

Ladies and Gentlemen, Elders and fellow Scholars....

my predecessor, Elder Claibourne, entertained and educated us with his researches into the Battle of New Orleans last year. I have forgotten much of that hard-won detail, but have unfortunately retained an absinthe habit. I am not myself a man of war, having defended Australia during the Vietnam Years with my clarinet, from the Paddington Barracks.

Yes, my field of expertise lies in the Arts, and to be more specific, in the Art of Music. Ha, already your ears prick up, your functioning memory cells ignite and you seem to recall Crabtree research in that area – flawed research I regret to say. Far be it from me to impugn the reputation of my esteemed colleagues

The facts however, speak for themselves, the facts being those which I have uncovered during the last 12 months and which have been previously inaccessible for reasons which will become clear, but which include global warming and genome mapping.

My predecessors in this field have spoken about Crabtree's association with the violin and the clarinet - vulgar modern instruments given over to technical virtuosity and bombastic display – something of which I have never been accused. And here is the nub of my contention, and the fruit of my researches – the instrument closest to Crabtree's heart, and the one which voiced his real soul, is none other than – **THE BASSOON.**

Need I enlighten you? I think perhaps I'd better. This is a bassoon.

There are 2 varieties – German and French. The same applies to clarinets.

The German Bassoon now dominates the Classical world as does the French clarinet. But it was not always so clear-cut. The word “bassoon” is not known in Germany. There, the instrument has always been known as “Das Fagott” It has a rounded tone, descending to a low Bb. (DEMONSTRATES)

The French bassoon looks quite similar, but is known as “Le Basson” and has a feathery, hollow tone, at once bucolic and oblique. As Sachaverell Sitwell said “With the bassoon, it is as the sound of a sea god speaking.” It descended only to a low C. Perhaps a “deep, blue C” according to Mr.

Sitwell.(DEMONSTRATES)

It is strange, is it not, that while the German instrument, the Fagott, now dominates the world, that we call it by its French name, bassoon? How perverse. Yet, so similar to the eighth letter of the alphabet.

Time's up – it's “h”.

What about it? You know very well. It's a contentious letter, a social marker. Of course, you and I say “h”, at least I do. But consider this. The French call this letter “aiche” and do not aspirate when they use it – very logical. The Germans call this letter “ha” and do aspirate when they use it. Very logical. The educated Anglos call this letter “aitch” yet do aspirate – illogical.

My Irish friends, when asked about it, think for a while and admit “Yes, I do

say “Haitch” and if you spoke Gaelic, you wouldn't dream of sayin it any other way.”

I have to admit, when they say it, they sound quite charming. And that's because the diphthong is so pleasant “Haitch” rather than “Haytch”.

I once asked my Irish friend “Michael, do you believe in the Little Folk?” and he said “No, but I've seen 'em.”

It is difficult today to appreciate the heat of the dispute between the two musical factions... that it was a matter of public and artistic concern may be gleaned from the writing of two of the leading poets of the day, and I quote

Coleridge - from "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

The Wedding-guest here beat his breast

For he heard the loud bassoon'

and

Wordsworth - from "The Female Vagrant"

The lanes I sought, and as the sun retired,

Came, where beneath the trees a faggot blazed,

The Travellers saw me weep, my fate inquired,

And gave me food, - and rest, more welcomed, more desired

In 1798 Wordsworth (fagott) and Coleridge (bassoon) journeyed to the Continent with the subject of the fagott/bassoon divide foremost in their consciousness. It is well known that they parted company. What is less well-known is what Coleridge got up to. I can now tell you. Coleridge was a fair-minded chap, and having lost a fagott friend, replaced him with another – Crabtree.

They met at Schwarzee in Switzerland, a little town at the foot of a glacier, and at the confluence of the world of the French-speaking bassoons and the World of the German-speaking fagotts.

And what took them there in particular? A meeting of the IDRS The International Double Reed Society. Oboes, Cors Anglais, Shawms, Curtals Dulcians Bassoons and Fagotts. A month-long orgy of Chamber music composition master-classes and the like...all poisoned by the relationship between the fagottists and bassoonists. Every contest was soured by this adversarial relationship, and it seemed the matter needed to be cleared up, and for one faction to represent, for once and for all, the face, or voice, of this bass woodwind instrument.

And in the midst of this artistic mayhem – 2 Englishmen, set apart from the crowd by their dispassionate nature, their aristocratic bearing (much avoided by

the French of late years) and their English sense of humour. It seemed only natural to appoint these eminent English milords as judges and arbiters of taste. This task they undertook with grace and diligence, grading performers and handing out prizes, which were mostly in the form of a private audience with Joseph Crabtree.

It should be noted that Crabtree appears at this stage as a man in advance of his time, striking a blow for feminism, as most of the prize winners were women. Nor did he discriminate in favour of experience, as some of these women, in fact most of them, were quite young. The losers, unfortunately, did not bear their fate with dignity, and it has to be said, these Continental cads reacted in a most un-British way, hissing, booing and slow-clapping in a most sarcastic manner. Their manner became progressively more threatening, till, in a move a great statesmanship, Crabtree announced that he would make a definitive judgement on the status of the bassoon versus fagott.

This galvanised the assembly, who watched the pair take off up into the mountain glacier wilderness for a month of meditation and contemplation. Their Alpine life resumed its usual tenor while they waited anxiously for their return. Days passed, and then From far up on the mountain slopes, somewhere behind the glacial ice, they heard music. Sometimes it was soulful (plays Mozart Bassoon concerto Andante) Other times, the mood was quite jolly (3rd mvt) and again rather grand (1st mvt) Those were excerpts from the Bassoon Concerto

generally attributed to Mozart. For a very good reason. He wrote it.

Gradually the music diminished. Days and weeks passed . Binoculars and telescopes were trained on the glacier until – there it was.

First one noticed, then another. More and more frequent it came, yes, it was to be sure, a puff. A puff of smoke. A puff of white smoke. The Catholics were encouraged. Not so the Protestants. Now the 2 schools were further divided, and not only did the bells of the bassoons menace the funnels of the fagotts, but partisans within each side turned on their own.

The tumult was interrupted by the appearance of a man. A man more like a nature god – long hair streaming and his eyes filled with the knowledge of the Universe. All eyes were upon him as he lifted, like Moses and his staff, a magnificent, European curly maple instrument. Every eye was glued to its shape and construction. This was it! The definitive opinion. There was no doubt about it. It was – THE FAGOTT!

It was clear Crabtree had undergone a profound experience and was no longer mere mortal man. He appeared about to speak, opened his lips once or twice, with no sound, but on the third occasion, lifted his index and middle fingers in frontal “V” shape, and those nearby later attested that the words which issued forth were “Peace Man”.

The decision was made, and the rest of the story is known to us all – the German instrument, Das Fagott, reigns supreme except in Paris and certain

French speaking enclaves.

But what transpired in that mountain fastness to so influence Crabtree?

It was in the European Summer that I got a call from Professor Giuseppe Cavalieri Sforzando – apparently Global Warming had melted the Glacier above Schwarzee to reveal a cave. A shepherd boy throwing rocks into it heard a chink, as of something hitting pottery. A deputation from the town was gathered to enter the cave, and the mayor's little daughter, running in first with a torch, exclaimed “"Mira papá! Fagotti pintados!" (Look Papa! Painted fagotts) If you are wondering why she spoke Spanish, the mayor by this stage was Spanish – after two world wars the French and Germans agreed on a third party.

And there it was, or rather, there they were. An image, or should I say, a likeness, of a man, on the walls of the cave, cleverly drawn using the natural contours of the cave walls. Large and small, they were all the same – a profile of a man of Western European appearance, even British. And from his lower frontal portion arose an appendage of great length at an angle of nearly 45 degrees. Yes, you've guessed it – may I demonstrate (demonstration of man with bassoon in profile).

The cave appeared to be last occupied some 200 years ago. A strange feature of the likeness was that above the bell of the bassoon appeared a small cloud-like circle. It was agreed that this represented a kind of spiritualistic speech-bubble signifying the spiritual element of the music expressed by the player. However,

analysis of elements found in the cave floor appeared to have the same consistency as the traces in these bubbles – it was only when these substances were shown to be powerful hallucinogens did the researchers realise that Crabtree was not blowing, but inhaling. And his preference for the Fagott, the German bassoon, was based on the fact that, extending to low Bb, it was larger, and contained more of the truth-inducing drug than the French model.

This cave now officially known as the Cave of the Fagotts, is irreverently known by some researchers as “The hits of 1798”.

A foot-note, or hand-note, really, to this story, is one peculiar image. It shows a truly ancient hand image, the type from the Late Palaeolithic done probably by spitting vegetable dye through a straw to create a daguerrotype of a hand. It just so happened that this hand was juxtaposed to the bell of the bassoon. It looked as though the hand was emerging from the bassoon. I myself have no doubt of its provenance. It was just Crabtree saying goodbye in his own inimitable way, just as I must. (PLAYS GOODBYE WITH GLOVE EMERGING TO WAVE GOODBYE AT END)