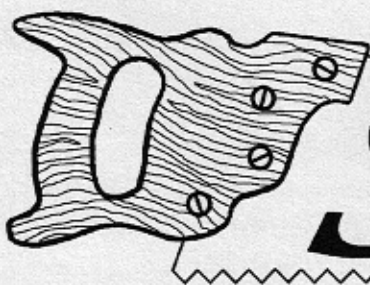


# INTERNATIONAL MUSICAL SAW ASSOCIATION



## SAW PLAYER NEWS

Vol.11, No.1 www.SawPlayers.org Email: Info@SawPlayers.org (415)331-9661 Designer: Ken Ball Winter 2005/06

### The 2005 Saw Festival

by Morgan Cowin

Photos Courtesy Ralph McCaskey

Everyone had a GREAT time again at the 2005 Saw Festival! Although only 9 people signed up for the contest this year, 31 saw players were on the Main Stage at the Chorus of Saws and we met some nice (and skilled!) new saw player friends.

We had a large crowd (150+) through much of the day, and Kenny just reported that we took in almost \$1,000 at the festival - much of it in Saw Festival T-shirt sales. White turns out to sell much better than orange - although we sold nine of the orange ones too! (If you would like a T-shirt, see the ad later in this issue.)

**Henry Dagg** from Faversham, England came in First Place at the Saw-Off contest. Henry has pretty good vibrato control and he has "right on" pitch control. He is a very nice guy, interesting in many ways, and an excellent saw player. We had a wonderful couple of hours playing together Saturday night.

**Caroline McCaskey** from San Pablo, California (a fiddle player and our "Teen Advisor" since she first came to the Festival 3 years ago) has REALLY gotten better control of her bow, pitch and overall tonal quality, and came in 2nd at the contest. She is now 18 and has just gone off to college in Stockton (Central California) for the Fall semester.



Some of the 31 saw players at the Chorus of the Saws (Videographer Peter Esmonde is at far left)

**Irving Francis** came to the Festival from Queens, NY and earned 3rd Place. I thought Irving had a beautiful sound quality. Irving had his 71st birthday on Sunday at the Festival! I was very impressed with Irving both as a saw player and as a person. He has great energy, spirit and a warm friendly demeanor. He also seems like a very sweet guy.

We had a few Special Awards this year. One was for "Unique Tools" (!) to new member **Frank Feldstein** from Crestline, California, because of his tiny, rusty "toolbox" saw about 10-12" long. He used a VERY hairy (numerous broken bow hairs) children's violin bow that wouldn't tighten up - so he had to use a finger to stretch the remaining hairs tight enough to bring out sound in the saw. Frank is an interesting, friendly guy, who also played a very rusty 26" or 28" carpenter's saw.

The other Special Award went to **Dax Tran-Caffee** from Santa Clara, California for "Unique Presentation" for his red fingernails and toenails, and a made-up-on-the-spot "micro tonal" piece of sound effects. Dax doesn't seem to have a lot of musicality, but he is a very creative, self-assured "artiste."

**Jackie Jones**, a smart and funny 78 year old saw player from San Francisco, played on the Main Stage with her "tap dancing cat" (manipulated by a foot pedal). Jackie has an unbelievable skill for drawing small children to watch and dance around her like the Pied Piper. As soon as she starts to play, the little ones start dragging their mothers toward Jackie from all directions. Jackie is quite a performer.

Jackie was escorted to the Saw Festival by **Mark Hedin**, the author of the nice article on the musical saw and Saw Festival that appeared in the Sunday *San Francisco Chronicle* the week before the Festival. His article really got a lot of attention, and I think it exposed a lot of people to the musical saw, and helped to enhance the size of this year's audience. If you missed his article or want to print it out for yourself - it's at: [www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/08/07/PKG0RE18DK1.DTL&hw=Musical+Saw&sn=001&sc=1000](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/08/07/PKG0RE18DK1.DTL&hw=Musical+Saw&sn=001&sc=1000)

**Bill Heier**, the amazing (and humorous) player of the six-foot-long 2-man cross-cut saw, came out of hiding just before the Chorus of Saws. Unfortunately many people missed hearing him play - and as far as

I know he's the best around. Bill is alone among saw musicians in that the "instrument" he plays typically requires a lumberjack at each end if it's going to be used to cut wood. Heier, who uses a tympani mallet with his long saw, refers to his instrument of choice as "jagged and very dangerous." He says: "I'm apparently the only one in captivity who plays that thing."

**Ruby Wright**, a saw player from London, England with a bubbly, optimistic, youthful energy/personality - rallied from her jet lag and got some good interviews for her documentary piece for BBC Radio. It turns out that saw contest winner Henry Dagg also had done some recording about saw players for the BBC - and had his way paid by the BBC to come to the 1987 Saw Festival in Los Angeles.

Videographer **Peter Esmonde** is producing a piece on "the culture of saw players" (hopefully to sell to a major TV network) was a joy to have with us at all the Festival events, and I'm sure he got a lot of good video. He was very professional and sensitive (gave everyone "Talent Releases" to sign, promising to give everyone a final DVD, didn't "shoot" anyone that did not want to be on camera, etc.) and worked from about 12:30-8:30 PM on Saturday, and all day Sunday to document everything and everyone he could. I believe he is also going to interview me (I was too busy at the Festival), **David Weiss** in Los Angeles and **Natalia Paruz** in New York. I'm really looking forward to seeing his final product!



First Place Winner Henry Dagg



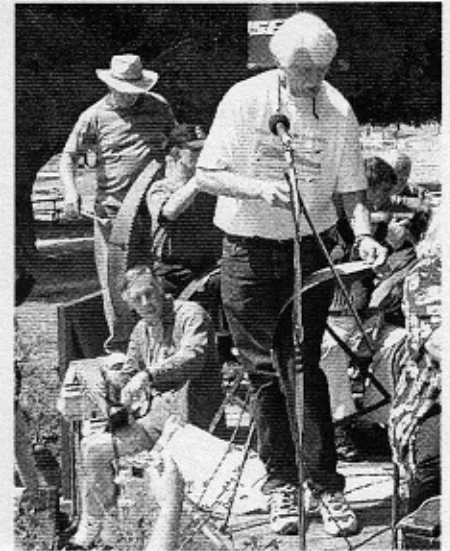
2nd Place Winner Caroline McCaskey



3rd Place Winner Irving Francis



*Part of the Audience at the Saw Off Contest*



*2-man crosscut Saw Player Bill Heier and Morgan Cowin at the Chorus of the Saws*

Overall, it was a really fun event, with lots of good energy and fellowship in sharing the joys of playing the musical saw. IMSA Vice President **Art Peterson** and his friend **Vince French** did a fine job with the sound system again, and **Thomas Spearance** (who used to be called **Mr. Hej** and was First Place winner at the Saw-Off several years ago) did another great job as Master of Ceremonies.

The only real shock was seeing the Main Stage - which was almost COMPLETELY different. There was NO background - which makes the photos and feeling of being up on stage completely different than in previous years. There was nothing to use to hang our Saw Festival banner on, so we ran a rope between a light post about 30' away from the stage, to a tree behind the stage and hung it on that.



*Contest Judge Joe Eding plays his saw with IMSA Vice President Art Peterson*



*Charlie Blacklock watches the talent on stage with his saws close by*

Anyway, the Saw Festival was a lot of fun, and everyone I've talked to since said the same thing. I hope you can make it NEXT year (August 12th & 13th, 2006)!!!

NOTE: 2005 Saw-Off Contestants were (in order of playing):

*Makoto Yoshida* - from Sendai-Shi, Japan  
*Ruby Wright* - from London, England  
*Jack R. Smith* - from Victoria, BC  
*Christopher Bricker* (with a guitar playing friend) - from Escondido, California  
*Henry Dagg* - from Faversham, Kent, England  
*Caroline McCaskey* - from San Pablo, California  
*Irving Francis* - from Brooklyn, New York  
*Frank Feldstein* - from Crestline, California  
*Dax Tran-Caffee* - from Santa Clara, California



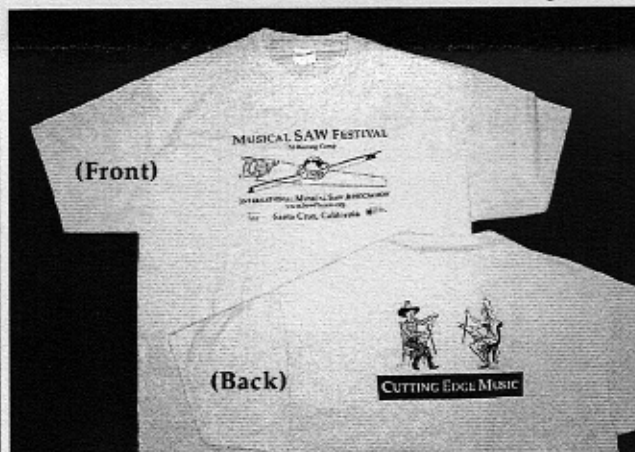
Special Award Winner Dax Tran-Caffee



Special Award Winner Frank Feldstein

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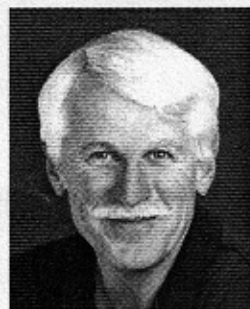
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## The Origins of the Saw and It's Use As A Musical Instrument



By Morgan Cowin

Many saw players have been asked: "When (and where) did the musical saw originate?" This is a subject that many have thought about, and everyone has an opinion, but factual references about the subject are rare and hard to find. So I recently did a Google search

on the internet for "antique tool expert" and found John de Marchi from Petaluma, California - an incredibly knowledgeable retired college professor and fine artist with scholarly reference books on this broad subject, including some specifically on the saw. John generously donated his time, knowledge and resources to this article.

Hand saws have been used around the world since man started building living structures, boats, weapons etc., and have been made from a variety of materials - from obsidian, shark's teeth and shells (8,000 to 10,000 years ago) - and eventually evolving into metals. Early Egyptian craftsmen used saws over 4,000 years ago. I have seen photos of metal saws from the early "Bronze age" (1700-1400 BC). People from India worked copper and tin into the stronger metal bronze. Egyptians worked with many copper and



"Antique Tool Expert John de Marchi in his shop."

Photo by Morgan Cowin

later bronze tools - including saws. The Greek and Roman tools were mostly of iron and wrought iron with some harder bronze edges. Although saws made of bronze were stiff and strong, and they could be bent - it is unlikely they were ever used to produce music.

The Iron Age was important because the technology was found for mixing carbon with iron - which makes an alloy - steel. Improved metal working produced better saws in the early Iron Age in Syria about 600 BC ("Damascus Steel"), and in Switzerland and England in 150-100 BC. There are numerous other references to working steel in India, the Middle East, and elsewhere around the globe. Early Vikings made good saws for their boat building. The English, French, Germans, Italians, Chinese, Japanese and others worked metals into swords, body armor, and tools of many kinds.

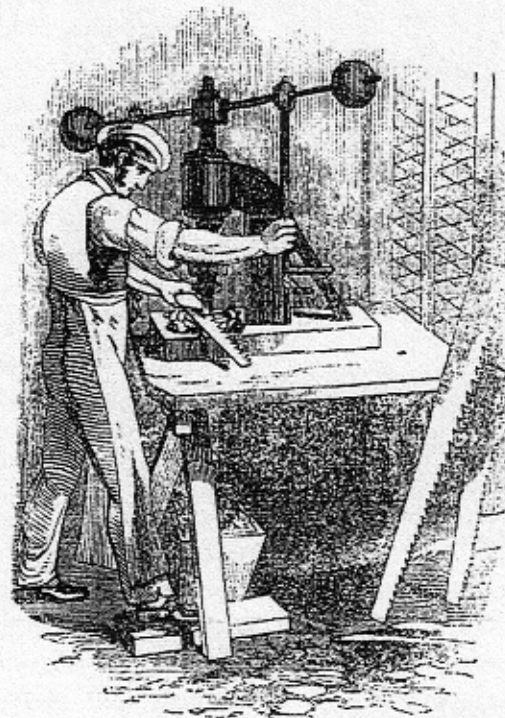
The characteristics of steel (how hard or soft, how brittle or flexible, etc.) depends on many variables, and the knowledge and production techniques of the steel industry took many centuries to evolve. Better quality steels and processes for working steel consistently were not available until the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The Dutch were apparently early users of the new technologies, and the Swedish and English developed it further. It turns out that the raw iron ore in different locations included various chemical properties that played a large roll in the quality of the steel that could be produced. Sweden had a particularly good blend of ore that enabled them to make a much higher quality steel. The English purchased "bar iron" from the Swedes, and developed high quality "Sheffield Steel" which could utilize the new "rolling mills" to form it into sheets and other shapes. Good tools that would "hold an edge," and return to the same position after bending (like the "spring steel" of today's hand saws), required more sophisticated knowledge of metallurgy. Mixing chemical additives, and special techniques for heating and cooling the metals (tempering), weren't refined on an industrial scale until about the last 300 years.

John de Marchi believes that until the 18th or 19th centuries, the conventional handsaw probably would not have the properties to be potentially used as a musical instrument. Steel workers and craftsmen

around the world probably noticed a "ring" (or note) occasionally coming from their tools. To my knowledge, there is no definitive resource documenting when any one of these people actually learned to play a saw as a musical instrument. Probably, many craftsmen and other individuals with some musical talent, heard the potential beauty coming from the vibrating steel, and started experimenting. They would observe and learn that to make the vibrations (sound) occur and sustain - it was necessary to bend the tapered handsaw into an "S" shape. Then - if the saw was hit with a hard stick, big nail, small hammer, mallet or other hard object, they could get the steel to "sing."

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries a new material: "Carbon enriched iron" and finally "cast steel" was developed in Sweden and Sheffield, England. One form/type of Sheffield cast steel became known in the USA as "London Spring Steel" and was used in many of the finest hand saws of the 19th century. Cast Steel was primarily developed and distributed by the Sheffield tool and steel makers, and tools stamped with the logo "Cast Steel" was an indication of a high quality tool that would hold an edge and was made of superior high carbon steel. This may be the origin of when the discovery was made that while bending the saw into an "S" curve and moving the saw blade one could change the pitch of the saw's "voice," and that with practice, it would be possible to play melodies. Anyone wanting information about John de Marchi's reference books can email me at: [Sawman@DistinctivePhotos.com](mailto:Sawman@DistinctivePhotos.com)

According to research by Jim "Supersaw" Leonard for his out-of-print book "Scratch My Back," there are reports from the mid 19th century - by explorers, merchants and missionaries - of the saw being used to make music around the globe - from the Ozark mountains in what is now the south-eastern United States, many countries in Europe, Asia, South America, Australia and Africa. By the beginning of the 20th century, many saw



[Toothing Long Saw.]

"Illustration from Penny Magazine (April 27, 1844) on the Sheffield Cutlery Works"

players were performing publicly, and several people in particular had a strong impact on the saw being recognized as a musical instrument.

In 1904, vaudeville performer Leon Weaver (1882-1950) traveled around the U.S. performing alone, playing his saw while sitting on the handle with the blade sticking out in front of him and using a mallet. Meanwhile, his brother Frank and Frank's wife June also played music. June was frustrated that this legs-apart position was "un-ladylike" and inappropriate for female saw players, and found she could put the saw handle between her knees - which is now the most common position for playing the saw. June also is credited with discovering she could take her old violin bow

and make a much more pleasing, sweeter sound than that made by using a mallet. Leon, Frank and June started playing together professionally, and their group "The Weaver Brothers and Elviry" toured the United States

and Europe gaining fame and fortune, and appeared on radio and in many Hollywood movies as well. The major collection of information, memorabilia and photos of the "Weaver Brothers & Elviry" are in the collection of the Ralph Foster Museum, part of the College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout (near Branson), Missouri.



"June 'Elviry' Weaver (1920's?)  
courtesy of Ralph Foster Museum,  
College of the Ozarks"

Look for future articles about other major players in the evolution of the musical saw in the Saw Player News. (Any information and/or photos you may have about early saw players would be appreciated!)

## SAW TIPS - Developing a "Career" as a Saw Player



By David Weiss

*www.davidweissgallery.com*

Sometimes people just seem to stumble into their careers. In my case, I didn't set a goal to be a professional saw player. I just started out enjoying playing it for people.

Like most performers, I loved the attention. Needless to say the saw is PERFECT for attracting attention, and you don't even have to be particularly good at it for people to enjoy watching and listening to you. Here are some tips that will help you advance your saw playing career:

1. Obviously, the more you practice, the better you get. The better you get, the more confidence and consistency you have. Potential employers need to sense that about you. Take some lessons with an experienced music teacher (it doesn't have to be a saw player!). Work on your intonation, bow response, your ability to play both loud and soft, and increasing the range of notes you can play. Using a video camera to record your practicing is another good way for you to improve more quickly.

2. Look professional. Have business cards made, or a flyer that you can hand out to people who seem interested. Have some publicity photos ready to give when the right occasion arises. Opportunities can come and go quickly, and it is best to be prepared. If you are internet-savvy (or even if you're not!), establish your own website. The cost of doing so is coming way down, and it's yet another way to tell the world that you're a pro.

3. You might consider developing a "persona" - wearing a certain outfit or costume for your performances, and/or creating a certain banter as you interact with your audience. Most of us know what questions to expect of an audience or a journalist. Being able to answer clearly with a sense of humor goes a long way towards enhancing your image as a professional.

4. Be knowledgeable about saw activities in your area and around the world. People always want to know

more about you and your saw. (Here's where your subscription to the Saw Player News can really pay off!)

5. Donate performances to charitable organizations, hospitals, old age homes, schools, etc. The more you put yourself out there, the better you'll get, and the more comfortable you'll be dealing with people and audiences. Don't worry about making money yet - that will come as your exposure increases. Donating your time and musical talent to raise money for worthy causes will pay you amazing dividends in the long run.

6. Contact some journalists from your local newspaper. You never know when they have extra space to fill for a particular edition, and would use a photo of you playing your saw along with a brief interview - especially if you've been donating services for charities, etc.

7. At some point you'll want to make a demo CD or DVD. It doesn't have to be very long - even only 10 minutes of music is fine. Choose the music that you know and enjoy best. Don't try to cover too many bases in your first demo. These days, the cost of making a decent recording is amazingly cheap. You just need to get in contact with the right people to get it done efficiently. The more you talk to people about it, the easier it becomes to locate the right recording studio and engineer. The one area you shouldn't skimp on is the album cover. Hire a good professional photographer to take the photo and give you ideas for the proper design of the cover (layout for the title, contact info, and other text). The cover is VERY important to help sell the album. If it looks amateurish, people will presume your music is amateurish, too. If you do make a recording, try to find a "live" room that has a fair amount of reverberation. That will enhance your tone, and reduce bow noise. Another technique is to have the engineer add a little reverb during the mixing, and also to digitally filter out excessive bow noise. If you're making a video, be sure the background is plain (not distracting) and there is good lighting on you and your saw. Here again, you want to use a good videographer to do it right.

There are many other ideas to share. We encourage you to write to us with your suggestions.

# Saw Players Hall of Fame - Sam Moore

By Natalia 'SawLady' Paruz



By Natalia 'Saw Lady' Paruz

In my article in the last issue of the Saw Player News, I briefly mentioned that the famous Ziegfeld Follies (the most coveted vaudeville gig 1907-1931) had a musical saw act. Sam Moore, the "Handsaw Wizard" was hired to play *The Swan*, by Saint Saens, accompanied by a lady on harp. His act was in the Ziegfeld Follies for 2 straight years (1920-21).

Who was this saw player who managed to climb all the way to the top of the entertainment heap of the early 20th century? Sam (Samuel Pasco) Moore (born in Monticello, Florida, June 28, 1887) was a well known musician who played guitar, octo-chorda (eight-string steel guitar) balloon and the musical saw from the 1920's & 1930's.

By age seven he was proficient with the violin, but an arm injury ended his violin career. He then turned to playing guitar, banjo and every day objects as musical instruments. In April 1924 Moore's father told the Columbus Courier, "That boy can get music out of anything. When he was a small boy, I've seen him get music out of a pitchfork." By 1918 he was experimenting with the hand saw, first tapping it with a pencil and eventually perfecting the bowed technique.



Sam Moore with his family, age 7



Sam Moore with banjo, age 7 (far right)

For a number of years he played at the New York City Winter Gardens Theater. He was so well known that Clarence Mussehl used his name in early advertisements of the Mussehl & Westphal saws, to promote their sales.

A 1920s newspaper article reported that Moore's hand saw was "the same kind you see carpenters use every day.... The saw has to be pulled with great strength - measures show the pulling strength exerted to be 200 pounds - before the metal is in the exact condition, or tension, to give the marvelous results produced by Mr. Moore."



1920's studio portrait of Sam Moore

A New York newspaper article reporting on a reception hosted by the Musical Courier for Enrico Caruso and other Metropolitan Opera luminaries said: "Those eminent artists were so delighted by Mr. Moore's playing on a carpenter's hand saw, that they hovered so closely around him that he hardly had room to play."

For many years he worked as a headliner on the Keith and Orpheum vaudeville circuits. The Columbus (Georgia) Ledger dating April 9, 1924, reported that "Among the most appreciative of Sam Moore's audiences are the negroes who go north... [they] often talk to the performer from the galleries, which makes the act 'go big'..."

Moore's first vaudeville partner was guitarist Horace D. Davis, (great-grandson of Robert E. Lee) who also performed under the name of John Powell. Around 1924 Moore teamed with Carl Freed, whose specialty was the musical spoons. They developed an act titled "Spoonin' and Ballooning," with Moore playing an inflated rubber balloon to Freed's spoon accompaniment. An undated news clipping noted that "'Spoonin' and Ballooning' is more or less of a riot at the Golden Gate this week. He [Moore] claims to be the inventor of rubber balloon music, and says it was suggested to him by his small son,





Ad for record by Sam Moore & Horace Davis, early 1920's

who found a way of making weird noises with a similar balloon even after the whistle that came with it had been lost." By 1927 Moore was performing with Davis again.

By the mid-1920s, with several firms marketing cheap musical saws and instruction courses, the hand saw was largely relegated to the status of an amateur's novelty instrument. Moore was a major force in popularizing the musical saw as well as other unusual instruments. Moore recorded the hand saw on the Gennett label, Columbia label (1922) and in 1923-1924 on the Brunswick and Vocalion labels. In the 1930s to 1940s Moore became a writer and performer on radio at NBC shows. Teamed with his wife, Carolyn, as "Sambo & Mandy"

they performed on radio and live shows.

Moore suffered from asthma, and eventually he settled in San Francisco for health reasons. There he was featured in the cast of KSFO's "Country Store." He died in San Francisco on November 13, 1959, at the age of seventy two. He is survived by his grand-daughter Betsy (Moore) Loar.



Sam Moore during KSFO radio's "Country Store"



Original label of "Dear Old Pal Of Mine"



Original label of "Laughing Rag"

### WE REQUEST YOUR HELP:

To continue to improve and enliven the content of the Saw Player News, we need your contributions! (We will return them upon request)

Please mail (and/or email to: [Sawman@DistinctivePhotos.com](mailto:Sawman@DistinctivePhotos.com)) the following:

- Please submit any musical saw-related photos, illustrations, cartoons, humor or ideas for articles.
- Please send us anything you have about the history of the saw or saw players.
- Please help us update our historical archives. Unfortunately, the IMSA does not have complete records of contest winners from 1978 through 1997 Saw Festivals.
- Please send us news articles about the saw or saw players from your area or around the world.
- Announcements wanted: Send us information about saw festivals or festivals including the saw.



NOTE: If a green dot appears next to your name, your membership has expired. To continue to receive the SAW PLAYER NEWS, please send a check and a completed Membership Application. Thanks for your support!

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