

Some comments on
THE NEW GROVE DICTIONARY of MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
By Carey Beebe

Despite its expense, this recent publication certainly deserves some attention from all musical bookworms—performers and musicologists as well as instrument makers.

The volumes are impeccably bound and the layout follows the neat scheme devised for THE NEW GROVE. Many articles are followed by copious bibliographic material (over a page for the 'metronome' article), and the volumes are profusely illustrated with photographs, diagrams and tables. Articles over a certain size seem to mention the name of the contributor at the end and there is a complete listing of contributors with the titles of their articles at the end of Vol. 3.

We are told in the preface that the work is not just a reprint of various NEW GROVE articles, but rather there is much new material and earlier contributions have been revised to make a monumental collection of articles including the latest research. Even 'Casiotone' manages to fill four paragraphs (attempting to wrestle the long held Musical Verbosity Award from THE OXFORD COMPANION?) but it doesn't say whether or not Woolworths has them.

Musical instruments (east and west, old and new) are not the only contents—performance practice articles (including perhaps a few too many one sentence definitions of musical terms for a work of this type) take a fair space, as well as biographical articles of important makers.

Ethnological instruments seem to assert their presence on every page and many of these obscure (for a musician with western upbringing) instruments have an accompanying photo of a suitable performer. For some light entertainment, have a look at the casual pose of a Cretan Lyra player captured complete with dangling cigarette in Vol.2, p579. Ever played a 'dikki' or a 'dilli'? Monash University's Trevor Jones contributed the 'didjeridu' article, an instrument certainly better known here.

I suppose it is natural for mistakes to creep in to a work this size. And 'Ron Sharp', mentioned having built an organ for 'Woollongong' (sic) is easy enough to make. But just how authoritative are the contributors or careful are the editors? The 'Wurlitzer' article says that spinet organ keyboards overlap each other an octave and then each cover an octave not on the other keyboard. I hope nobody tries to follow the unfortunate diagram with the 'Arpichordum' article, where the strings are seen leaving the correct side of the bridge pins but wound on the wrong side of the tuning pins.

There may be more inaccuracies if one looks hard enough, but despite this, the work is useful and handy and is marvellous for musical insomniacs. The three volume set is now priced at \$395, which may well be out of the range of public libraries let alone the home workshop bookshelf. Ask Macmillan nicely for a trade price to ease 10% of the blow, but make sure they send you clean ones. My set was obviously packed with care, but somehow Vol.2 crept through quality control with about 20 crinkled pages.

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