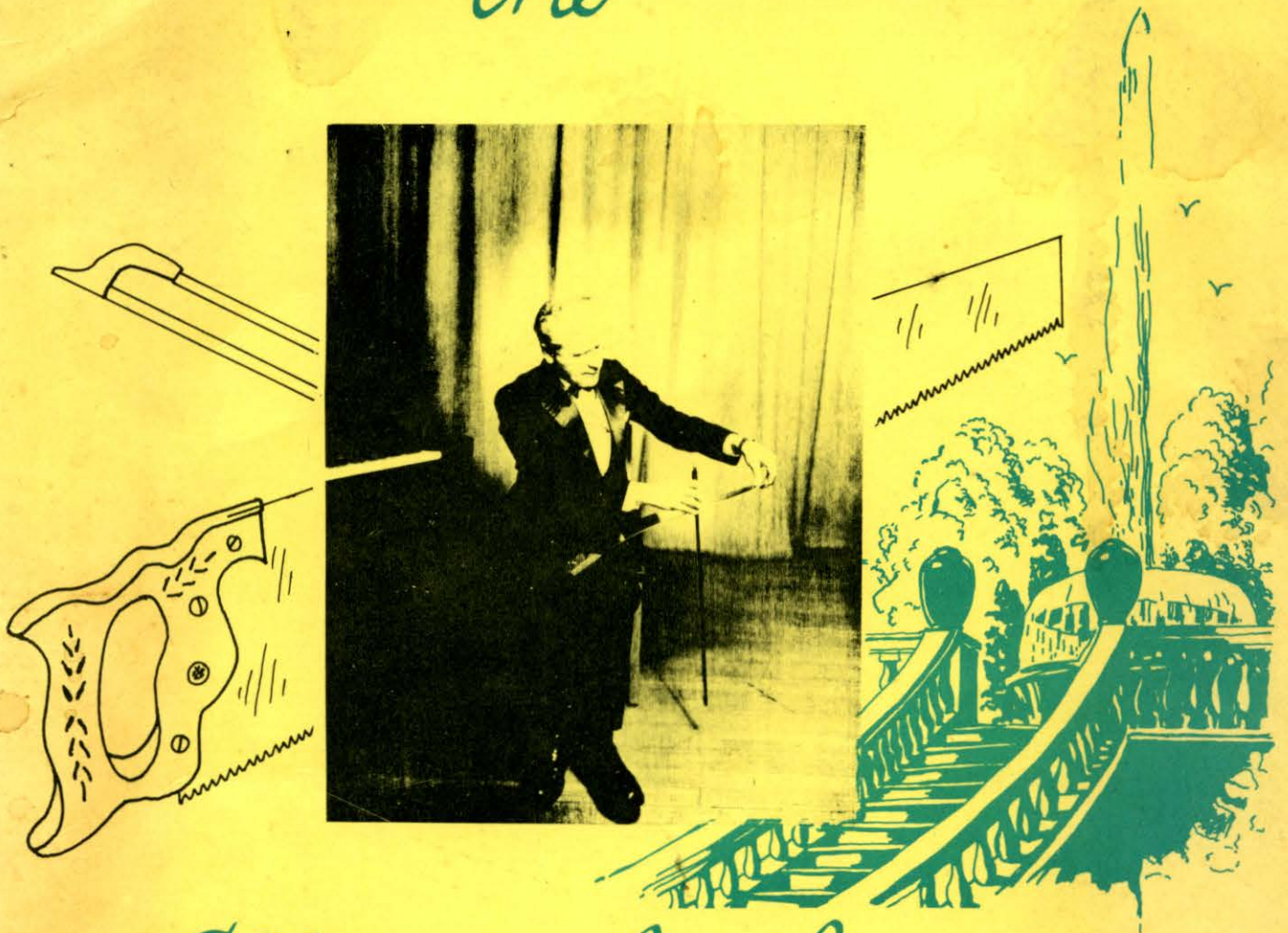


How to Play the



Musical Saw by René Bogart

To my cousin

Harold Steen of my
mother's Steen-family

Sincerely always

Rene Bogart, (Cousin of Humphrey)

Sept. 8, 1980 @ Santa Cruz, Calif.

"HOW TO PLAY THE MUSICAL SAW" by RENE' BOGART

INTRODUCTION TO PLAYING THE MUSICAL SAW:

It is unknown just when nor where *THE MUSICAL SAW* had it's origin and was first played. It is believed among some *MUSICAL SAW* players, however, that it originated in South America in the 1800's and some believe the idea was imported into the U.S. from Europe. I well remember the first time I heard it played. It was in Buffalo, N.Y. and played at the *Elmwood Music Hall* about 1910 when I was a boy. It has been used extensively in the home, on stage at private clubs, church functions, social gatherings, hospitals and nursing homes, in vaudeville and theaters for years, and more recently on Radio and Television Programs in the entertainment field. The late *Clarence Mussehl*, of Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, was the first to introduce and supply Musical Saw Kits to the field under the name of *Mussehl & Westphal*,** and did a great deal to develop the best line of SAWS suitable for this use, after considerable research.

Before taking up the *MUSICAL SAW* and going into the details of the required procedure for playing it well, it is important to understand some of the basic rudiments and techniques involved for it's proper manipulation. While the *MUSICAL SAW* is essentially a typical carpenter's or craftsman's saw, it's use as a very unique musical instrument has gained in popularity, and has recently become a means of expressing a very distinctive quality of music. It's tone is unlike that of ANY other musical instrument, ancient or modern, as it produces tonal qualities that are distinctively different from those of brasses, woodwinds, horns, strings, etc heard in various kinds of orchestras and combos, including various electronic devices.

Let it be understood, that not just "any" carpenter's saw can be properly manipulated and played so as to produce a good clear undulating, singing wave-like tone similar to that of the human voice, or the violin. Due to the special technique and manipulation required, The *MUSICAL SAW* must of necessity be of the right quality of steel and also of the proper size and design that will permit it to be so used to the best advantage, and achieve top quality tone.

FIRST: Before one can play and master the *MUSICAL SAW* with good taste, tonal quality, and eventual professional skill and finesse as an artist with the instrument, the following points must be thoroughly understood;- The *MUSICAL SAW* must be held properly and firmly in the correct position shown in the following photographs of INSTRUCTION.

SECOND: The BOW must be well rosined by running the bow-hair, or bow cord, (violin or cello bow) briskly over the cake of rosin so it will be amply coated. Also run the cake of rosin along the back or playing edge of the saw blade to coat it likewise. The BOW must be adjusted to a medium-tight tension, and let down when not playing. The rosin enables the BOW, upon drawing it across the SAW-edge (edge without teeth) and at a right angle to it, to set the SAW into VIBRATION while bowing, or else it cannot produce good tone and be played properly. It is the "stickiness" of the rosin that grips the SAW edge by the BOW, and keeps it CONSTANTLY VIBRATING during play. The BOW should not however be held constantly against the SAW-edge while bowing, but alternately used as required according to the musical selection being played. The MUSICAL SAW technique requires a special co-ordination of so-called "*Playing by Ear*", control of the bowing, and manipulation of the left hand and vibrato (vibration) of the Right leg and foot all simultaneously. Only by much practice can this be achieved.

THIRD: Both the UP-BOW, and DOWN-BOWING strokes are used as required in playing the MUSICAL SAW. The SAW must be properly bent down slightly (not too much) by the THUMB of the LEFT HAND, thumb pointing inward, while at the same time, a REVERSE-CURVE is made in the saw blade by the thumb and first three fingers of the LEFT HAND, with the fingers held UNDER the end-edge of the saw blade, which together bends the saw blade end back, or upward so as to produce a variable tension to the whole saw blade. Otherwise one cannot play it at all. The double or REVERSE-CURVE so made simulates the crest and hollow of a water-wave, like the letter "S". This most necessary technique maintains a constant TENSION on the MUSICAL SAW at ALL TIMES, from the start to the finish of a musical selection. The SAW must be kept vibrating so as to acquire a desired tone. By a slow alternate action of the RIGHT FOOT and LEG, UP and DOWN, a VIBRATO (vibration) or tremolo is produced in the saw tone that largely simulates the tone-waves in the human voice or violin vibrato. A constant tone without this VIBRATO is very disturbing, like the "whine" of a saw mill. Always use a SLOW vibrato. Sometimes difficulty is experienced when reaching for the high notes near the end of the Musical Saw and this is due to the short or "end-curvature" of the saw blade. High notes are played near the end of the SAW, while low notes are played at the low end near the saw handle. If the bow-pressure is too heavy against the saw edge, it will have a tendency to kill the VIBRATION rather than add to it, at a sacrifice of good tone.

There are other alternate devices used in place of the customary violin or cello BOW, such as an improvised wooden BOW with a suitable nylon cord, etc. Also a rosined dowel-stick, previously coated with fine abrasive can be used for the BOW, as the violin and cello bows are becoming scarce because of absence of imports. The wooden string-BOW made with nylon or other cord is flexible like the violin bow, as it "gives" with the touch of the bow to the saw edge and will not deaden the vibration, and these are very satisfactory.*

FOURTH: The tone-range of the MUSICAL SAW is generally limited to about one and one-half octaves, according to it's length. However, the longer 26 inch MUSICAL SAW* is now available which has a broader range-scale at about two octaves, which permits a larger selection of musical numbers to be played. The MUSICAL SAW is sometimes played with a light-weight felt hammer as the SAW is held more upward in a near vertical position, held between the knees, using the same REVERSE-CURVE bending technique of the saw blade, as the flat-side of the SAW facing the player is struck to "hammer-out" a melody. Only trial and error with practice will determine where the felt hammer is used to get clear suitable tones. The use of the felt hammer is largely as a "novelty" feature, to give variety to a programme.

The MUSICAL SAW is always "played by ear" as it requires a co-ordination not found in playing any other musical instrument. The MUSICAL SAW may be used in combination with one or more voices as the author has done on many programmes, in duos, trios, with piano, accordion or guitar or other suitable accompaniment. It may also be used to play alto or tenor parts to harmonize as in duets, trios, and combos. The author has on numerous occasions in the professional entertainment field, used the MUSICAL SAW as a third voice in a trio, even playing obligattos for closer harmonies. Group ensembles may be organized, using one or more MUSICAL SAWS for more novel presentations.

FIFTH: ALWAYS, if possible, have preferably a pianist, accordionist or guitarist accompany you, or even a musical ensemble or orchestra, for the MUSICAL SAW is the soloist, and it calls for a proper background for good balance and counterpoint. Otherwise the selection will sound "hollow", without a base. Remember a good soloist NEVER "goes it alone". Due to the ad-lib (much liberty) used by the Musical Saw Player at all times, drumming tempos are inappropriate.

SIXTH: Most of the time, the player of the MUSICAL SAW will be using the UP-BOW strokes while playing. Only through experience and practice after playing several musical selections can one determine when the DOWN-BOW strokes should be used to advantage as in accelerating a tempo, and this, according to the measures of the music selected, phrasing, etc. Excess bending of the saw blade produces bad "harmonics" — a ruined tone.

SEVENTH: Before attempting to play the MUSICAL SAW before public audiences on stage or at social gatherings or in the entertainment field, MAKE SURE that the music selection used, in one having a SLOWER, song-like tempo (like an "andante" movement) as such are more easily adaptable to the MUSICAL SAW technique. THIS IS MOST IMPORTANT. The reason for this is, that due to the manipulation-technique of the SAW, it is almost impossible to play fast tempos, Rock or Disco tunes. Only the slower SONG-TYPE selections should be used in order to get good, true musical tones that will not be "cut in half" by a "too-fast", or a pre-set tempo. Play the MUSICAL SAW selection as a singer would sing it, with a breathing tempo, as a singer does a solo.

EIGHTH: Always instruct your accompanist at the piano or other, before you play the MUSICAL SAW NOT TO LEAD YOU, or set his or her own tempo, even when he or she reads it from sheet music, because the MUSICAL SAW is played only with MUCH AD-LIB, that is, with tempo liberties taken by the performing artist, who ALWAYS TAKES THE LEAD. The accompanist ALWAYS FOLLOWS the MUSICAL SAW PLAYER, and NEVER over-rides it in volume or loudness at any time. The piano should never "drown out" the MUSICAL SAW, for the SAW is the soloist, for proper finesse. Before starting to play the MUSICAL SAW, it may be well to give the saw blade a soft downward "pick" with the RIGHT thumbnail. This starts the Musical Saw vibrating and also helps one to find the right spot or key along the saw-edge where you start the melody. Another, is to have the piano accompanist give you the first musical note to start upon, or better still, give you a few measures of the musical selection as an introduction, to bring the MUSICAL SAW into correct range. This gets your ear in proper tune with the melody to be played.

INSTRUCTIONS:

BEFORE STARTING TO PLAY: Select a common straight back chair preferably with a flat seat, and have the MUSICAL SAW, BOW and ROSIN accessible. Rosin the BOW well before you go on stage.

POSITIONS: (A) Sit slightly forward on the chair with legs and knees close together, but extended as shown.

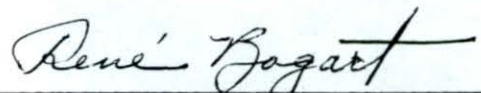
(B) Place MUSICAL SAW with the saw-tooth edge, on the INSIDE, facing you with the plain "playing edge" away from you facing the audience. Place the wood or plastic handle of the MUSICAL SAW, OVER THE LEFT THIGH, and slightly UNDER the RIGHT THIGH just back of the RIGHT KNEE, which secures it's position firmly. Rest the UNDERSIDE of the saw handle ON TOP of the LEFT THIGH, just back of the LEFT KNEE. Do NOT ever let the steel SAW blade touch nor rest upon your LEFT THIGH or KNEE, or the tone will be ruined.

(C) Place the LEFT FOOT flat on the floor all the time you are playing the MUSICAL SAW, especially the LEFT HEEL. Place the RIGHT TOE (ball of the foot) on the floor with the RIGHT HEEL raised about two inches off the floor. See that the RIGHT BALL of the foot is opposite to the LEFT HEEL, keeping the feet and legs fairly close together while playing.

(D) Place the first three fingers of the LEFT HAND close together on the UNDER SIDE of the tip-end of the MUSICAL SAW, with the LEFT THUMB bent back and resting upon the flat blade of the SAW, about two inches from the END EDGE. THEN, BEND the whole SAW blade slightly DOWNWARD with the LEFT THUMB and LEFT ARM from the tip end, to the wood handle of the SAW, keeping the LEFT THUMB and FINGERS in their correct position. Then, with the whole SAW bent DOWNWARD, use only the LEFT THUMB and fingers to bend only the LEFT END of the SAW ... UPWARD, thus making an UPWARD CURVE or letter "S" curve, which is required at all times when playing the MUSICAL SAW. Good tone cannot be achieved without it. Thus, the MUSICAL SAW is invariably bowed at a point along the SAW edge that is constantly shifting, according to the high or low range of the music selected. This point lies between the UPWARD and DOWNWARD CURVES ... a sort of neutral point between the waves.

Like with all musical instruments, THE MUSICAL SAW is no exception, for a reasonable amount of "trial and error" must be experienced before one truly progresses, and one must always remember ... "PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT".

Sincerely,

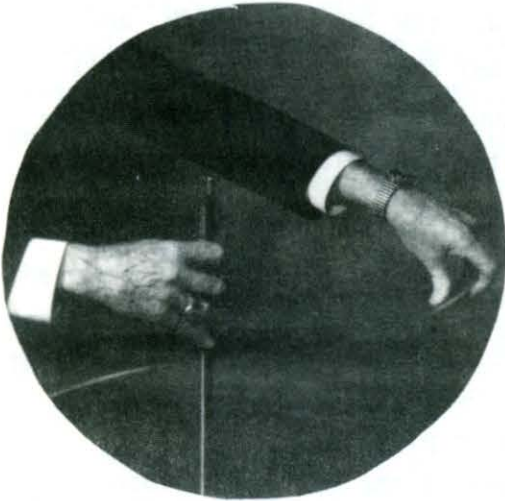

Rene' Bogart

* Musical Saw Kits are available from Mussehl & Westphal, Delevan, Wisc. 53115.
There may be other suppliers of Musical Saws unknown to the author.

POSITIONS

THE LEFT HAND

THREE FINGERS of LEFT HAND bent under end edge of SAW with THUMB bent BACKWARD, PRESSING DOWN for reverse curve in SAW blade.



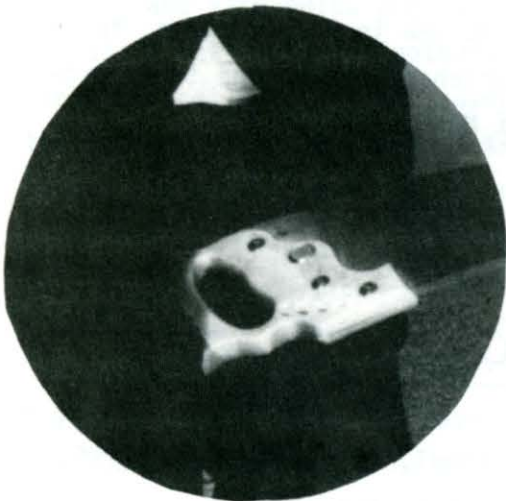
HOLDING THE BOW

FIRST FINGER half-enclaspingshank of BOW, with little finger resting on the SHANK for positive control.



HANDLE OF THE SAW

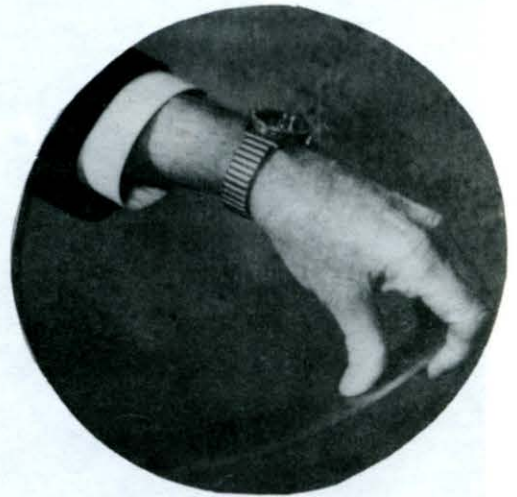
REST HANDLE on LEFT LEG and held down under RIGHT THIGH. Never let SAW blade steel rest on LEFT LEG.



POSITIONS

THE RIGHT HAND

Uses UP-BOW and DOWN-BOW strokes, seldom full length of BOW, to control SAW vibration. Used intermittently according to the measures of the music.



THE FELT HAMMER

Used for novelty performances. A heavy wire handle with wooden head with felt tip, used on the top FLAT SIDE of the SAW.



THE FEET

LEFT FOOT flat down on floor at all times. BALL of RIGHT FOOT down also, with RIGHT HEEL raised about two inches off floor. UP and DOWN raising of RIGHT LEG produces necessary vibration or wave-like tone in the music.





POSITION ON CHAIR

Always use STRAIGHT BACK CHAIR, with no "DIP" in the seat, and sit slightly forward on the chair.

PERFORMING

Always hold the SAW low, and assume a graceful position and avoid an awkward posture. Sit where you and your accompanist can see each other for the starting cue.



A WORD ABOUT THE AUTHOR

From "THE BOGART STRING ENSEMBLE", RENE' BOGART stems from a large musical family of eight, and is a life long cellist, plays piano and several musical instruments. He has played the MUSICAL SAW for over 35 years, and was a member of *The Les Jardienne Trio* in the entertainment field, having given performances largely in the New York and New England area. He was booked by the late K. M. White Entertainments Bureau of Boston, who was formerly Musical Director of M.G.M. in Hollywood motion pictures. Mr. White stated, — "I have heard the *Musical Saw* played before, but not in the classical field as *Rene' Bogart* renders a selection on the concert stage. It is a great asset to our bookings He plays it just like a violin, with excellent tone." A cousin of the late *Humphrey Bogart*, it was *Rene' Bogart's* privilege to have played several times at the home of *Louis B. Mayer* of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Motion Pictures of Hollywood. It is interesting to note that *Rene' Bogart* was the first, on several occasions to have played the MUSICAL SAW at both *Town Hall*, and also at *Carnegie Hall* in New York.

Independent of his professional performances, he has devoted much of his time giving benefit programs for various organizations, municipal benefits, clubs, hospitals and nursing homes. In his recent Carnegie Hall performances, he was accompanied by *Vladimir Padua*, pianist-composer, founder and manager of the world famous Four Piano Quartette, along with the noted mezzo-soprano and pianist, *Dr. Inez Bull*; great granddaughter of the famous Norwegian violinist, *Ole Bull* of the 1800's, and a relative of Edward Grieg.

Rene' Bogart keeps young by his continued musical performances and in each instance, his MUSICAL SAW invariably brings a rousing response, and to him, there is no such thing as "time".

— The Publisher