

Basic Detail Report



Mélophone

Date

1851-1854

Primary Maker

M. R. Jacquet

Description

The body of this varnished, birdseye maple mélophone resembles a guitar-shaped hurdy-gurdy, with a violin-type of scroll as the finial of the neck. Attached to the fingerboard are a set of small metal touchpieces which are intricately wired internally to a valve mechanism situated over a set of tuned metal reeds. A removable wooden lid protects the intricate valve mechanism, which, at first glance, might be said to resemble a series of small mousetraps. A carved, wooden handle attached to two plunger rods at the lower end is pulled in and out by the player's right hand, in order to open and close the bellows located in the interior of the body. The lid, which covers the intricate valve mechanism, bears two decoratively-carved soundholes which resemble a pair of f-holes; however, unlike an f-hole, each soundhole features three additional scroll-shaped carvings and a carved flower (thistle?). The ribs of the lid feature nineteen (19) small, C-shaped soundholes, such as might be seen on a viola da gamba, carved around both sides, as well as on the bottom rib. The valve mechanism consists of 57 flat, round, brass valves attached to a corresponding number of levers, springs, and thin control wires, all of which are located over a similarly spaced rank of metal reeds. The entire mechanism is situated above an air chamber and set of bellows. The valves have leather pads. The wires attached to the valves lead to 91 semi-circular touchpieces made of nickel-silver, located on the upper side of the neck. The touchpieces are arranged into 7 rows of 13 touchpieces each, over which a metal plate, perforated to fit precisely over the touchpieces, is affixed. An octave coupling mechanism is located on the underside of the neck. The air chamber itself is split into two parts. The mélophone was invented in 1837 by Leclerc, a Parisian watchmaker. Leclerc's instruments were made in Paris by A. Brown. The composer Halévy used a mélophone in his operas. It preceded the harmonium's invention in 1842.

Dimensions

Body length at back (excluding handle): 490 mm Length of neck (excluding scroll): 200 mm Length of scroll: 70 mm Total length of instrument (sum of above three parts, excluding handle): 760 mm Width of upper bout (at back): 260 mm Width of center (at back): 240 mm Width of lower bout (at back): 290 mm Depth of the part of body containing the bellows (excluding lid and mechanism): 115 mm