Selmer Saxophones

How history affects quality control

Adolphe Sax didn't discover the saxophone, as Denner discovered the clarinet by putting a reed on the recorder; Sax created the saxophone. He knew what he wanted, and he set out in an orderly way to invent it—the only patented instrument in history to gain a place in the standard instrumentation.

He was so thorough that the saxophone has evolved much less than most instruments. In this respect Selmer is in a strategic spot. As successors to the Adolphe Sax business, Selmer inherited priceless models, drawings, and experimental notes as a foundation for the development of our refinements in the saxophone's acoustics and mechanical design.

But before Selmer the saxophone had to make it the hard way—like so many other nightclub performers. Soon after its invention about 1840, composers as influential as Berlioz and Meyerbeer wrote parts for it in their own music, and commended it to others. With such a sendoff it was accepted in Europe as a serious instrument, and has remained so ever since, with its own teachers at the Conservatory, a growing repertory of works by major composers, and virtuosos of the first rank.

Several of these virtuosos toured America with great effect in the era of the professional concert bands. But the saxophone never really caught on here until someone found it to be one of the few genuine musical instruments that were genuinely easy to play. By the 1920's there was scarcely a young man in the country so tone deaf he wouldn't join his girl at the upright piano with his C-melody sax. It was a craze to equal hula hoops and miniature golf.

But if the saxophone was easy to play, it was hard to play well, with the result that many serious musicians, and some who were merely stuffy, ranked it no higher than the ukelele, mouth organ, and ocarina. Worse, the saxophone's distinctive voice became the representative sound of jazz in the 1920's and guilt by association demoted it to the foot of the social and musical scale.

In those days of high popularity and low repute, the saxophone was not only badly played, but often badly made. The tradition of shabby workmanship has faded, along with the memory of the saxophone's questionable past. Even so, the saxophone buyer should be prepared to invest in the most reliable instrument, even if he no longer runs a great risk of choosing a wholly unreliable one.

Clues to reliability

A typical saxophone body has walls about .025" thick—less than six pages in this catalog. In most saxophones this is the sole foundation for a mechanism up to four feet long, which has to move with clockwork precision, hopefully for many years.

Even the gentle stress of removing the saxophone from its case can eventually distort its thin body. Then, the post holes no longer parallel, its hinge rods begin to bind, and regulation becomes a chronic problem. If you can, inspect some used saxophones—the older the better—for signs of a brand's durability. Barring this, at least look in new instruments for evidence of solid design in the keys and the bracing of the body and bell.

Selmer saxophones are somewhat different from others in their body design. Groups of key posts are first mounted on flat brass ribs, and these subassemblies are then mounted on the body. The body is subjected to less heat in assembly, and is buttressed, rather than strained, by the ribbed mounting. However, the high cost of this method has discouraged its use by other manufacturers.

The feel of the keys under the fingers is another clue to workmanship. Look first for comfortable hand positions. Does the octave key lie easily under the left thumb? Are the right and left hand keys too high or low, too spread out for small hands, or awkwardly placed in relation to each other?

Saxophone keys vary more in these respects than the keys of other woodwinds. Selmer's policy

is to put the keys for left hand well around to the left side of the body, and the right-hand keys well around to the right. The bell rods can then be put in the center, directly between the bell and body. We find these locations are the most comfortable for most players, and the location of the rods makes their action direct for speed and lightness of touch.

Lightness of touch is another clue to workmanship. No other woodwind carries such a burden of mechanism, and it is a trick to make it as light and fast as other woodwinds. Check all saxophones thoroughly for keys that seem stiff or sluggish, too hard or too awkward to press. If they seem stiff in a short trial, they will seem far stiffer at the end of a long rehearsal. Take special pains to test the keys for the left little finger by trying jumps from B♭ to C♯, C♯ to B, and B to B♭.

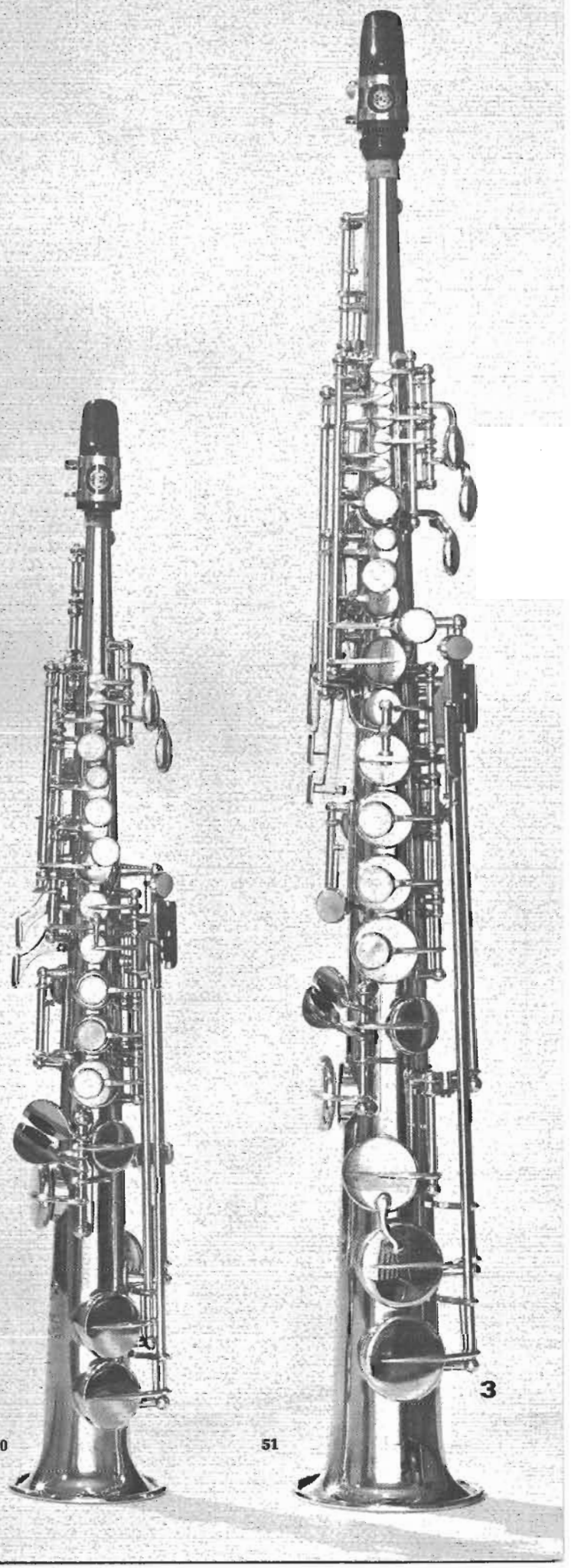
Our Bundy saxophones have machine made, hand fitted actions, and good ones. But the Power Hammered action of a Selmer is custom finished and fitted piece by piece, with such refinement that it will work to perfection only on its original body. This is why the key assemblies of Selmer saxophones are marked with serial numbers for permanent identification with their body.

The quality of workmanship in a saxophone body is easier to hear than see, but it is still worth scrutiny. While slovenly soldering is not a direct cause of poor musical quality, it is a double hint of low standards to have been done in the first place, and then to have passed inspection. If the body is still being made with soldered tone hole sockets, sloppy work can be a warning of present or future trouble.

However, soldered tone hole sockets are no longer common, since sockets machine-drawn directly from the body are more accurate, more durable, and reduce the number of parts by some dozen and a half.

Durability is an important but secondary virtue in saxophones. While we intend Selmers to be made well,[1] our first concern is their ability to produce fine music, and we think this should be the buyer's first concern too. When you assemble a saxophone to see if it does produce fine music, notice one last mechanical detail — the fit of the neck in its socket.

[1] At the beginning of World War II a number of Selmer saxophones went down with the U.S.S. Ogalalla. The instruments were recovered after five years at the bottom of Pearl Harbor, and restored to playing condition with our standard reconditioning. Others have been destroyed by fire, but we have never seen one that had been worn out by use.



50 51

The efficient way to find the best saxophone

Every year hundreds of musicians come to our offices in Elkhart to choose an instrument from our stock for purchase through their local dealer. Few of them use a system for testing all aspects of performance. As a result, they often spend entire days in doubt and confusion. Meanwhile our own inspectors, using an orderly pattern of tests, are able to check every saxophone we finish, spotting the slightest flaw in minutes. Any similar pattern of tests will help the buyer choose an instrument just as efficiently.

Begin testing unfamiliar saxophones by finding the mouthpiece location that makes the scale most accurate and consistent, ignoring for the moment its general pitch level. Check consistency with more than a scale or two and some octave jumps; use fifths as well, along with major and minor thirds and other intervals, with major and minor arpeggios. When you find the place where the mouthpiece works best, mark it on the cork. (In the future, put the mouthpiece at this place whenever you are playing alone.) Next tune to your customary pitch level and mark the cork again. The farther apart your two marks are, the darker your future with that saxophone.

While the saxophone is unusually flexible in pitch, its internal tuning becomes progressively worse as the pitch level varies in either direction from normal. This is because a change in mouthpiece location affects tones produced near the mouthpiece so much more than the bell tones. But for most players, the pitch of our saxophones can be changed a number of vibrations per second from normal A-440 and still be played in tune.

The notes most commonly out of tune on saxophones are low B, C, C♯, and D, which are often flat; middle D and E, which are sometimes sharp; and high C, C♯, D and up, these notes often being sharp. If these notes are in tune, be sure to check them an octave higher or lower. It is in these tones that a saxophone's octaves sometimes tend to spread, so that accuracy in one register may well aggravate inaccuracy in another.

If the brand you are testing does prove to be out of tune, it is probably better to be progressively sharper towards the top of its range than irregularly out of tune anywhere, because in the first instance you will find it easier to humor the instrument into passable accuracy.

The saxophone's natural flexibility makes it easy for the player to adjust to slight discrepancies in tuning. It also puts some of the responsibility for good performance on the player's taste and keen ear. These are as important to the saxophonist as to the trombonist or string player, and are worth careful investigation in the young student.

The natural limits of a good saxophone

After such dire warnings, it is fair to ask why instrument makers don't build their instruments in tune to begin with. The saxophone overblows its octave by stopping the vibration of its air column at the middle. The vibrating column of air, like the vibrating string of a violin, must be a certain length for each note in the fundamental scale, and exactly half that length for each note in the octave above. The violinist divides a string easily enough by touching it with his finger. It isn't so easy with an air column. This has to be divided by a vent hole. Dividing the column exactly in half for each note in the scale would take twelve vent holes—and twelve pads, and the keys to work them, and the fingers to play the keys.

Experience shows that two vent holes will serve: this causes variations in the instrument's tuning, but it doesn't overburden the mechanism, and if the instrument is made with skill the player can bring it into tune without strain.

Under the circumstances, the saxophone maker who sets out to create a perfectly tuned instrument is foredoomed to failure by the laws of physics. But a perfection impossible to achieve is easy to claim, with the predictable result that fine intonation is more common in saxophone advertising than in saxophones.

Our own goal is the more practical one of good performance, which we view as a dual effort by instrument maker and instrumentalist. We make the compromises with perfection that are most practical for the player—after all, he has to live with them.

Details to remember as you judge

Will others hear you as you hear yourself? This is a consideration to any musician who plays in public, but an urgent one to the saxophonist, who is often required to sound out against the combined forces of the brass section. It is always revealing to compare saxophones at a distance, and tape recordings can now give you yet another interesting perspective on a new saxophone.

All through your playing test, think about the response of the new saxophone. How sensitive is it? How readily does it speak at your lowest dynamic level? How powerful is its *fff* (and is it only an *ff* plus noise)? How are its octave jumps?

Three reasons why saxophones fail

A saxophone may fail to satisfy you because it is poorly made, it may fail because it is out of regulation, and it may fail because of the mouthpiece you are using. We are confident the first problem does not concern our products. We deliver all saxophones with their entire mechanism locked shut with cork wedges, which helps preserve their careful regulation during shipment. The third failure is up to you.

If you are committed to one favorite mouthpiece, use it in testing any new instrument. But bear in mind that the chamber of a mouthpiece is an extension of the instrument itself, and has to be as accurately matched to the whole as the neck. If your mouthpiece looks significantly different from the one supplied with the saxophone, either in size or shape, you may be putting both yourself and the instrument at a disadvantage. Because Selmer mouthpieces are probably the largest selling woodwind accessory mouthpieces in the world, they are readily available in seven different models, all suitable for use with Selmer saxophones.

52 Selmer (Paris) Mark VI E♭ alto saxophone: *high F and articulated G♯ auxiliary keys; high F and low C♯ adjustments; drawn tone holes; reinforced neck; power hammered brass keys; rib-mounted mechanism; dome-shaped Nylon tone boosters; adjustable right hand thumb hook; patented tilting B♭ spatula; adjustable felt bumpers on low B♭, B, C, and C♯ keys; brass body with multiple coat gold lacquer finish; Selmer (Paris) mouthpiece; case; accessories group A.*

52A Selmer (Paris) Mark VI E♭ alto saxophone: *same features as 52, but with range to low A (C concert) and low A key for left thumb.*

52F Selmer (Paris) Mark VI E♭ alto saxophone: *same features as 52, but with high F♯ key and tone hole for a true high F♯.*

52AF Selmer (Paris) Mark VI E♭ alto saxophone: *same features as 52, but with range to low A (C concert) and low A key for left thumb. Has high F♯ key and tone hole for a true high F♯.*

152 Signet E♭ alto saxophone: *high F and articulated G♯ auxiliary keys; drawn tone holes; dome shaped Nylon tone boosters; brass body with multiple coat gold lacquer finish; Brilhart mouthpiece; case; accessories group B.*

1252 Bundy E♭ alto saxophone: *high F and articulated G♯ auxiliary keys; drawn tone holes; nickel plated brass keys; dome-shaped Nylon tone boosters; brass body with multiple coat gold lacquer finish; G. M. Bundy mouthpiece; case; accessories group B.*

54 Selmer (Paris) Mark VI B♭ tenor saxophone: *high F and articulated G♯ auxiliary keys; high F and low C♯ adjustments; drawn tone holes; reinforced neck; power hammered brass keys; rib-mounted mechanism; dome-shaped Nylon tone boosters; adjustable right hand thumb hook; patented tilting B♭ spatula; adjustable felt bumpers on low B♭, B, C, and C♯ keys; brass body with multiple coat gold lacquer finish; Selmer (Paris) mouthpiece; case; accessories group A.*

54F Selmer (Paris) Mark VI B♭ tenor saxophone: *same features as 54, but with high F♯ key and tone hole for a true high F♯.*

154 Signet B♭ tenor saxophone: *high F and articulated G♯ auxiliary keys; drawn tone holes; reinforced neck; dome shaped Nylon tone boosters; brass body with multiple coat gold lacquer finish; Brilhart mouthpiece; case; accessories group B.*

1254 Bundy B♭ tenor saxophone: *high F and articulated G♯ auxiliary keys; drawn tone holes, reinforced neck; nickel plated brass keys; dome-shaped Nylon tone boosters; brass body with multiple coat gold lacquer finish; G. M. Bundy mouthpiece; case; accessories group B.*

Accessories group A: *ligature, cap, cork grease, neck strap*
Accessories group B: *ligature, cap, cork grease, neck strap, lyre*

1252


152
154
54
1254

51 Selmer (Paris) Mark VI B♭ soprano saxophone[1]: *high F and articulated G♯ auxiliary keys; high F and low C♯ adjustments; drawn tone holes; power hammered brass keys; dome-shaped Nylon tone boosters; brass body with multiple coat gold lacquer finish; Selmer (Paris) mouthpiece; case; accessories group A.*

55 Selmer (Paris) Mark VI E♭ baritone saxophone: *high F and articulated G♯ auxiliary keys; drawn tone holes; reinforced neck; power hammered brass keys; dome-shaped Nylon tone boosters; adjustable right hand thumb hook; patented tilting B♭ spatula; adjustable felt bumpers on low B♭, B, C, and C♯ keys; brass body with multiple coat gold lacquer finish; Selmer (Paris) mouthpiece; case; accessories group B.*

[1]*Available in key of E♭ on special order. Also available with high F♯ key.*

55A Selmer (Paris) Mark VI E♭ baritone saxophone: *same features as 55, but with range to low A (C concert) and low A key for left thumb.*

1256 Bundy E♭ baritone saxophone: *high F and articulated G♯ auxiliary keys; drawn tone holes; reinforced neck; nickel plated pad cups; dome-shaped Nylon tone boosters; brass body with multiple coat gold lacquer finish; G. M. Bundy mouthpiece; case; accessories group C.*

Accessories group A: *ligature, cap, cork grease*
Accessories group B: *ligature, cap, cork grease, neck strap*
Accessories group C: *ligature, cap, cork grease, neck strap, lyre*

Feature Comparison Chart / SAXOPHONES

CATALOG NUMBER	MODEL	KEY	AUXILIARY KEYS	AUXILIARY ADJUSTMENTS	Tone Holes	KEY MECHANISM TYPE	KEY MECHANISM FINISH	RIGHT HAND THUMB HOOK	PAD TYPE	FELT BUMPERS	CLOTHES GUARDS	FINISH	MOUTHPIECE	CASE
51	Selmer Mark VI	B♭, E♭ Soprano	High F Articulated G♯	High F Low C♯	Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Fixed	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters			Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	481B
51F[2]	Selmer Mark VI	B♭, E♭ Soprano	High F♯	High F Low C♯	Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Fixed	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters			Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	481B
52	Selmer Mark VI	E♭ Alto		High F Low C♯	Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Adjustable	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters	Adjustable on low B♭, B, C, and C♯	Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	4968
52F	Selmer Mark VI	E♭ Alto	High F♯	High F Low C♯	Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Adjustable	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters	Adjustable on low B♭, B, C, and C♯	Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	4968
52A	Selmer Mark VI	E♭ Alto	Low A	High F Low C♯	Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Adjustable	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters	Adjustable on low A, B♭, B, C, and C♯	Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	4452A
52AF	Selmer Mark VI	E♭ Alto	High F♯ Low A	High F Low C♯	Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Adjustable	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters	Adjustable on low B♭, B, C, and C♯	Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	4452B
152	Signet	E♭ Alto	High F Articulated G♯		Drawn	Cast Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Fixed	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters		Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Brilhart[4]	4452B
1252	Bundy	E♭ Alto	High F Articulated G♯		Drawn	Cast brass	Nickel plated	Fixed	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters		Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	G.M. Bundy[5]	482B
54	Selmer Mark VI	B♭ Tenor	High F Articulated G♯	High F Low C♯	Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Adjustable	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters	Adjustable on low B♭, B, C, and C♯	Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	4969
54F	Selmer Mark VI	B♭ Tenor	High F♯	High F Low C♯	Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Adjustable	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters	Adjustable on low B♭, B, C, and C♯	Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	4969
154	Signet	B♭ Tenor	High F Articulated G♯		Drawn	Cast brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Fixed	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters		Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Brilhart[4]	4454B
1254	Bundy	B♭ Tenor	High F Articulated G♯		Drawn	Cast brass	Nickel plated	Fixed	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters		Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	G.M. Bundy[5]	484B
55	Selmer Mark VI	E♭ Baritone	High F Articulated G♯		Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Adjustable	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters	Adjustable on low B♭, B, C, and C♯	Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	485
55A	Selmer Mark VI	E♭ Baritone	Low A		Drawn	Power Hammered Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Adjustable	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters	Adjustable on low A, B♭, B, C, and C♯	Brass	Multiple coat gold lacquer	Selmer (Paris)[3]	485A
1256	Bundy	E♭ Baritone	High F Articulated G♯		Drawn	Cast brass	Nickel plated pad cups	Fixed	Dome-shaped Nylon boosters		Plastic	Multiple coat gold lacquer	G.M. Bundy[5]	485B

Specifications subject to change

[1] This key available on special order
[2] Available on special order
[3] Machined from hard rubber rods
[4] Machined from molded synthetics
[5] Machined from molded hard rubber blanks

Selmer Saxophone Cases

481B soprano saxophone case: *black keratol with leather binding.*

4968 alto saxophone case with compartment for clarinet and flute case: *molded gray Royalite with double zipper.*

4969 tenor saxophone case with compartment for clarinet and flute case: *same features as 4968.*

482B alto saxophone case: *blue vinyl with leather binding.*

484B tenor saxophone case: *same features as 482B.*

4452A low A alto saxophone case: *black vinyl with leather binding.*

4458 alto saxophone case with compartment for clarinet and flute case: *tan vinyl with leather binding.*

4452B alto saxophone case: *same features as 4452A.*

4452 alto saxophone case: *tan vinyl with leather binding.*

4459 tenor saxophone case with compartment for clarinet and flute case: *same features as 4458.*

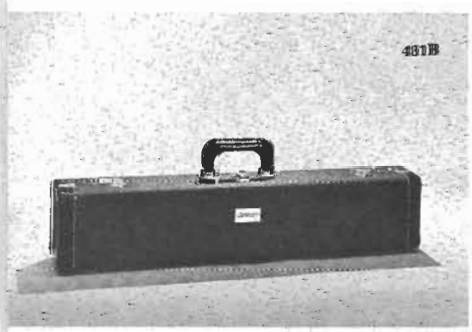
4454 tenor saxophone case: *same features as 4452.*

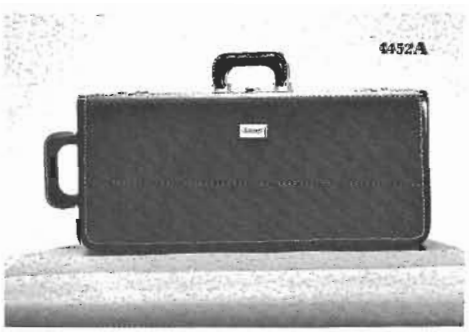
4454B tenor saxophone case: *same features as 4452A.*

485 Selmer baritone saxophone case: *blue keratol.*

485A low A baritone saxophone case: *same features as 485.*

485B Bundy baritone saxophone case: *same features as 485.*





A NOTE ON SELMER QUALITY

It is unlikely that anyone about to buy a musical instrument has never heard the name or the sound of Selmer products, because they are used in nearly every professional orchestra and band in the world.

The reason for their pre-eminence among wind instrumentalists is this: from the beginning of their company, three generations ago, the Selmer family has worked only from the most advanced designs they could create, making instruments largely by hand from the finest materials obtainable. Their business was making instruments for the artist, and so price was never a consideration in their design. The instruments are and always have been as nearly flawless as Selmer could make them — regardless of cost.

As you would expect, the price of such instruments is high. As you may not expect, their price is often close to that of the best mass-produced instruments. Moreover, while a Selmer is never cheap, it is always economical. This point gets clearer as time goes on. Repair bills on a Selmer are low because their regulation is stable, and their parts so durable they often stand up through accidents that would ruin an inferior instrument.

But sound is more important than strength. While you own a Selmer you will enjoy a difference in the quality of your playing that only a Selmer can make. To the artist, this is the only important difference, but combined with durability, it gives any Selmer instrument a ready market for trade-in. And this makes a Selmer instrument as practical an investment for the amateur or the serious student as for the artist.

Bundy instruments are a practical choice for younger students. Nothing is spared in their acoustical design, based on the same principles and long experience that make Selmers great. Bundy instruments are as inexpensive as good musical quality permits, because of new materials, efficient machine production methods, and a large volume of sales.

Signet instruments combine the best modern production methods and traditional hand craftsmanship. Their advantage lies in their feel — the extraordinary smoothness of a valve, the refinement of their key action, or a quality in their tone and responsiveness that can come only from patient hand finishing.

Like Selmer instruments, Signets and Bundys are among the costliest in their class. There is no cheap way to make a superior product — although it is easy enough to claim there is. Any musical instrument is a sizable investment, and so deserves to be chosen with care. This catalog not only describes our instruments, but also describes objective tests for comparing them with others. We are confident these descriptions will help both you and us. After all, our products, being musical, are equipped to sing their own praises best.

H. & A. SELMER, INC.
BOX 310
ELKHART, INDIANA 46514

OUTSIDE U.S.A.: VINCENT BACH INTERNATIONAL, ELKHART, INDIANA 46514

Printed in U.S.A.