

## A Triumphant Horn Sounds for Flow Blue

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In a previous article on the website entitled “Distin Musician Figural Jug,” Dan presented an interesting relief jug decorated with the figure of one of the musicians of the Distin family band. At that time, he didn’t know which member of the Distin family was on his jug. Also, the manufacturer was unknown.

In 2017 Dan added two additional jugs with Distin family figures to his collection. The tallest jug shows each of the family figures in relief on five of its six sides. The other one is round, one inch shorter, and features only John, the father, like his original jug. The three jugs measure 5, 6, and 8 inches to the top of the handle.



The smaller jugs feature John Distin; the tallest, all 5 family members.

What a musical family this was! The band was composed of five family members---the father, John Henry Distin (1798-1863), plus his four sons, George Frederick (1818-1848), Henry (Henri) John (1819-1903), William Alfred (1821-1884), and Theodore Rose (1823-1893). In addition, there was also a fifth child, Louisa Rose (1831-1908), who was a singer.

Dan gained more information on these figures from an article published by Nottinghamshire’s principal historical and archaeological society, the Thoroton Society. This esteemed group publishes newsletters containing articles of historical

interest. The information quoted below is from an article titled “Famous entertainers in early Victorian Nottingham” by Terry Fry who collected 19<sup>th</sup> century jugs, some of which were relief-molded jugs featuring entertainers. In the article Mr. Fry references a dissertation written in 2009 by Michael Payne titled “Theatre and Entertainment in Nottingham 1700-1900.”

Terry Fry says, “I have another relief-molded jug portraying the Distin family of musicians, which would have been sold after performances. John Distin, who had played bugle in the Victory Parade after the Battle of Waterloo, and his four sons formed the Distin Quintette (sic) which toured Britain, and abroad.” Originally, they played old-fashioned pace-horns until the early 1840s when they met Adolph Sax in Paris who introduced them to his newly invented valved brass instrument, the Sax-horn, which became the parent of today’s cornet. In 1846 the Distins became the sole agents for the sale of the Sax-horn in Britain.

The Distin Quintet began performing on these instruments and popularized them. As their music became well-liked due to their purity of tone and intonation, they became sought after. They were asked to perform for members of the Royal family and even at Windsor



Two graduated jugs featuring John Distin

Castle for Queen Victoria. King Louis Philippe of France had five solid silver Sax-horns made which he presented to the Distins. In time, the quintet performed before nearly every crowned head in Europe.

The quintet became a quartet with the death of George Frederick who died at age 30 in 1848. John rearranged all the quintet music for a quartet plus the piano. The next year the four musicians were to begin their tour of the U. S. and Canada with concerts in New York



Each panel of the tallest jug features a different family member.



City at the Park Theater, but the venue burned to the ground as they were crossing the Atlantic. Their concerts were transferred to another venue, the Concert Room at Castle Garden. During rehearsals for their concert series in NY, a businessman offered to pay them the then unprecedented sum of \$400 plus their travel and hotel expense for a single concert in Philadelphia. They arrived just before the concert, performed, collected the \$400 plus \$200 for expenses, then returned immediately to NY. The Castle Garden concerts were quite successful. However, the attendance at their other U. S. concerts was severely affected by the cholera epidemic and unrelated riots. Their Canadian tour also did not go well. Thus, these two tours, while critically acclaimed, were a

financial failure. Despite this, Henry now had a dream to return to the U. S. someday to live.

After returning to England, the members began to go in separate musical directions. Theodore Rose had been taking voice lessons while a member of the band. A baritone, he left the band to sing with two choral groups. He also became a successful voice teacher and composer of choral works. Three of his works won prizes. Some of his works became quite popular.

After returning to London in 1849, Henry left the group to take over the family business which was re-named Distin & Co. The firm began manufacturing brass instruments and sold Adolph Sax instruments. Henry became a valuable contributor in the evolution of brass instruments. In 1855, just six years later, he won a prize medal at the Paris World's Exposition for his brass instruments as they were judged to be superior to those made elsewhere in Europe. Consequently, he became a celebrated manufacturer of brass instruments in both England and the U. S. It was during this time that the father, John Henry, died in 1863. In 1868, Boosey & Co., a music publishing firm which also made wind instruments, bought Distin's business in London to augment its line of wind instruments.

Henry spent the next eight years in Paris. Within a few years he lost much of his money in concerts and other ventures. In 1876 Henry returned to New York where he began manufacturing brass instruments, especially cornets.

Meanwhile William Alfred had become interested in inventing. He applied for a patent for a special type of horn valve as well as for several improvements in pipes for smoking. He died in 1884.

Two years earlier, in 1882, Henry had begun a partnership in Williamsport, PA, and relocated there. By 1885, a full line of brass instruments was being produced under the name of the Henri Distin Manufacturing Company. He continued to market brass instruments and perform. Even in 1889, at the age of 70, he was still performing.

Henry's remaining brother, Theodore Rose, passed away in 1893. On Oct. 11, 1903, Henry, the last survivor of the five musicians, died in Philadelphia, PA.

Today Boosey & Co. is known as Boosey and Hawkes. They stopped producing musical instruments in 2003, but continue today as a prolific publisher of classical music.

On Dec. 2, 2016, The Prince Regent's Band released an album, "The Celebrated Distin Family," on Resonus Classics. This album features the repertoire of the Distin band arranged for performance on Sax-horns plus other brass instruments of that period. Soundbites of the music can be accessed on YouTube via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdGvGysS7Xk>



Although not flow blue, there was an eight-sided, 16-inch tall, Rockingham water cooler made in 1850 which featured the figures and instruments of members of the Distin band in relief. Rockingham is a type of American-made pottery that has a brown glaze. Made from 1840-1900, it is attributed to E. & W. Bennett of Baltimore, MD.

<https://www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2558M/lots/749>

In this latest search which was fueled by the addition of two more Distin jugs, Dan, a collector of relief-molded jugs, discovered that some were produced as memorabilia. He found that sometimes one can learn about the interesting lives of those depicted on the jugs. Someday he still hopes to find who manufactured them. Perhaps he'll even find a 7-inch Distin jug. His education continues in the fascinating world of flow blue! Stay tuned!

Image Courtesy of Skinner, Inc.  
[www.skinnerinc.com](http://www.skinnerinc.com)