

# Crow Conn Conversion

Steve Crow | Saxophone Specialist ~ Repairs ~ Modifications ~ Tuning

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I have owned a couple of tenors now, each had a certain quality. However much they excelled to me there was always a sound or tonal compromise. When playing there would always be that uncertainty in the back of my mind. I don't have any of those thoughts when playing my converted C.G. Conn. I find I can be far more expressive with the emphasis on richness thus creating a more personal open tone.

I once unknowingly tried a Conn when looking for my first tenor. I absolutely loved the sound quality of that old sax but found the keywork worn & awkward that I couldn't really play it properly, that was 6 years ago. As I was new to tenor playing I bought a Yanagisawa T901 instead. Later I switched to Borgani which I used through my time at LCM & the Royal Northern College of Music.

The Borgani was a great modern horn, and served me really well. Their saxophone ethos is centered around sound and tone to that of the older vintage horn. Infact much of Borgani's early development was learnt at the Conn factory in Elkhart Indiana, using their innovative production techniques. This is probably why I was drawn to the Borgani sound.

Steve Crow has looked after my saxes for a few years now. Each time I'd visit him we'd talk about instruments and set up until he mentioned a experiment he was doing for UK free improv legend Paul Dunmall. He had a standard C.G. Conn New Wonder there (bare brass I think), I had a go on it while he fixed my Borgani and there I fell in love with the Conn sound, it was amazing, I'd always found other tenors a little stuffy until I tried that New Wonder.



Steve takes that old awkward C.G. Conn keywork and brings the instrument back to life and into line with that of

the more modern, up to date standards found on newer horns, through many different kinds of modifications and genius processes that only Steve is so great at. There's a section on his website about it, check it out!

Since I claim to be a classical saxophonist I sought out a silver new wonder which I found at Woodwind Exchange, Bradford. In-fact I found a 1933 New Wonder Transitional which is absolutely beautiful, in very similar condition and looks to Paul's horn. I've never had a horn that resonates like this one does, with such a pure, rich and dark sound. My logic is that the silver plate finish would create a clear and cleaner sound compared to that of the usual lacquered or plain brass finish.

Steve finished the conversion and has refined it for me, I absolutely love it! I'm still just getting used to the upper register/altissimo range as I don't have those extra cheat keys and vents the modern sax has compared to the vintage horn. Steve has also now worked out how to articulate the G# without adding too much weight to the mechanism so that's the next thing to be done to the horn.

When it comes to saxophones I think there will always be small compromises whether you go for a modern or vintage horn, which ultimately comes down to personal preference and should be made on that basis. I decided that I would build my foundation and understanding of saxophone playing on modern horns thus giving me consistency when going through the



process. Once comfortable with an understanding of my own playing and technique I then decided to move on to the vintage horn.

Personally I've never been a fan of Selmer Paris horns (old or new). Don't get me wrong I think they are top top horns and sound great. I just personally never got that buzz when playing them and found them harder to create a more personal tone to my liking.

I know that my choice of instrument is a rather unusual one especially for classical! And that by choosing an older vintage horn I could have possibly make life slightly harder for myself. But for me it is all about sound and tone which

is of most importance. This is something of much debate when it comes to classical tenor and is something I've been exploring and developing and will discuss in some articles on this website and through my work on the Tenor Saxophone Index.

For those of you have managed to read this article thank you and if you have any questions about the crow conn conversion or anything tenor related do get in touch.

If you get the chance you must try a C.G. Conn, especially a Steve Crow one!

By Matt London

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Instrument details and set up:

C.G. Conn New Wonder Transitional 1933 | Brillhart Ebolin 4\* mouthpiece | Vandoren MO ligature | Alexander DC 3 or 4 reeds

Related websites:

[mattlondonmusic.com](http://mattlondonmusic.com)  
[stevecrow.co.uk](http://stevecrow.co.uk)