

# VICHY<sup>®</sup> ENCHÈRES

*An extremely rare  
harmony bass:  
François Antoine Sautermeister  
on the spotlights*

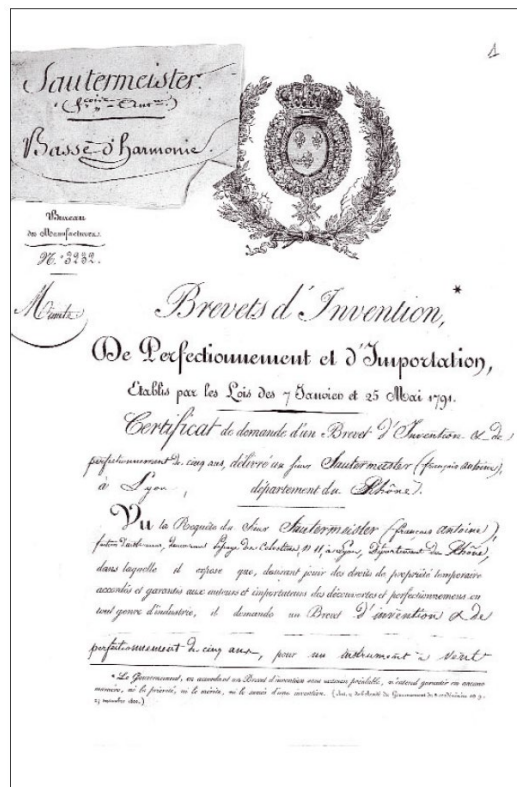
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*June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 - 14:00*



On June 27<sup>th</sup>, Vichy Enchères will sell an exceptional instrument both in its rarity and in its historical interest: a harmony bass. Let's discover its inventor: François Antoine Sautermeister, one of the most daring instrument makers of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

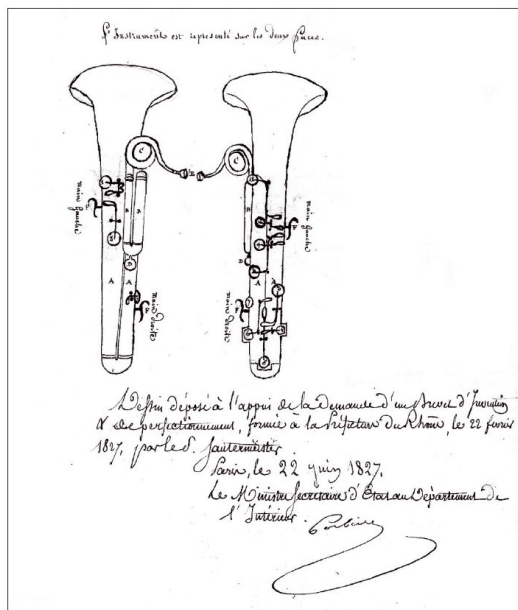
## ***Sautermeister: a creative and enterprising spirit at the service of musical practice***

François Antoine Sautermeister was born in Rottembourg in Wurtemberg, Germany, in 1782. He settled in Lyon in 1809 and remained there until his death in 1830, at 46 years old. Companion luthier with recognized expertise, he produces all wind instruments, from woodwinds to brass, mainly intended for regiments in the Lyon region. Driven by a fertile imagination and a desire to manufacture innovative instruments with the aim of facilitating and perfecting musical practice, he deposits in 1812, that is to say only three years after his settlement in Lyon, his first patent for a «bass organ» - acoustically comparable to a bass clarinet. Faithful to his ambitions, he continued his experiments and obtained, on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1827, a new patent for five years: the one of the «bass harmony», also known as «new ophicleide». But then what is it?





## The harmony bass according to its inventor



The harmony bass was born from Sautermeister's ambition to make an instrument with a sound superior to others and with simplified use. He defines it as «an instrument with wind and eleven keys», giving «majestic sounds», while offering an «easy» fingering, “the most perfect accuracy [and] all the tones and semitones” (Memory de Sautermeister, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1827). The search for an ideal sound also explains its extent «of three octaves and more». Finally, to simplify the practice of the instrument, Sautermeister thought of the division of the eleven holes and the way in which the keys block them to «shorten the work of the fingers» and to make «the instrument very advantageous and easy for those who play them».

In addition to its eleven keys, the harmony bass is made up of a double slide - used to tune and transpose the instrument by a semitone - a conical bore, two tubes, a mouth-piece with round (or conical) basin and a flared roof. Perfectionist, the maker has finely worked the bevel and annotated each key with numbers, making the harmony bass a real piece of art. Always faithful to an ergonomic design of the instrument, Sautermeister added a small container - a screw ball - in order to collect and evacuate the water inside the instrument. As we can see, Sautermeister thought about the smallest details and it is therefore not surprising that he anticipated the destination of the instrument, which could be «used with the greatest success to accompany the plain song; as well as in harmony» - hence its name «bass harmony».

*Gamme de la Basse d'harmonie à Onze Clefs, ou Nouvel Ophicléide.*  
 Les numéros désignent la clef que l'on doit toucher pour faire la note: chaque clef est Numérotée.

Position des notes que chaque Clef donne  
 le zéro signifie de ne toucher aucune clef.

Sans toucher de Clef: 1<sup>re</sup> Clef, 2<sup>me</sup> Clef, 3<sup>me</sup> Clef, 4<sup>me</sup> et 5<sup>me</sup> ensemble, 5<sup>me</sup> et 3<sup>me</sup> ensemble.

6<sup>me</sup> Clef, 7<sup>me</sup> et 6<sup>me</sup> ensemble, 8<sup>me</sup> Clef, 9<sup>me</sup> Clef, 10<sup>me</sup> Clef, 11<sup>me</sup> Clef.

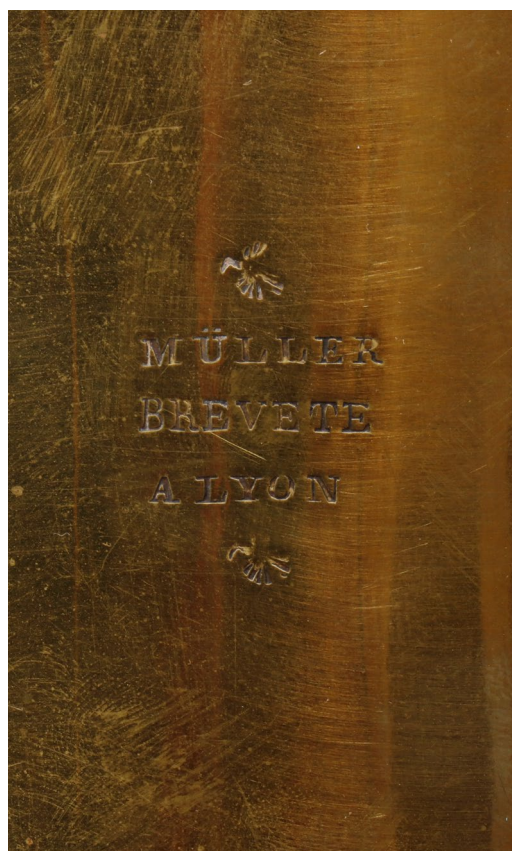
Sautermeister facteur d'instrument ~~Paris~~ Passage des Galeries, N. 11. à Lyon.

## ***The implementation of revolutionary elements***

As its second name suggests, this “new ophicleide” shares common points with the ophicleides of the time, including those of makers Halary and Labbaye. For example, the principle of the double slide was already generalized on straight snakes and on most ophicleides. However, Sautermeister has developed real technical innovations. According to Bruno Kampmann, expert in wind instruments, and Jérôme Wiss, instrument maker, many elements were revolutionary for the time. Among these elements, there is the screw ball used to collect saliva, used later by a large number of Russian bassoon and ophimonocleid makers, and then by Gautrot for sarrussophones. The adjustable hand supports, another Sautermeister invention, were also picked up by Gautrot and Sax, the celebrated instrument maker behind the saxophone. But, if it were only necessary to give a revolutionary element, we would stick to the fact that the harmony bass constitutes a “synthesis between the ophicleide and the fingering of the serpent and the Russian bassoon” (Kampmann, Wiss, “Sautermeister’s Harmony Bass”, Larigot n ° 55, May 2015). Audacious, Sautermeister revised the geometry of the instrument by turning his hands over in order to obtain a fingering «more logical than the one by Halary and Labbaye». Provided the usual use of both hands has been radically reversed. It is moreover probably this characteristic which explains today the great rarity of harmony bass.

## ***A very rare instrument, a collector’s item!***

In fact, very few harmony bass models have been produced. This is no doubt explained by the fact that the musicians were reluctant to the idea of radically changing their fingering. Today, only a few rare copies are known. There are two in brass, corresponding exactly to the patent. The first stamped “Sautermeister & Müller”, the second stamped “Müller”. A third harmony bass signed «Müller» also exists, but does not fully correspond to the patent (the first chimney starts lower on the small branch). Finally, we know a fourth, also stamped “Sautermeister & Müller”, the first chimney of which also starts lower on the small branch and in a very different jar (Kampmann, Wiss, “La Basse d’Harmonie de Sautermeister”, Larigot n ° 55, May 2015). The item sold by Vichy Enchères, stamped “Müller breveté à Lyon”, is therefore the fifth and last known. Quite exceptional on the market, this extremely rare witness to an invention that marked the history of musical instruments, is a real collector’s item ...  
See you on June 27<sup>th</sup>!



*From «La Basse d’Harmonie de Sautermeister» by Jérôme WISS and Bruno KAMPMANN published in Larigot 55 of May 2015.*



## ***Description of the sales catalog***

**#407 • Harmony bass by MÜLLER**

Small depression in the roof and in the lower part and small accident to a hand support.

*Estimate: € 2.000*

## ***Useful informations***

### ***Sale***

Saturday June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at 2 p.m.

### ***Exhibitions***

Friday, June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (2 p.m./6 p.m.)  
and Saturday, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (10a.m./12 p.m.)

### ***Experts***

Jérôme CASANOVA, Bruno KAMPMANN  
and Philippe KRÜMM

### ***Contact***

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### ***Location***

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