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Smith and Slocum: Story of Robert Giardinelli

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A STORY OF ROBERT GIARDINELLI BY ANDRÉ SMITH

At the request of Richard Vangermeersch, André M. Smith recently sent to me a historical article entitled, "Robert Giardinelli (1914–1996): Four Decades of Excellence in New York," which he had written and published in *International Trumpet Guild Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2, December, 1996. In this article, Mr. Smith, not only traces the life and success of Robert Giardinelli, but provides an interesting historical review of brass instruments in music in New York beginning at the end of the eighteenth century. The focus of the article is Robert Giardinelli, who established his first music shop in the low rent district of the Bronx in 1946, and in less than ten years grew into what Smith describes as "the most expansive combination of brass mouthpiece manufactory, discount retail music store, and custom repair shop for wind instruments that had ever been created." But this is also a story of Robert Giardinelli, who was also a chartered accountant and used his accounting knowledge for success in business.

Robert (Roberto Antonio) Giardinelli was born in Catania, Sicily on January 23, 1914. His father was a music instrument repairman, and Robert displayed a natural aptitude while working as an apprentice. However, his father, being pragmatic, insisted that Robert prepare for a livelihood that was more stable than music instrument repair. Thus, as a result of many family discussions, Robert attended the regional

school of accounting in Catania, the Istituto di Felice (Royal Technical Institute "Carlo Gemmellaro") from 1936 to 1939. Although Robert was "neither happy with nor much interested in accounting," he graduated in 1939.

With his diploma at the age of 25, Robert recognized that opportunities for music repair or accounting as a career were limited in Sicily. Giardinelli left Sicily in 1939 for New York. There he obtained a job at Penzel & Muller, a woodwind manufacturer, as an assembler and finisher of clarinets. Smith points out that Giardinelli used this experience as a means of learning about American manufacturing, repairing, advertising, wholesaling, retailing, and maintenance of staff and facilities. He was inducted into the army in 1942. Robert had already served three years in the Italian army, 1932–1935.

With his discharge from the army and with only a few dollars, Giardinelli opened his first music shop. Smith reports that Giardinelli's training in accounting provided the tools to "accurately assess his current financial status and make realistic forecasts based on the financial condition of his business and an astute understanding of his likely market." He was a gifted teacher and excellent judge of people.

Smith traces the history of modern production of high quality brass mouthpieces leading to the work of Joseph J. Shepley, in *GIARDINELLI...continued on page 19*

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the late 1960's, with craftsmen in Giardinelli's shop to invent the first mouthpiece with three interchangeable parts. With modifications of Shepley's original designs, Giardinelli began in 1975 to market the famous Giardinelli 3-piece mouthpiece with 5 backbore styles. Smith states that "Business management for Giardinelli was founded on a solid base of professional training as an accountant and a commitment to high standards of repair and instrument modifications, particularly in the last ten years of his business." Smith concludes that Robert Giardinelli "will remain fixed in the music

history of New York" along with other significant music craftsmen and businessmen, for a large class of musicians, the brass players.

The article is recommended for those interested in music history and as an example of the supporting value of an accounting education. The article includes a number of interesting photos, illustrations, and experiences, such as how Louis Armstrong demonstrated the kind of mouthpiece he wanted. Mr. Smith does an excellent job of providing the reader with interesting insights into aspects of music history and the contributions of Robert Giardinelli.

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