

Adolphe Sax



- Adolphe Sax, the inventor of the saxophone, was born in Belgium in 1814. His given name was Antoine-Joseph, but it appears everyone called him Adolphe, from a young age.
- Sax was one of eleven children born to Charles and Marie Sax. His father was trained as a carpenter, but later became a wind instrument inventor, who went on to earn a court appointment with the Kingdom of the Netherlands.
- Adolphe attended the Royal School of Music in Brussels. He was a virtuoso clarinetist, who also studied flute and voice. Between 1839 and 1840, eight of Adolphe's siblings died. It is believed that to overcome his grief, Adolphe threw himself into his work and began preparing a group of instruments for display at the Brussels Exhibition of 1841. Shortly after this, he left Brussels for Paris.
- Around 1841, Adolphe Sax began working on the plans for an instrument that combined the best characteristics of brass and woodwind instruments. For Sax, this meant integrating the projection of brass instruments, with the flexibility of woodwinds. Sax desired to create an instrument that could blend with strings, in an orchestra. He also wanted this instrument to play with a tone and volume that was fuller and stronger than string instruments.
- Many historians think the saxophone came about because Sax wasn't happy with the sound of the ophicleide he was working on. (An ophicleide is a keyed brass instrument, played with a brass mouthpiece, and used in 19th-century bands.) Sax replaced the brass mouthpiece with a bass clarinet mouthpiece and liked the darker, richer sound.
- Sax began making saxophones from brass because making a tapered tube, necessary for the body of the instrument, was difficult when using wood. All members of the saxophone family have a conical bore and use a single cane reed.
- Sax took out a fifteen-year patent on the saxophone family, in 1846. This expired in the early 1860s, allowing anyone the ability to copy Sax's instruments.
- The first time a saxophone was heard in public was on February 3, 1844, in Paris. This concert featured a chamber piece, composed by Hector Berlioz, with Adolphe Sax playing his newly invented Bass Saxophone.