

Alphorn blower

The alphorn was an instrument of the shepherd between the 16th and 18th century. It conduced to call the cows kine from the field to the barn, when it was about time to milking. Also whilst the milking process, the alphorn should have been blown for the purpose of calming the cows kines. Moreover, it assured the contact between the dairymen and the neighbored alps, as the people in the village.

In the early 19th century, the alphorn lost its meaning as a communication tool of the shepherds and disappeared almost into oblivion. The traditional cheese production on the alp changed its location more and more to the cooperative dairies of the villages in the valley. Another reason for this may be the substitution of the cows kine for cattle on the alps, too.

To set an end of the alphorn blower's dying, resp to convey the tradition of the alphorn playing, alphorn player have been invited for a competition, by the organisers of the first Unspunnen Festival, which was on 17th of August 1805. The role of the jury was taken over by the organisers, while the governor's wife was holding attractive awards ready for the two only competitors. At the next competition, which was three years later, only one single alphorn player was participating. He won the highest award, a sheep, without having to face up to the rivalry. Thereupon, the first alphorn courses have been arranged in Grindelwald (Bernese Oberland) in 1826 and 1827. Thanks to this, the alphorn blowing got a boost. More and more frequently, alphorn player were performing at sights for the tourists and solicited for a donation. Since 1910, the Federal Yodeler Federation is keeping up the tradition of the alphorn playing. Up from 1921, it has been organised courses for alphorn, published alphorn teaching material and note collections with traditional compositions or new composed melodies. It's due to this engagement, that the alphorn play today has become popular again, all over the country. Traditionally, alphorn player are making music at folksy calendary customs, like the „Älplerchilbi“, but as well at yodeler- and Swiss wrestling festivals, and at the national holiday (1st of August). Thereabouts, respectively the popular flag thrower are performing to the alphorn music .

When we are speaking about an alphorn nowadays, we mean a long, straight, bend-down wooden horn. The term alphorn yet was used for other shepherd instruments at earlier ages in the alpine regions. The alphorn's typical form (bend-down bell) probably has practical reasons. A wooden horn, which length amounts approx. 3 meters, is not able to be kept held like a fanfare instrument, by the hands only and without any support, for a longer period. If the trumpet of a straight tube is supported at the ground, the tone will be blown into the ground. That's why an hobbyist among the shepherds must have gotten the idea, to bend the tube at its buttom. Originally, this was reached by the usage of suitable fir trees, which have been grown at the narrow, for the instrument's construction. Hence the typical bending of the alphorn has been, so said, naturally given.

Today, alphorns are manufactured on various ways. On one hand, there is the traditional production of massive wood by handwork. While others use a profile miller for the manufacture, whereby the rough internal- and external form is given to several instruments at the same time. At the newest manufacturing processes, computer-controlled CNC-machines are used. In Switzerland, the costumes do not only differ from canton to canton, but (especially the womencostums) do also varify within each of them. There is, practical everywhere, the differenciation between Sundays- and working days-costums. **Our alphorn blower wears the official costum of the Zuger association of alphorn blowers.** The special at his costum is his cravat. This one is manufactured of wood.