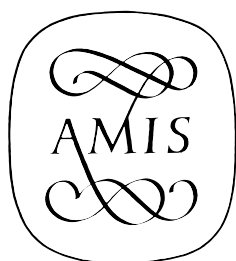


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AMIS AT FIFTY

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AMIS at Fifty

CYNTHIA ADAMS HOOVER (WITH JANET K. PAGE)

Fifty years of the American Musical Instrument Society! Who are we—and what have been the highlights, contributions, and changes over these five decades? I have been asked to trace how the Society has evolved over these years and where we might be going in the decades to come.

Several sources, rich with stories and photos, detail the AMIS history. An excellent article on the formation and the first ten years of the society, written by long-time AMIS member Carolyn Bryant, appeared in the 2007 volume of the Society's *JOURNAL (JAMIS)*; an abridged version is reprinted in this volume. In addition to the *JOURNAL*, the Society's publications include the *NEWSLETTER (NAMIS)*, published twice or three times a year from November 1971 and the AMIS website (amis.org), both containing current information about the Society's membership, programs and history, and subjects of interest to the field. Using these sources and my memories as a Smithsonian curator of musical instruments and as an AMIS founding member as a guide, I'll look back at the fifty years of the Society to sketch a portrait of AMIS and its relationship to the history and use of musical instruments.

So, Who Are We?

According to the Society's by-laws, as amended in 1978, "The American Musical Instrument Society (AMIS) is an international organization founded in 1971 to promote the study of the history, design, and use of musical instruments in all cultures and from all periods." Besides publishing the *JOURNAL* and *NEWSLETTER*, the Society holds annual meetings with symposia, papers, demonstrations, and performances of interest to members, and maintains a website (amis.org) and the AMIS Listserv (amis-l-list) to foster online discussion. What attracts us to the Society? Do we have a special aspect of musical instruments that interests us—winds, strings, brass, keyboards, percussion, collecting, conservation, performance, scholarly studies, iconography, dance, ritual—the list could go on and on. Has the size and profile of the membership changed through the

years? How has the development of technology influenced the Society—in the topics, the method of presentations, and the way we communicate within the Society?

In October 1971, seven men and one woman, all collectors of musical instruments, met at the Scarsdale, NY, home of Robert Rosenbaum. At that gathering, they discussed the possibility of forming a society for collectors, where they could meet face to face, schedule “show and tell,” and share information through a journal and a newsletter. They sent out four hundred questionnaires about founding a group; replies came from ninety-nine men and nine women (ages ranging from 18 to 82), and also one museum.

Three months later, in January 1972, about sixty American members of the Britain-based Galpin Society (including Robert Rosenbaum, Arnold Fromme, Friedrich von Huene, Edwin Ripin, Frederick Selch, Victor Yellin, and Cynthia Hoover) met for three days in Jersey City, NJ, to hear papers and performances, and also visited the musical instrument collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Also on the agenda was to discuss the possibility of establishing an American branch of the Galpin Society. It was decided instead to meet with the Scarsdale group at the Smithsonian Institution in April 1972 to found the American Musical Instrument Society.

AMIS Membership

Various publications and the website list the categories of who we have been from the beginning: collectors; performers; museum professionals; dealers, instrument technicians, and restorers; amateur historians; academic faculty; and music and musical instruments lovers. There is another characteristic not often found in other societies: family couples.

A quick survey through the years: The Society has met annually since that founding meeting, through 2019. The 2020 meeting, scheduled to be held in Calgary, Canada, was canceled on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its cancellation highlights the current character of the Society: we are truly international, with conference attendees coming from all over, and we are dedicated to studying musical instruments and meeting colleagues “on the ground” in the presence of instruments themselves.

The membership includes both individuals and institutions. It grew

gradually, to a high of about 820 members in the early 1990s, then saw a gradual decline to the 500s in 2005–2009, and to the mid-400s in 2020. All the AMIS membership lists throughout its nearly fifty years record more men than women—for example: 1971 Scarsdale 7 men /1 woman, 1993 Nashville 429/96, 2006 Vermillion 286/97, 2013 Williamsburg 252/95. Also, in two sample years reviewed, there were twenty-four family couples (48 members) in 2006 and thirty-one (62 members) in 2012. Among these couples are people who have held important leadership positions in AMIS. The modest size of the Society allowed members to get to know each other’s families, collections, and favorite eras of music and instruments. When AMIS members visited other AMIS households overnight, it wasn’t unusual to sleep in a guest bedroom along with a keyed bugle, church bass, or even a serpent!

Interests of AMIS Members

In 1993 and again in 2006, AMIS members were asked to complete the “AMIS Interest Index Form,” a list of over 150 entries related to musical instruments, with categories like Accordion, Dealer, Jew’s harp, Non-Western instruments, Percussion, Performer, Piano technician, Sousaphone, and Zither. Respondents were asked to limit their choices to ten items. The membership profiles show that Collector was at the top of the list in 1993, but not in 2006 (175 people chose Collector in 1993/54 in 2006). Other popular categories were Restorer/Repair/Technician (109/58), Performer (92/60), Dealer/Consultant (51/24), Museum Professional (32/34), and Student (19/not on 2006 form).

The Interest items were listed alphabetically, and there could be several sub-categories. For instance, in the 1993 survey Brass had 19 sub-categories, including Bugle (chosen by 7 members) and Cornet (24). Keyboard had 12 sub-categories, including Clavichord (31), Harpsichord (56), Piano (34), and Fortepiano (30). Musical instruments as ranked in 1993 and 2006 were: Keyboard (298/294), Woodwinds (292/259), Brass (254/259), History of Musical Instruments (175/259), Non-western/other cultures (98/124), Bowed strings (71/61), Plucked strings (45/45), and Percussion (12/15). The lists also include hints about the involvement of some spouses. Robert Eliason, a long-time member, AMIS officer, article writer, brass expert, and professional player, listed his many interests (he did not

include his performances with the Saturday Serpent Society!); his wife Ellen listed: “Instruments, general interest.” Roland Hoover, a spouse, publisher, typographer, and letter press printer of the AMIS awards, listed not only the instruments that he played in Boy Scouts (Trumpet) and in his college marching band (Baritone horn), but also Jew’s harp.

AMIS Annual Meetings

AMIS members look forward to their annual meetings: the roster of excellent papers presented by long-time or new members, or by young scholars making their debuts; tours of instrument collections, exhibitions, and performances; camaraderie at meals and breaks; the announcement of awards, and the introduction of the Gribbon Scholars—the Society’s future. Among the former Gribbon Scholars who are now leaders of the Society are Jayson Kerr Dobney, our president; Michael Suing, secretary; and board members Edmond Johnson, Allison Alcorn (also a former editor of the JOURNAL), Jayme Kurland, and Jonathan Santa Maria Bouquet.

Through careful planning, meetings have been scheduled in all areas of the United States, plus two each in Canada and England/Scotland. Meeting five times in Vermillion (in years ending with the number 6), we have tracked the transformation of a large private collection at the Shrine to Music, as it was then known, to the National Music Museum, which is also a training ground for students interested in “the study of the history, design, and use of musical instruments.” Several have gone on to become curators at museums in Boston, New York, Edinburgh, and other cities. We have watched as several collections became the foundations of newer museums (the Selch private collection to Oberlin College and Conservatory; the Claremont College collections to the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix; and the Marlowe Sigal private collection to the Carolina Music Museum in Greensboro, SC, later renamed the Sigal Museum).

Paper presentation sessions have often been organized by instrument types, like keyboards, brass, or flutes (especially at the beginning, we had a lot of flutists). “Show and tell” has appeared at many meetings, sometimes on the official program, sometimes informally in hotel rooms or a designated space in the meeting areas. On occasion, panels have discussed specific challenges. At the Society’s 2017 conference in Edinburgh, held jointly with the Galpin Society and CIMCIM, the subject of “Organology

and the Others” focused on “cross-disciplinary methods applied to the study of musical instruments.” A report of these discussions appears in *JAMIS* 44 (2018).

The Journal of AMIS

From the early meeting in Scarsdale, a major goal was to publish a high-quality annual journal. The project took several years to launch (see Carolyn Bryant’s account of the challenges), but from the first issues, the JOURNAL exemplified the Society’s commitment to variety of approach and openness to all cultures and all periods. The first volume (1975) included articles on Han Dynasty musicians and instruments (by Fong Chow), European instruments of the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries (Shelly Davis, Laurence C. Witten), and “North American Indian Musical Instruments” (J. Richard Haefer), the latter being the first in a long line of contributions dedicated to American musical instruments. Within nine years, many of the Society’s interests and concerns had been aired in the journal’s pages. The time frame was extended back to classical Greece (Martha Maas). Underlying assumptions of the study of musical instruments came under discussion in articles on classification systems (William Dowd) and terminology (Stephen Bonta). The earliest in a rich collection of articles on musical instrument makers appeared (Charles Howard Kaufman, “Musical-Instrument Makers in New Jersey (1796–1861).” Robert E. Eliason, who has been by far the most prolific contributor to the journal, published his first article in 1978. By the early 1980s, the mix included articles focusing on museum practices (Gary M. Stewart) and scientific methods (John Coltman).

Over the years, scholars contributed articles on ongoing research, some of which engendered considerable back-and-forth discussion—for example the series of articles and communications on *Deutsche Schalmeyen* by Bruce Haynes, Susan E. Thompson, and Jan Bouterse that appeared around 2000. This blend of topics and approaches continues to the present day, and the Journal well illustrates how terminology and methods have adapted and changed, and how thinking about the study of musical instruments has changed. Some recent articles draw on the most modern technologies, including X-ray spectrometry (Stewart Carter and Sabine K. Klaus, on trumpet mouthpieces, 2011) and microphotography (Robert

Howe, on the dating of wind instruments, 2019).

Awards for Excellence in the Field of Musical Instruments

In addition to the excellence of the annual JOURNAL, the Society gained status internationally through the creation of three awards for the scholars, performers, and contributors to the field of music and musical instruments. The Curt Sachs Award was the first of these, begun in 1983 “to honor those who have made important contributions toward the goals of the Society.” In 1988, the Frances Densmore Prize for the “most significant article-length publication in English” was established, and the Nicholas Bessaraboff Prize, to honor “the most distinguished book-length work in English,” followed in 1989. The focus of the honored publications ranges through many centuries and many topics, among them instruments from Ancient Greece and Ancient China, framed drums in medieval Iberia, trumpet making in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Nuremberg, musical ensembles in Renaissance festival books, Ruckers Flemish harpsichords, guitars in Tudor England and in the American parlor, pipe organs for the rich and famous, banjo roots and branches, and electronic music. Conservator and scholar John Koster has won all three awards; seven other authors have won two: Cecil Adkins (S/D), Edmund A. Bowles (S/B), Bruce Haynes (D/B), Sabine K. Klaus (D/B), Arnold Myers (S/D), Grant O’Brien (S/B), and Al Rice (S/B). If the handsome certificates awarded to these outstanding recipients were gathered all into one room, that space could certainly be named The Hall of Fame for the Study of Musical Instruments.

AMIS in the Next Decades

As we approach our fiftieth year, how do we envision AMIS in the future? Clearly, technology will be important in expanding the ways AMIS members connect with each other and share research and ideas. In the early years, we connected through annual meetings and the NEWSLETTER. In 1997, we launched our first website, and in 2007 our Listserv for online discussion. Although it is important that we meet as a body at least once a year, we can hold smaller meetings and focus groups on Zoom—or

whatever will be the latest version of internet conferences. We can make podcasts featuring specific instruments, or projects, or performances—and perhaps even try to arrange a worldwide membership performance similar to the ones that appeared during the pandemic of 2020.

A second focus might be to enlarge our categories of membership and subjects of our research, and to include topics that can involve students from an early age. We can be open to the stories of under-represented cultures and presenters, and to their ways of telling them. We can find more ways for institutions like museums and universities to contribute their expertise and collections to train the younger generations. Let's circulate a more current AMIS Interest Survey to create a portrait of AMIS in 2021 and the years to come.

Happy Fiftieth Birthday, AMIS!



Jeannine Lambrechts-Douillez, left, and Cynthia Adams Hoover during the 1993 AMIS conference. Photo by Susan E. Thompson.