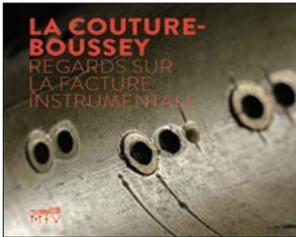




OBOE BOOK REVIEW

Review by **David Rachor** | Tempe, Arizona



La Couture-Boussey: Regards sur La Facture Instrumentale

La Couture-Boussey: A Look at Musical Instrument Making
Emanuele Marconi, editor.

Printed by the Musée des Instruments à Vent, 2022.

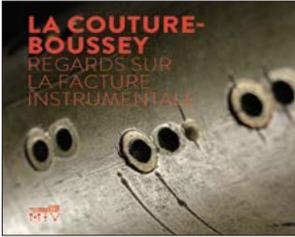
La Couture-Boussey is about an hour and a half drive west of Paris. Since the seventeenth century, this small village (as well as other small towns in the Eure Department) has had an oversized importance in manufacturing woodwind instruments. The Hotteterre family originated from this village and became flutists and oboists in the Grande Écurie, a department of Louis XIV's Music in Versailles and Paris. Although the Hotteterre name is probably the best known, other prominent dynasties of woodwind-instrument makers and players came from La Couture-Boussey, including the Chedeville, Lot, Martin, Noblet, Thibouville, and Hérouard families. For much of the twentieth century, this small village produced approximately 80% of the woodwind musical instruments made in France, amounting to about 25,000 to 30,000 instruments per year.¹ Frequently, instruments stamped "Paris" were in fact made in La Couture-Boussey. Many of the most important woodwind-making firms in France were located in La Couture-Boussey, and several of them produced oboes and bassoons. Accessories such as mouthpieces, reeds, and pads were also produced in the village. Names that might not be familiar to American double-reed players, such as Couesnon and Thibouville frères, made thousands of double-reed instruments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Another familiar name would have been Cabart; and even more familiar, the company Marigaux, to this day still manufactures approximately 1000 oboes and English horns per year and employs about twenty workers in La Couture.

La Couture-Boussey: Regards sur La Facture Instrumentale is one in a series of books published by the Musée des instruments à vent de la Couture-Boussey and presents parallel texts in French and English.² The English is well-written and easy to read. The French is also well written in an easily readable style (for example, the authors do not use *passé simple* for those of us who have studied French). The book is noteworthy if only for the images. There are over 280 photographs of woodwind instruments, tools, workshops, promotional materials, design drawings, factories, buildings in La Couture-Boussey and other towns in the region, letters, ledger sheets, group photos, and even banquet menus. The book reproduces many historical postcards from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century



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part of the process of making instruments, and the distinction between home and work was often blurred. Much of the building of the instruments was accomplished in small workshops in private homes or in a separate building on the same property as the worker's home. The system of small, home-based factories was usually dedicated to the skill-sets of key making and finishing-assembling of the instruments. This “boutique” system had many advantages over a system where personnel worked on a large factory floor. In particular, it afforded workers and their families additional flexibility. For example, some workers took agricultural employment during planting and harvest season, and made instruments or parts of instruments the rest of the year.

A fascinating snapshot of the lives of instrument makers is found in a menu for the feast of Saint Cecilia. This was not a simple country dinner but a lavish extravaganza with many main courses, vegetable dishes, and desserts. Several courses are separated by a *trou normand* (“Norman hole”) comprising a palate cleanser of sorbet served with local apple brandy or calvados. This being a formal French dinner, each course had its own particular wine selection.

The role of women in the village is examined in detail throughout the book. Women had specific roles in woodwind instrument manufacture, often dedicated to accessories. For example, the making of pads, polishing the interior of single reed mouthpieces, and reed making were mostly accomplished by women. Pad-making was considered women's work since sewing was involved. The flexible, home-based work system allowed them to participate in the family business while raising their children—but they were paid only about half their husbands' salary. The many historical postcards presented in the book provide insight into the role and status of women in the instrument-making industry. Women are usually pictured seated with male supervisors standing; postcards also portray men with their wives and children by their side. It is noted that women were omnipresent in practice, but little mentioned in archives. Archival mention did occur when a wife took over the business of her deceased husband, for example, when Rose Léonie Cabart took over the business of Jean-Baptiste Thibouville.

Two further chapters by Biteau, titled “Memoirs of Workshop” and “Instrument Making, A Family History,” detail the history of important regional wind instrument-making firms. Family businesses were often passed down from father to son, which is documented through family group photos and family trees. The author points out that larger firms eventually acquired many smaller ones; an example is Auguste Henri Georges Buffet's purchase of the key-making firm of Clément Masson in 1911.

“Makers and Musicians: A Fruitful Dialogue (1850–1930)” by Fabien Gilloux considers that instrument making always has required a close relationship between maker and player. Musicians were directly involved with makers in the design, manufacture, and promotion of instruments; they were often employed as testers, key fitters, or finishers.

Instrument makers formed business relationships with important musical organizations in France, including the Musique de la Garde Républicaine (Republican Guard Band), the Opéra de Paris, and the Paris Conservatoire. Photos of musicians and catalogue pages emphasize this close relationship; some meaningful collaborations include George Gillet (1854–1920), oboe professor at the Conservatoire de Paris, and François Lorée (1835–1920). In the USA, Lorée had a quasi-monopoly on the sales of oboes through its relationship



Figure 2. Women traditionally played an important role in woodwind production in this small town.

with Fernand Gillet (1882–1980) and Marcel Tabuteau (1887–1966). Regarding the bassoon, Eugène Jancourt (1815–1900), bassoon professor at the Paris Conservatoire, worked with Jean-Nicolas Savary (1786–1853), Jean-Louis Buffet-Crampon (1813–65), and Frédéric Triébert (1813–78) for the development of the “new system” bassoon, or what we know today as the French system bassoon. It was understood that instrument makers also needed to be musicians, especially the finishers-assemblers. In the late nineteenth century, a band was formed in La Couture-Boussey called the Harmonie “Industrie” de La Couture-Boussey. The band allowed workers to practice their playing skills while personally test the instruments.

Biteau’s chapters, “A Workers Museum” and “The Collections,” examine how the Wind Instrument Museum has kept alive the social, artistic, and economic history of La Couture-Bussey. The collection consists of more than 350 instruments (not all made in La Couture-Boussey), plus tools, machines, and archival documents that illustrate the production of woodwind instruments. Interestingly, from the museum’s inception in 1888, the founders wanted to create a professional teaching museum with both old and modern instruments. Since they did not have instruments from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the talented woodwind makers of La Couture-Boussey manufactured reproductions or “facsimiles” of the old woodwinds. The photos of the instruments are stunning, many show tools, accessories, and design drawings that are not to be found anywhere else. One would expect to see only French system bassoons, but the photos also show several German-system bassoons manufactured in La Couture-Boussey.



Figure 3. The Musée des Instruments à Vent in La Couture-Boussey welcoming a group of young enthusiasts.

The book is beautifully produced and printed on high-quality, covered paper that displays the many photographs (most in color) well. Any player interested in the history of woodwind instruments can learn a great deal in general about how woodwind instruments were made. Throughout the book, the makers of woodwind instruments from La Couture-Boussey in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries come alive. One can sense their pride in their work in the group photos, in which the men often will be holding the instruments they made or the tool in which they specialized. Finally, *Regards* is a valuable resource for any serious researcher of woodwind instruments. Besides presenting detailed accounts of prominent woodwind manufacturers, each chapter contains copious endnotes that provide sources for further study.



David Rachor has enjoyed a career spanning bassoon performance and woodwind organology. He has concertized on the bassoon and period woodwinds in Europe and the United States. Rachor has performed numerous concerti for bassoon and wind orchestra and has recorded noted Dutch composer Bernard van Beurden's Concerto for Bassoon and Wind Ensemble with the Wisconsin Wind Orchestra. He served as visiting Professor of Baroque Bassoon and Assistant Professor of Bassoon at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, and has been guest clinician at the American Band College in Oregon since 1989. In addition, he held the position of Principal Bassoon with the Des Moines Symphony for eighteen years. A

particular area of his research concerns the development of an acoustic model of the Baroque and Classical bassoon. Information on over 280 historical bassoons from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be found on the website davidrachor.com. Emeritus Professor of Bassoon at the University of Northern Iowa, Rachor holds the doctorate in bassoon performance from Indiana University.

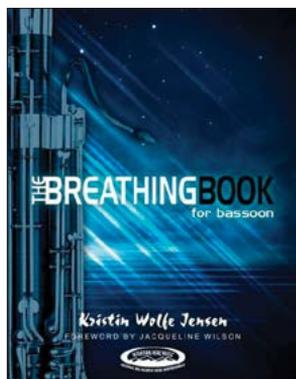
Endnotes

- 1 Apparently, saxophones were not made in La Couture-Boussey. Saxophones were manufactured about thirty kilometers from La Couture-Boussey in Mantes-la-Jolie. Personal correspondence with Emanuele Marconi, 3 January 2023.
- 2 Another book published by le Musée des Instruments à Vent de la Couture-Boussey is *Un Souffle de Modernité! Camille Saint-Saëns et les Instruments à Vent* (2021), also edited by Emanuele Marconi.



BASSOON BOOK REVIEW

Review by **Ryan Romine** | Winchester, Virginia



The Breathing Book for Bassoon

Kristin Wolfe Jensen
Mountain Peak Music, 2022

Kristin Wolfe Jensen has racked up an impressive range of accomplishments in the course of her career. In addition to teaching a very successful studio at one of the nation's premiere universities, she is the founding director of the Meg Quigley Vivaldi Competition and Bassoon Symposium, the creator of an online bassoon tutor (MusicandtheBassoon.org), producer of an in-depth video series on the Herzberg/Kamins reed making method, soloist on multiple highly-regarded albums, principal bassoonist with the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra (ROCO), licensed Body Mapping Educator, and teacher at the Round Top Festival Institute. At this rate, one would be forgiven for assuming that she is also a master chef, a nationally ranked billiards player, and a skilled haberdasher. It wouldn't be too surprising.

Never one to rest on her laurels, Jensen has continued on her quest to make bassoon editors worldwide simultaneously proud and jealous by releasing a book so quietly powerful that it has the potential to alter for the better how the bassoon is taught for generations to