

QUEEN VICTORIA'S CONSORT



*A professional ensemble of specialist musicians playing
on original brass instruments of the Victorian era*

On a drizzly weekend trip to the Cotes d'Armor, Brittany, at a random stop at a Brocante (or really a junk shop), I parted with 55 euros and became the very proud owner of an 1850s Michaud bass sax-horn.

The first intrepid puffs in the car resulted in a beautiful sweet sound albeit with some of the valves stuck down. I was hooked. I wanted to hear more of this instrument and how it would have sounded being played in an ensemble.

Subsequent purchases were made, followed by many hours of restoration and polishing by experienced repairers and my father - a clock-maker of 60 years - well used to working with antique French brass in Horological form. The idea of forming a group using these historical brass gems to play music from the period they were made was born.

I therefore called upon my friends Jeremy West, Sue Addison and Robert Vanryne and the embryonic 'Queen Victoria's Consort' was formed.

During my studies at the Royal Academy of Music I had taken lessons on serpent and Ophicleide and subsequently have worked on concerts and recordings for 'The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment' and 'Gabrieli Consort and players' for large orchestral repertoire, a small brass chamber ensemble on these historic instruments seemed the logical next step.

Starting any new group can be challenging and requires hours of preparation and energy not knowing whether anything will come of it or whether the instruments will work together or not. However a chance phone call requesting a brass ensemble to play a concert in Buckingham Palace was just the incentive we needed and hours of rehearsal time were set aside.

The thrill of hearing these instruments performed together for the first time was exhilarating, knowing that most of the instruments I had found had languished in lofts, sheds, junk shops or as ornaments hung on walls for most of their lives - one even arriving completely stuffed full of dead bees.

The group now brings to life the sounds of cornets, soprano through to contrabass sax-horns, the ballad horn, a trompe de chasse, serpents, ophicliedes and even a 'Russian bassoon' - which is neither a bassoon or of Russian origin!

We play a wide variety of Victorian ditties as well as bespoke arrangements of traditional French and English music correct to the period (superbly arranged by Alan Gout and Robert Vanryne) resplendent in full Victorian Sunday best.

What started as a chance find of an instrument has led to the formation of an ensemble of expert musicians creating an amazing sound from old instruments, which were thought to be no better than wall ornaments.



Andy Kershaw with Serpent by 'Christopher Monk' after 'Pretty' and Saxhorn by 'Couturier'

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert immediately found a common interest in music, Albert already being an accomplished composer and keyboard player when they met and Victoria a pianist and singer. 'Queen Victoria's Consort' play on instruments that were invented, developed and championed throughout the Victorian period and would have been common in all walks of life seen by everyone from street bands to royal occasions.

Queen Victoria's Consort play on an unrivaled collection of Victorian brass instruments; it was this era of history that saw the invention of the valved brass instrument and the development of the keyed brass instrument and it is a combination of beautifully restored examples of these that the ensemble is dedicated to bringing back to audible life within our concerts.

The Distin family first caught the attention of 'The Illustrated London News' during the week of 7th December 1844 and continued to perform the same concert over the course of that week at 'M. Jullien's Concerts'. By 14th December 1844 they had a full review within the Journal.

This review is very keen to point out their use of the 'Distin improved Saxhorn' (one of many instruments the family patented and sold under their name) and Jugs depicting the family were sold as marketing aids and souvenirs after each concert.

Shortly after this date instruments were advertised to the public as 'Distin's Brass Instruments for Amateurs'; an advert in 'The Graphic' on 21st November 1874 states Boosey and Co. as the sole agents. One particular instrument listed is a 'Ballad horn 9 Guineas' which was intended as a parlor instrument to perform popular ballads and arias of the time, however this instrument didn't develop any further, unlike the growing popularity of the standard brass band instruments, and fell out of use.

With the combination of a unique playing skill and the idea of marketing their concerts, instruments, journals and souvenirs, the Distin family could be regarded as one of the first 'Pop Bands' of any kind, perhaps the Victorian era's version of 'The Beatles'?



'Distin' trade mark Ballad Horn



'Distin' jug sold at 'Distin' concerts

DISTIN'S BRASS INSTRUMENTS
for AMATEURS.
DISTIN'S CORNET-A-PISTONS, from £3 ros.
DISTIN'S MINIATURE CORNET-A-PISTONS, 9 gs.
DISTIN'S BALLAD HORN, 9 guineas.
DISTIN'S BAND INSTRUMENTS, at all prices.
Estimates for bands of all sizes, also illustrations and prices of individual instruments, to be had of the sole manufacturers, **BOOSEY and CO., 295, Regent Street, London.**
Distin's Monthly Brass Band Journal, ros. 6d. per annum.

PRATTEN'S PERFECTED FLUTES,
CYLINDER and CONE, commencing at Four Guineas.
THE SICCAMA FLUTE, and the BOEHM old and new system of fingering.
Particulars of all these Instruments upon application to the Manufacturers, **BOOSEY and CO., 295, Regent Street, W.**

BOOSEY and CO.'S PIANOFORTE
ROOMS, GRAND and UPRIGHT PIANOS
by all the great makers for SALE, Hire, or upon the Three Years' System. Price Lists upon application.—295, Regent Street, adjoining the Polytechnic.

'Distin' instruments advert from 'The Graphic'

384 THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS. [DECEMBER 14, 1844.]

THE DISTIN FAMILY.

The first appearance of these highly-cultivated artists at M. Jullien's Concerts, was noticed in our journal of last week. They have repeated their performances, with increased effect, during the past week.

Mr. Distin and his four sons have been for several years before the public. Mr. Distin, who, far more than any other, was principal trumpet in the private band of King George IV.

The Distin Family have visited various parts of Scotland, Ireland, and France, and have given numerous successful performances. In December, 1841, they proceeded to the continent, and were invited to make a tour of the principal cities of France, Germany, and Italy, by M. de Schickel, Baron de Fries. Upon the introduction of the Distin's improved Sax Horns in Paris, they at once repeated before the public the most perfect performance, Mr. Distin was received by M. de Schickel, the Director of the Conservatoire National de Musique, in the presence of the Emperor, and the Emperor's Consort, who, in particular, having very distinguished success for the trumpet—which he did, and also the obligato to Havel's, "Let the Devil be taken." This performance had not been equalled in Paris for many years, as no French trumpeter-player would have dared to attempt it.

Mr. Distin's reputation was a most brilliant one, the audience and critics alike, and he was accompanied by a first-rate band, accompanied with a very distinguished spirit and style. The instruments were also presented with a special silver medal by the Conservatoire National de Musique, and a very distinguished honorary diploma, for their performance at their great concert at the Hotel de Ville.

The Distin's are at present the only performers on the Sax Horns, which, within the space of the French Horn and those of the Saxophone, are in admirably constructed, and in all respects the most complete and superior of the Horns, both in its construction and in its power of playing, and in its tone, which the Distin's perform in all their own arrangements, and do credit to their musical skill.

HAVANA.

An interesting article in daily morning papers, containing a full and complete account of the Distin's performance at Havana, and the great success which they have met with there, which we shall shortly present to our readers.

Review of 'Distin' concert in 'The Illustrated London News'

Adophe Sax made his name during the Victorian period and is perhaps best known for the family of Saxophones. These were invented from the combination of an Ophicleide and a bass clarinet mouthpiece, the rest is history and a lot of Jazz and Military band music features this instrument.

The Ophicleide from which it was invented was itself a development of such instruments as the Serpent Forveille, Russian Bassoon and Ophimonocleide by the maker Halari. The Ophicleide became the favored bass instrument with composers and the standard bass brass instruments in orchestras, military bands and small sacred and secular ensembles.

At the same time some instrument makers were developing the keyed brass instruments, Sax (and others mainly working in Paris, Germany and Austria) were excitedly developing instruments with the more reliable (by design) valve. Early examples were the 'Berliner pumpen', Stolzel, Rotary and perinet systems.

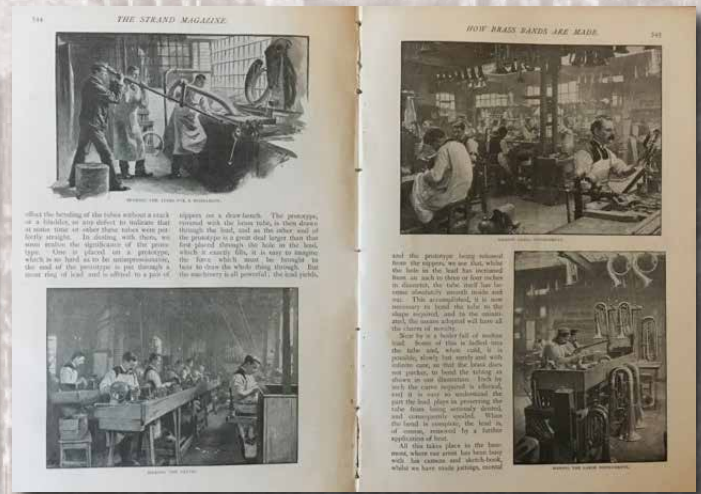
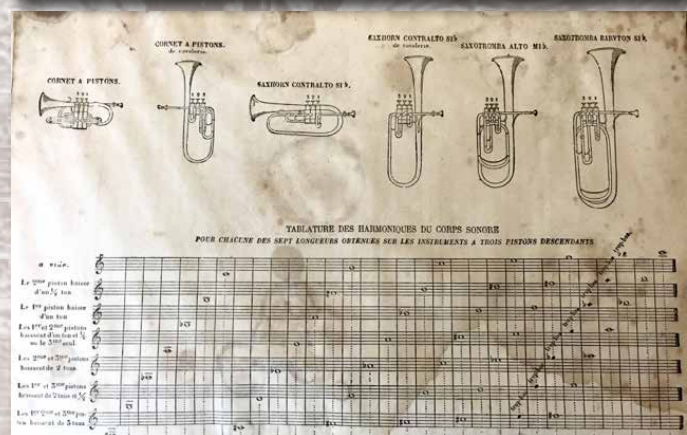
It was with these early valves that Sax developed the Saxhorn and Saxotromba/Saxtuba families. These were then improved and championed by such musical celebrities of the time as the Distin family and of course Arban with regard to the Cornet.

Many French makers (for example F Besson) moved to London where valved brass instruments were also popular partially thanks to the Distin's concerts and the use within military bands and the established village bands. They joined with established British brands such as Boosey and co, Hawkes and Son and Higham to produce the family of instruments we now see regularly in our Brass Band movement and within the brass sections of military bands and orchestras. 'The Strand Magazine' November 1894 features the making of Besson brass instruments in an article 'How brass bands are made'.



Early 'Arban' edition for Cornet and Saxotromba/Saxhorn – Title page, Ranges of instruments and 'Fantaisie Brillante'

Fanfare de Hussards showing Saxhorns and Six Valve Trombone in Regiment



How Brass Bands are made from 'The Strand'



Early Method for Bass Saxhorn – Title page and Diagrams of Instruments



Baritone and Bass Saxhorns by 'Couturier' and Six valve Trombone Patent by A. Sax

A number of brass instruments were developed so far within the Victorian period that they became obsolete and new instruments (with a passing resemblance) took their place. Queen Victoria's Consort aims to let audiences enjoy hearing and seeing these somewhat forgotten but fascinating and often visually stunning instruments.

One of the earliest examples is the Serpent, thought to have been invented c1590 in France to accompany and add to the tenor voices for chanting within church services. The Serpent managed (despite attempts to alter and develop it) to still be in service both in military bands and churches until the end of Victoria's reign. Thomas Hardy makes a few references to it within his writings and a letter from The 6th Earl Beauchamp 10th June 1860 suggests "supporting the voices with a Serpent or some such instrument" for a church service he was involved with organizing.

Serpent cartoon from 'Le Rire'



Serpent By 'Christopher Monk' after 'Boudouin'

Advert for Serpent and other Victorian Instruments from the 'Boston Morning Post'

HENRY PHINTON has constantly on hand and for sale a large assortment of the New-England Musical Instruments, such as the Clarinet, Bass Violon, a large assortment of Clarinets, Bass Flutes, Basses, Trumpets, Bugles, Horns, Saxophones, Tenor Horns, Bass Horns, Cornets, Trombones, Violinello, Double Bass, Harp, Organ, &c.

First-class for the above instruments—Clarinet and Bass Horns—Tuning Machines and Forks—Tones and Bow Hair—Instruction Books for all instruments—Blank Books, Paper, &c.

A large assortment of Accordions, whistles, and small.

H. P. has also on hand for sale and to let, Piano Forte and Harp, on the lowest terms.

Also, a large assortment of Music, for Piano Forte, Organ, Guitar, &c.

H. P. is daily receiving additions of new publications, which with his present Catalogue, comprises the most extensive assortment of Music to be found in the country.

Unusually of all kinds always on hand, and made in the best style.

P. S. Carriages and instruments repaired. Tuning in town, wood, &c. Dealers and Military Bands supplied on the most reasonable terms.

117—Pavement Flat Floor for power Music, and Music stand &c. &c. &c.

W. S. Accordion repaired and Piano Forte tuned. 1860.

A Letter from the 6th Earl Beauchamp mentions using a serpent in a London church service

19 Grosvenor Place,
London.
June 10. 1860.

My dear Belmore

I am quite ashamed of having taken so little notice of your former letter on the duties of the sub-committee, but the House of Commons must be my excuse for all that concerns.

In my great sorrow

have a dinner engagement for Wednesday the 20th it will prevent me from being at St Martin's Hall.

Your selection of Agnew's is limited, if there were more than one I should be disposed to suggest the prospectus of supports the voices with a

Serpent or some such Instrument
I hope must for a Tuesday
Remain
Yours truly
Frederick Agnew

IMPROVEMENT IN DENTAL SURGERY.

Queen Victoria's Consort often performs works by Mendelssohn arranged for the ensemble, this is because we know from Victoria's extensive journal entries and Mendelssohn's letters of a friendship and mutual respect between the royal couple and the composer born out of Victoria and Mendelssohn's talent at performing and Albert and Mendelsohn's love of composition.

Victoria wrote his account of their first meeting (16th June 1842, Buckingham Palace): "After dinner came Mendelssohn, whose acquaintance I was so anxious to make. Albert had already seen him the other morning. He is short, dark, & Jewish looking, delicate, with a fine intellectual forehead. I should say he must be about 35 or 6. He is very pleasing & modest..."

It seems Mendelssohn was keen to show off his talents as an improviser and was given two melodies on which to improvise. We can choose to play these as an ensemble and know that they were popular choices with Victoria and Albert.

"...He asked us to give him a theme upon which he could improvise. We gave him 2, 'Rule Britannia', & the Austrian National Anthem. He began immediately & really I have never heard anything so beautiful, the way in which he blended them both together & changed over from one to the other, was quite wonderful as well as the exquisite harmony & feeling he puts into the variations, & the powerful rich chords, & modulations, which reminded me of all his beautiful compositions. At one moment he played the Austrian National Anthem with the right hand,

he played 'Rule Britannia' as the bass, with his left! He made some further improvisations on well-known tunes & songs. We were all filled with the greatest admiration. Poor Mendelssohn was quite exhausted when he had done playing."

Mendelssohn scored for many of the instruments we use in Queen Victoria's Consort, especially the Serpent and English bass horn, which he sketched in a letter to his sister to later be included in the score for 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'

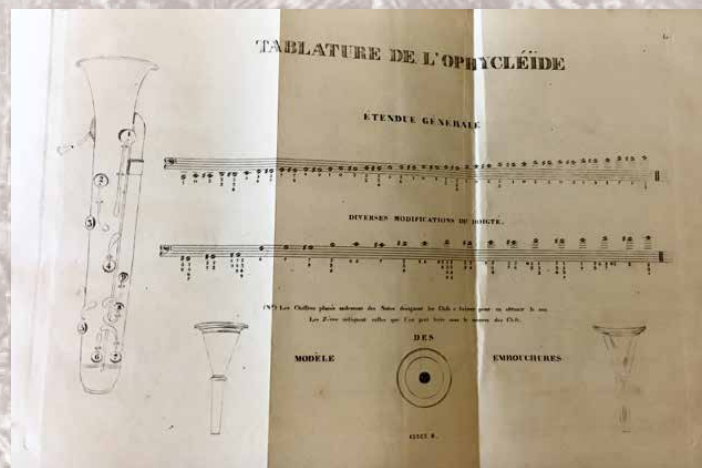
On another visit to listen to Victoria sing and to be played a number of Albert's compositions, Mendelssohn's duties extended to removing the Queen's parrot from the room so that the bird would not interrupt the performance. Mendelssohn wrote in a letter "... Just as we were about to begin, she said, 'But first we must get rid of the parrot, or he will scream louder than I can sing.' Prince Albert rang the bell and the Prince of Gotha said 'I'll take him out;' so I came forward and said, 'Please allow me!' and lifted up the big cage and carried it out to the astonished servants."

Queen Victoria's Consort continues the Victorian practice of arranging music for a specific ensemble or soloist. We are lucky to have access to a large number of compositions by Prince Albert that have been arranged by Robert Vanryne for brass quartet or quintet. We have included a fragment of a simple part song by Albert and can arrange specific compositions or selections of Albert's music to suit an occasion or programme.

INVOCAZIONE ALL'ARMONIA

ALBERT, PRINCE CONSORT

Allegro maestoso



First edition Ophicleide Method by 'V. Cornette'
Title page and Fingering chart/Mouthpiece profile



Russian Bassoon by 'Cuvillier', Ophimonocleide by 'Coeffet' and
Ophicleide by 'Beauboeuf Freres'



**Andrew Kershaw
Tuba / Ophicleide**

Andrew started playing the Tuba aged nine within Bedfordshire Music Service. His formal music training was at the Royal Academy of Music and Trinity College of Music. After Graduating he was appointed principal Tuba of the Opera House in Santiago, Chile, and then returned to the UK in 2007 to build a freelance career. Andy has played with many of the country's top orchestras including The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, The Royal Opera House Covent Garden, The Halle and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He also regularly played for the West End production of Chicago. Andrew has a keen interest in historical performance and plays for the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, appearing on the BBC documentary The Symphony, and with the Gabrieli Consort, including the BBC Proms. He also enjoys the lighter side of music performance having toured the UK and USA with pop legend Elton John and even dressing up to perform at 'Shakespeare's Globe' and 'The Royal Shakespeare Company'



**Sue Addison
Trombone / Baritone horn**

Sue is recognised as one of the world's leading exponents of historic trombones. She currently plays principal trombone with The Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, Academy of Ancient Music, The Sixteen and the Gabrieli Consort. Her experience ranges from being a full time member of the City of Birmingham Orchestra under the direction of Sir Simon Rattle, to recording for the BBC Comedy 'The Two Ronnies'. She is a founder member of His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts and of The Orchestra of The Age of Enlightenment. She is currently Professor of Baroque trombone at the Royal College of Music, Birmingham Conservatoire, Royal Northern College, and Trinity Laban. She is also the education project manager for The English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble.



**Jeremy West
Horns**

Educated at the University of Durham and Guildhall School of Music, Jeremy West specialises in historic brass, most notably renaissance cornett and Victorian alto horn. Often regarded as a 'pioneer' of the cornett, he is a founder member of His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts – the leading ensemble of its kind, now over 30 years old – and Principal Wind Player with the Gabrieli Consort and Players for their early repertoire. He has more than 60 recordings to his credit and concert performances have taken him to 34 countries across four continents. Since 1991 Jeremy has run Christopher Monk Instruments for the research, development and reconstruction of "all instruments that wiggle": members of the cornett and serpent families. Examples of the workshop's output may be found from New York to New Zealand, Riga to Rio.



**Robert Vanryne
Cornets**

Born in Hertfordshire, England, the trumpeter Robert Vanryne became a brass finalist at the age of fifteen in the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition. He graduated with a Bachelor of Music degree from Royal Holloway College, London University, and continued his studies on the trumpet as a postgraduate at the Royal College of Music with Michael Laird. He has both performed and recorded regularly with many of the leading period instrument ensembles as well as with modern orchestras throughout Europe. He is also an instrument maker, specialising in the reproduction of seventeenth and eighteenth century trumpets many of which are currently in use by leading players across the world.

Queen Victoria's Consort uses popular Victorian composers, writers and themes of the era to create concerts that are both correct to the time period and fun and accessible to audiences of the current day. It is wonderful to be able to play music composed by Albert, the Prince Consort, as so much of his work survives and is well suited to arrangement for brass. We also have a wealth of music composed by Sullivan for the popular operetta; although this was mainly intended for voice, the characterful nature of his composition again lends itself to be performed by a brass ensemble or featured soloist.

Queen Victoria did meet Charles Dickens towards the end of his life and we know he presented her with a bound (in Moroccan red and gold leather) complete edition of his works. We have used a Dickens theme for past Christmas concerts and will be working on a musically punctuated version of 'A Christmas Carol' with an actor, starting Christmas 2018.

Queen Victoria was also one of the first Monarchs to visit many parts of the United Kingdom as well as abroad, travel being much easier during and after the industrial revolution. Village and town bands would have played popular 'Ditties' of the day for her arrival. One such link to my own early education at a small village primary school in Bedfordshire is that the Village decided to change their (perhaps rather unfortunate) name of Shitlington to Shillington for Victoria's visit. Resplendent with a more appropriate name and the village band playing on arrival the Queen was spared potential blushes.

Queen Victoria's Consort concerts and venues so far:

Buckingham Palace
Alexandra Palace (with the 'Willis' organ)
Bach to Baby Christmas family concerts
Girton College, Cambridge
Burgh House, Hampstead

Queen Victoria's Consort – Repertoire Examples

English Country Gardens – trad arr A. Gout

The Sun Who's Rays Are All Ablaze (Saxhorn feature)
– Sullivan arr R. Vanryne

The Policeman's Song (Ophicleide feature)
– Sullivan arr R. Vanryne

Hymn 'O for the Wings of a Dove'
– Mendelssohn arr R. Vanryne

Danny Boy – trad arr A. Gout

Le 'Cornet' Polka (cornet feature)
– Arban arr R. Vanryne

Lift thine Eyes – Mendelssohn arr A Gout

Locus Iste – Bruckner arr R. Vanryne

Abends will Ich Schlafen Gehn
– Humperdinck arr R. Vanryne

Invocazione All'Armonia
– Albert Prince Consort arr R. Vanryne

Gruss – Mendelssohn arr R. Vanryne

The Acrobat (Trombone feature) – J.A. Greenwood

The Queen of the Night's Aria (Ophicleide feature)
– Mozart

The Long Day Closes – Sullivan arr R. Vanryne

