

History of the Clarinet



Chalumeau

The first real ancestor of the clarinet was the chalumeau which developed to medieval times, probably from pipes played by shepherds. The word chalumeau is of French origin and is a generic name for any small reed-blown pipe. The first instrument to be called a clarinet was developed from the chalumeau around 1700 by German instrument maker Johann Christoph Denner. Denner gave the clarinet a separate mouthpiece, added two keys, developed the bell and made available for the first time the third and fifth harmonics.



13 key Muller Clarinet

Thru the 1800's much music was written for the clarinet as a solo instrument as well as chamber music. In 1812 Ivan Muller presented a newly designed clarinet to the Paris Conservatoire. This 13 key instrument was the furthest advance since the work of Denner. The Muller clarinet was much more practical to play but still could not be played in every key.



24 key Boehm system clarinet

The last innovator in the history of the clarinet was the French composer Hyacinthe Klose. In 1839 Hyacinthe Klose and August Buffet adapted the Boehm keywork mechanism from the flute to the clarinet. This system is named after Theobald Boehm who invented a system for the flute by placing holes in the proper acoustical positions. He also invented a series of ring keys by which a finger could close a ring when covering a whole. After much refinement, this 24 key instrument became the most practical clarinet and is what we know today as the "Boehm system" clarinet.