

# MAHILLON AND HIS TIME

Musical Distance in Time and Space  
— late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries —

*A Conference on the Occasion of the Centenary  
of the Death of Victor-Charles Mahillon (1841-1924)*



Musical Instruments Museum - Brussels

5-7 July 2024



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**Musical Instruments**  
**between Industrialization and Geopolitics**  
— late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries —

*A Joint Conference on the Occasion of the Centenary  
of the Death of Victor-Charles Mahillon (1841-1924)*

## **The Materiality of Musical Instruments**

*Bate Collection of Musical Instruments, Oxford*

*28 June 2024*

## **Musical Distance in Time and Space**

*Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels*

*5-7 July 2024*

*The Galpin Society*  
*Bate Collection of Musical Instrument, Oxford*  
*MIM, Brussel*

# MAHILLON AND HIS TIME

## Musical Distance in Time and Space

— late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries —

Founder of the Instrumental Museum of the Royal Conservatory in Brussels, member of a prominent family of musical instrument makers, writer on the manufacture and acoustics of musical instruments, developer of an influential classification system... each affirms Victor-Charles Mahillon's central position in organology. Mahillon was working in a period when the coextensive industrialization and colonial expansion of Europe deeply reshaped global economics and politics. At the organological level, this led to the growth of manufacturing on an industrial scale, to the opening of worldwide routes for the acquisition of musical instruments and to sharing of information and experiences through exhibitions, publications and correspondence.

Victor-Charles Mahillon demonstrated a strong interest in instruments beyond his own musical culture: early, folk, and non-Western. The widely adopted evolutionary model of his time, which viewed other cultures as evidence of former Western culture, had a major influence on his collecting policy. Mahillon's collection of non-Western instruments was not the result of a mere penchant for exoticism, but went hand-in-hand with his acquisition of early Western instruments. Mahillon's ambition to assemble and document a universal collection shaped his acquisition criteria and procedures, as well as his research. His multi-faceted study of instruments drew on acoustical science, technological experience, archaeology and cultural history. He attended international exhibitions, built a network of contacts and conducted extensive correspondence with contemporary organologists. He pioneered the copying of non-Western and historic instruments as a means to better understanding as well as making the collection more complete. Mahillon's own classification system (1877, last version 1908) results from a complex interaction between his personal observations and external influences (Linnaeus, Tagore, *Nāṭya-shāstra*, etc.). During the same period, numerous other collectors became interested in "distant" musical instruments. Each developed specific collecting policies in line with their personal intellectual background and their individual position within the major geopolitical changes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Colonial expansion, commercial growth, scientific exchanges and diplomatic outreach determined new networks, new access to information, new underlying concepts and new organological paradigms.

## Friday 5 July

08:30 **Opening**

09:00 **Keynote speech**

Christina Linsenmeyer, *Mahillon, Methodologies, and Sensibilities: (Re)Excavating Organology*

09:45 **Concert 1** (concert hall)

Sato Aki, koto and jiuta shamisen

*Japanese music from late 19<sup>th</sup> century sources kept at the MIM* (presentation: Fañch Thoraval)

10:30 **Coffee break**

11:00 **Session 1 – Colonialism** (chair: Saskia Willaert)

Alexandre Girard-Muscagorry, *Music, race, and civilization in the writings and collecting practices of French abolitionist Victor Schœlcher*

Louis Petitjean, *A Frenchman devoted to (Belgian) organology. The collecting process of Gustave Dumoutier (1850-1904)*

Giulia Coschiera, *The focal centers in the evolution of the sitār in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the British-influenced culture in post-1858 Hindustan*

12:30 **Lunch**

**Welcome by Géraldine David, Director General of the Royal Museums of Art and History**

14:00 **Concert 2** (concert hall)

Ad Mosam Barok

*Baroque music in the Low Countries on instruments copied from the MIM's collections* (presentation: Mirte Maes)

15:00 **Session 2 – Concepts** (chair: Cassandre Balosso-Bardin)

Sebastian Kirsch, *Collecting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the history of ideas*

Gabriele Rossi Rognoni, *Carl Engel and the first general history of musical instruments*

16:00 **Coffee break**

16:30 **Session 2, continued – Concepts** (chair: Christina Linsenmeyer)

Ryoto Akiyama, *On the documentation of epistemic objects in organology. The index cards and the order of things in the musical instrument collection of the University of Göttingen*

Fañch Thoraval, *An archaeology of the fourfold classifications in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*

## Saturday 6 July

09:00 **Keynote speech**

Sibylle Emerit, *Through the eyes of Mahillon. A pharaonic lyre and its fac-simile. An overview of his method applied to Antiquity*

09:45 **Session 3 – Networks** (chair: Richard Sutcliffe)

Caterina Guiducci, *Correspondence between Victor-Charles Mahillon and Alessandro Kraus*

Marie Martens, *Victor-Charles Mahillon and Copenhagen*

10:45 **Coffee break**

11:15 **Session 3, continued – Networks** (chair: Géry Dumoulin)

Rolf Killius, *Letters from the past or why does a museum collect musical instruments?*

Joana de Almeida Júdice Peliz, *Michel' Angelo Lambertini, a counterpart and penfriend of Victor-Charles Mahillon in Portugal*

12:15 **Lunch**

13:45 **Concert 3** (atelier -1)

Spat' sonore, *Des madeleines dans la galaxie – improvisation on spatialized instruments*

(or) **Themed tour of the museum**

Stéphane Colin, *Mahillon and the copies of early instruments*

14:30 **Concert 3** (atelier -1)

Spat' sonore, *Des madeleines dans la galaxie – improvisation on spatialized instruments*

(or) **Themed tour of the museum**

Stéphane Colin, *Mahillon and the copies of early instruments*

15:15 **Coffee break**

15:45 **Session 4 – Copies** (chair: Sibylle Emerit)

Géry Dumoulin and Christophe Vendries, *From observation to experimentation. Mahillon's copies of Pompeian tibix*

Lambert Colson, Tim Meulenbeld and Sushaant Jacquard, *A dubious ray of sunshine. Mahillon's cornett*

François Picard, *Zhu Zaiyu 朱载堉, Amiot and the lü copied by Mahillon*

20:00 **Social dinner** (Victor Bozar Café)

## Sunday 7 July

- 09:00 **Session 4, continued** – *Copies* (chair: Arnold Myers)  
Eszter Fontana, *Copies of rare instruments for the museum exhibition*  
Jean Michel Renard, *Victor Mahillon (1841-1924) and Auguste Tolbecque (1830-1919). An empirical and technical approach to organology*  
Alban Framboisier, *Auguste Tolbecque to Victor-Charles Mahillon (1891-1913). Study of correspondence relating to musical instrument reconstructions at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*
- 10:30 **Coffee break**
- 11:00 **Session 5 – Case studies** (chair: Mirte Maes)  
Cassandre Balosso-Bardin, *Mary Elizabeth Brown's global network. A case study of the Metropolitan Museum's bagpipe collection*  
Salvatore Morra, *North African lutes of the Musical Instruments Museum of Brussels*  
Nuria Bonet Filella, *Tenoras and tibles in European museums. The case of Mahillon*
- 12:30 **Lunch**
- 14:00 **Concert 4 – Lecture** (atelier -1)  
Adilia On-Ying Yip, *ReSoXy. Resounding the xylophones collection of the Royal Museum for Central Africa – electroacoustic and mixed music on digitalized Congolese manzas from the Africa Museum*
- 15:00 **Session 5, continued** – **Case studies** (chair: Anne-Emmanuelle Ceulemans)  
Karel Moens, *Attributions to early Italian bowed string instrument makers. Makers from Brescia as a case*  
Dörthe Günther, *Victor Charles Mahillon, Arrigo Boito and the Esposizione internazionale di Musica, Bologna 1888*
- 16:00 **Coffee break**
- 16:30 **Presentation of the historical resources kept at the MIM**  
Fañch Thoraval, *Archival and instrumental resources*  
Matthieu Thonon, *Audio-visual resources and early recordings*
- 17:00 **Conclusions**  
Ignace De Keyser

## Venues

*Musical Instruments Museum*

Rue Montagne de la Cour 2 Hofberg, 1000 Brussels

*Victor Bozar Café*

Ravensteinstraat 23 Rue Ravenstein, 1000 Brussels

## Contact

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## Scientific committee

Cassandre Balosso-Bardin (KUL), Anne-Emmanuelle Ceulemans (MRAH-MIM / UCLouvain), Ignace De Keyser (MRAC), John Koslovsky (KUL), Alice Little (Bate collection), Arnold Myers (University of Edinburgh), Christophe Pirenne (ULiège), Fañch Thoraval (MRAH-MIM / UCLouvain), Saskia Willaert (MRAH-MIM)

## Organising committee

Annelien Verbeeck, Anja Van Lerberghe, Joris De Valck, Marc Janssens, Valérie Martin, Alexander Rabadan, Fañch Thoraval, Anne-Emmanuelle Ceulemans, Matthieu Thonon, Richard Sutcliffe, Wim Verhulst, Saskia Willaert, Andrea Tuñón Lopez, Francesco Lussignoli, Colombe Six, Kettia Mathy, Adélie Vandenbranden.

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