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Sax appeal

Innovative instruments a big hit

By ERIC PETERSON
STAFF WRITER

For the past decade, the L.A. Sax company of Lake Barrington has been leading a revolution in the worldwide saxophone market.

The company customizes saxophones and creates new types in a way that Leo Fender introduced for the guitar, said Marketing Director H Allan.

Though Adolph Sax created the instrument around 1850, there has been relatively little else done with it before L.A. Sax started things rolling in 1987, Allan said.

"The sax market is very traditional," he said. "There hasn't been a lot of innovation. I'm a guitar player and we've taken a very guitar-oriented marketing approach. L.A. Sax began to be a force in the late '80s. I think Adolph Sax would be very proud of us."

The saxophone stands apart from many of the rest of the wind instruments for the range of voices and expressions it's capable of. Saxophone voices span the same spectrum as choir voices, from soprano to bass and even the lower contrabass. A 6-foot-4-inch contrabass saxophone was recently delivered to the company's headquarters from a production plant in Italy. The \$37,500 instrument is the largest production model saxophone in the world.

"L.A. Sax set out to have the entire range of saxophones in our entou-

rage," Allan said.

In fact, several types of saxophone have been developed by L.A. Sax itself. Research and Development Coordinator David Schottle created the straight tenor saxophone about three years ago, a product that has been on the market for about two years. Schottle is currently working on the prototype for a particular type of straight tenor sax specifically for sax man Joe Lovano.

Allan explained that slightly different sounds are possible from these various types of horn, and that the straight tenor has a somewhat warmer quality than does its traditional counterpart. "The saxophone is very keyed in to the human voice," he said. "Because of that relationship, people can really identify with it. The sax player is using breath for expression, and that's why people identify with it. There's no other instrument like it."

One-of-a-kind

In addition to its regular product lines, L.A. Sax also creates many one-of-a-kind and limited edition saxophones. Last week, Production Manager Garry Hane was putting the finishing touches on a saxophone that will be awarded to the winner of the Outstanding Youth award at a jazz festival coming up next month in Moscow, Idaho. In addition to its unique color scheme, the sax bears the logo and date of the event.

Hane said such a project took about two days to do. He explained how L.A. Sax's specially designed products arrive fully assembled from the plant. At one time the company had had the instruments delivered in kit form to assemble from scratch. But without the lacquer finish being put on at the plant, some amount of corrosion would occur during delivery which took even more time and effort to eliminate.

"Garry is known world round as the master builder," Allan said.

A very special limited edition was the Stars-and-Stripes Presidential saxophone inspired by Bill Clinton's playing a sax during a pre-election appearance on the "Arsenio Hall Show" in 1992. Only 150 of the instruments were made, each with a specific number.

Sax Number One was presented to Clinton in the Oval Office in May 1994, at which time the Chief Execu-

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Richard Bagalich/Pioneer Press

David Schottle blows a few notes on the 6-foot-4-inch contrabass saxophone that recently arrived at L.A. Sax from Italy. The massive instrument weighs about 50 pounds and has a retail price of \$37,500.



Richard Bagalich/Pioneer Press

A 6-foot-4-inch contrabass saxophone towers above its player, 5-foot-6-inch David Schottle at L.A. Sax in Lake Barrington. Schottle is the research and development coordinator for the company, and he invented the straight tenor saxophone three years ago.

tive played "Georgia on My Mind" for the representatives from L.A. Sax. That particular one was subsequently donated to the Shrine to Music Museum at the University of South Da-

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kota. Others in the range cost \$3,000 apiece. Saxophone artist Richard Elliot and comedian Bill Cosby are among a few celebrities who own one.

L.A. Sax is located at the former site of Barrington Guitar Works at 22N159 Pepper Road in the Lake Barrington industrial park. The idea of giving the "guitar treatment" to saxophones came about after Joe Cocker's band approached Barrington Guitar Works and asked for some saxophones to be painted, Allan said.

He added that the name "L.A. Sax" was arrived at for its feeling of hipness and so that the instruments were in-

stantly recognizable as a U.S. product in a worldwide market. Though some have begun following L.A. Sax's lead, the company's name is still the one readily associated with customized saxophones in general, Allan said.

Though saxophones are and will continue to be the company's main products, custom trumpets, trombones, Flugel-horns or pocket trumpets are also available.

For information about L.A. Sax, call (847) 382-3210 ext. 16 or (888) 368-7770. The company's Website is <http://www.lasax.com>.