

JEAN-PIERRE MATHEZ

JOSEPH JEAN-BAPTISTE LAURENT

ARBAN

(1825-1889)

**PORTRAIT OF A FRENCH MUSICIAN
OF THE 19TH CENTURY**

Revised and augmented by Edward H. Tarr

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SAMPLE EXTRAIT **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** AUSZUG

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My sincere thanks are due to Isabelle Arnstam who took the photographs of present-day Paris and found the illustrations of the Paris of Arban's time, and to Romain Brot who did the translations from Russian into French.

Finally, I would like to make special mention of Anatoly Selianin, professor

FOREWORD

Joseph Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban is the name of a french musician of the 19th century who was very popular in his day but is today remembered by no-one except brass players, and they remember only his last name.

Behind this name we discover a man who was an eminent cornet virtuoso, a popular conductor-composer-arranger, a professor who helped to improve the reputation of the Paris Conservatoire and an indefatigable researcher into the improvement of brass instrument manufacture.

His famous *Complete Grand Method for Cornet and Saxhorn* has been and is still today the most widely used in brass instrument teaching. The first edition appeared in Paris in 1864 (published by Léon Escudier, taken over shortly afterwards by Alphonse Leduc, the Paris publisher). The number of copies is impressive – from 1862 to 1950 Leduc alone printed 45'000. Since the work entered the public domain about ten large publishers have been circulating this best-seller throughout the world.¹

Generally books about music deal with works or with great musicians. Arban was popular but has never been “immortal”. This “little” story of the man himself therefore gives us details and unexpected and revealing glimpses of the musical life of European society in the 19th century. The documents I have collected have enabled me to sketch a simple portrait of Jean-Baptiste Arban. I have avoided long commentaries. The reader will complete the picture according to his own imagination.

The cornet is descended from the small coach-horn of earlier times, fitted first with two and later with three valves (sometimes even more). These additions nat-

urally have led to the development of the cornet as we know it today.

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in the famous English brass bands). Jean-Baptiste Arban was not only one of the pioneers of the cornet, he tried – in vain – to have it accepted as a “noble” instrument.

The instrument never quite established itself in the “classical” symphony orchestra, probably because of its sound. Thus musicians who choose to play it are unfairly restricted to a musical subculture.

Nowadays there are virtually no more professional cornet players. The instrument is played by trumpeters when required.

SAMPLE



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1. HIS STUDIES

– *Your name, place and date of birth, please?*

– *Joseph Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban. Born in Lyon on 28th February 1825. I wish to enroll for the trumpet class...*

Arban was 16 years and 7 months old when he appeared at the Paris Conservatoire on 29th September 1841. He was to be admitted to professor Dauverné's trumpet class.¹ We have every reason to believe that he was already a remarkable player since in the following year, on 4th June 1842, he obtained *six months' leave to place himself at the disposition of the Prince of Joinville who has seen fit to include him amongst the artists who are to accompany him on his journey.*² Arban was always careful to maintain good relations with the nobility and the political authorities.

On 14th June 1843 the Conservatoire noted that *Messieurs Mottin and Arban, pupils in the trumpet class of Monsieur Dauverné have been granted leave from 22nd June until 1st October.* Daniel Auber, the composer, had then been director for about a year. On Thursday 22nd June 1843 he noted in his examination register: [*Arban*] *he will do well.* There were seven trumpet pupils of whom Arban was the youngest.

As soon as he returned from his journey (London?), Arban started to prepare for the competition. Yet he was absent on the day of the auditions, 16th November 1843. Auber, who kept his supervision book meticulously, noted that Arban was ill that day. Arban must have felt very confident for, although the examinations were imminent, on 20th April 1844 he sought and obtained further leave until 1st July (he was going to London). Thus he was once again

be allowed to enter this year's competition. The Director has given him permission to be absent until 1st July for business in London.

On Tuesday 9th December 1844 Arban, now 19 years old, took the platform at the Conservatoire and presented his programme including, in particular, the competition piece «Solo» written by Dauverné.

At his first attempt, as was apparently the custom, his performance won only the second prize. That year's winner was one Jean-Jacques-Edmond Dubois (aged 24). Annual competitions for the trumpet started in 1835. This tradition has lasted until today.

So Arban returned to the class where Dauverné gave two-hour lessons every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. In spite of what was at stake (Arban was very ambitious), he sought and obtained (27th March 1845) further leave to go to London until 1st July, which did not prevent him from carrying off the 1st prize that year (2nd prize J.H.-L. Cerclier, who was to become professor after Dauverné in 1869). The three candidates for the competition were Arban, Cerclier and Luigi Fremmer [sic]. The competition piece was the same "Solo" by Dauverné as in 1844.



II. THE BEGINNING OF HIS CAREER, AND HIS ASSOCIATION WITH ADOLPHE SAX

The central figure in Arban's early career is a man nine years older who was at least as ambitious as he, if not more so: Adolphe Sax (1814-1894).

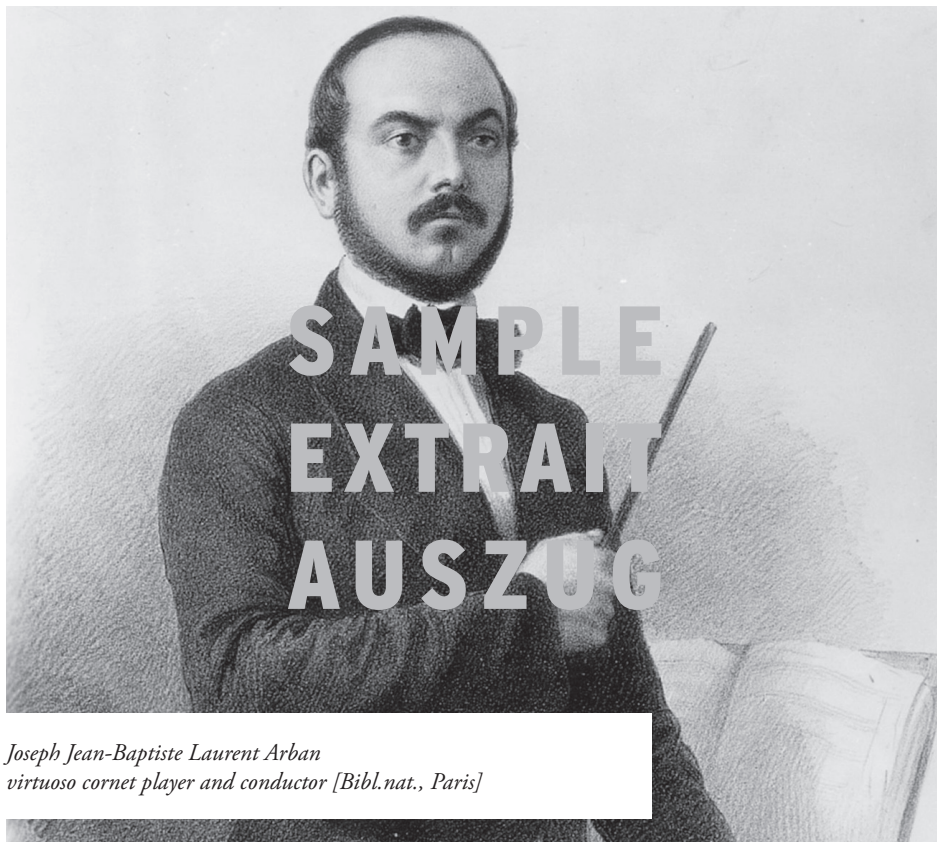
Born in Belgium, he established himself as an instrument-maker at an early age; but dissatisfied with the environment in his native country, he moved to Paris in 1842. Immediately he made influential contacts, not the least of them being Hector Berlioz (1803-1869), who as an innovator supported Sax and his new ideas in instrument-making on many an occasions. French patents were granted to Sax in 1844 for his invention of two families of instruments to which he rather immodestly gave the names «saxhorn» and «saxotromba». Another patent followed in 1846 for the saxophone.

If we wish to follow Arban's career in the 1840's and 1850's, we need only to look for Sax. The two men's careers were intertwined for a considerable period of time.

We hear of the two for the first time in 1843, while Arban was still a student and Sax only been in Paris for little over a year. In order to make his instruments known, Sax had organized concerts in his factory, inviting illustrious musical personalities. The first session took place in December 1843. Among those attending were Berlioz, Meyerbeer, Spontini, Georges Kastner (an important composer and theorist), and General de Rumigny (the Minister of War). Sax himself demonstrated his newly perfected bass and soprano clarinets, as well as his new, still unpatented invention, the saxophone. The trumpet and fluegelhorn, as well as bass and contrabass fluegelhorns, were demonstrated on this occasion by non other than Arban.¹

¹ The original program of the concert is reproduced in the book *Arban's Saxophone*, p. 10.

Hertz Hall. On this occasion Berlioz brought out the first instrumental piece ever written for an ensemble consisting only of Sax's instruments. It was an «Hymn» which had recently been performed in Marseille, and which the



master himself transcribed for six wind instruments, all of which had either been perfected or invented by Sax: $E\flat$ trumpet, $E\flat$ soprano fluegelhorn and $B\flat$ fluegelhorn, as well as soprano and bass clarinets and saxophone. Arban played the $B\flat$ fluegelhorn. The $E\flat$ trumpet was played by his teacher

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ganized regular Sunday concerts for his wind ensemble. His factory became a meeting point for celebrities in the worlds of music, the arts and even politics. At first, the group played transcriptions of operas arias. Soon after, various composers, including Arban, contributed original works.³ This is the first time we learn of Arban's second talent, that for composing.

(Later, when Sax went bankrupt for the first time, the lithographic plates of his music-publishing enterprise were put up for sale. Arban is listed as the composer of one solo for Eb alto saxophone and piano, four for cornet and piano, and a «Petite méthode de cornet».)⁴

Arban was at Sax's side during a significant episode in the inventor's career, one which was also to have a profound influence on French wind music: his battle to achieve a new instrumentation for French military bands. The War Minister, General de Ruffign, had always been concerned about the poor quality of the wind instruments played by French military musicians. As a sensitive man with good ear, he had therefore followed the career of Adolphe Sax with keen interest.⁵

In early 1845, matters had proceeded so far that the War Ministry had named an official committee to look into the question of a possible new instrumentation for French military bands. Sax, who had powerful friends, stood the chance of having a virtual monopoly on instrument sales to the French military if his ideas were to be adopted. It goes without saying that the other Parisian wind instrument makers — sensing defeat — were against the whole proceeding. In March, Raoux and Halary wrote a petition of protest which was signed by 28 other instrument makers from Paris and the provinces.⁶ It was during this period that Sax obtained an invitation to play for the royal family. Arban was one of the main artists in a ten-piece ensemble consisting