

## The Trombone

### Historical Sketch

- The trombone's earliest ancestors were, like those of all brass instruments, animal horns, hollow sticks, or other items with which the player produced a sound by buzzing the lips within an aperture. People later learned to fashion more sophisticated instruments out of wood and/or metal.
- By the 13<sup>th</sup> century a long, metal straight trumpet called the *buisine* was common. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century a single-slide instrument, known in musicological circles as the "slide trumpet," is believed to have been in use. This instrument changed pitches/harmonic series by moving the entire body of the instrument back and forth along a single tube into which the mouthpiece was inserted.
- By the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century a double-slide instrument, called *trombone* in Italy, *posaune* in Germany, and *sackbut* in England and France, first appeared. These instruments were functionally almost identical to modern trombones, except that the bore, bell, and mouthpiece sizes were considerably smaller. The term "sackbut" is now commonly used to refer to these smaller predecessors of the modern trombone. The sound of these instruments was much softer and mellower than that of modern instruments, well-suited to doubling voices.
- By 1500, trombones were in use throughout Europe, being most commonly used for church and civic functions, and often doubling vocal parts. An entire family of trombones, soprano in Bb or A, alto in F, Eb, or D, tenor in Bb or A, bass in G, F, or Eb, and contrabass in Bbb, was developed, but only the alto, tenor, and bass were commonly used, frequently doubling their corresponding vocal parts. The soprano appeared only sporadically and never really caught on; in trombone ensembles this role was most often filled by the cornett. The contrabass also was rare, and likely little more than a novelty.
- In the early 1600s trombone usage remained much the same as it was in the previous century, with voice doubling in church music being its most common role. Early dramatic music, including Monteverdi's famous opera *L'Orfeo*, used trombones rather prominently as well, often to symbolize death, the underworld, and/or religious themes. As the century progressed, however, trombone usage became increasingly rare, until the instrument nearly disappeared completely from England, France, Italy, and parts of northern Germany. Only in Austria did the instrument continue to thrive, and composers there used trombones very prominently in early eighteenth-century chamber music. In such works the alto trombone was the preferred "solo" trombone.
- Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century Gluck, Mozart, and others began to exploit the trombone's dramatic associations in operas and sacred works, and composers slowly began to use the instrument in serenades, divertimenti, and other instrumental works. Trombones became a standard part of the symphony orchestra after the early nineteenth century thanks largely to Beethoven's use of trombones in his Fifth, Sixth, and Ninth Symphonies.
- The eighteenth century also saw a significant change in trombone construction, with larger bell flares and bore sizes more similar to those of modern instruments being introduced. In the early nineteenth century the tenor replaced the alto as the most common solo instrument, and the newly-invented valve was applied to some trombones, producing instruments similar to the F-attachment instruments widely used today. The valve trombone (no slide) was also invented during this century, and even became more common than the slide trombone in some locales, but never gained a long-term foothold in any country or genre. In the twentieth century an enlarged Bb tenor trombone with a bass trombone mouthpiece and usually two rotor valves came to almost completely replace the large and unwieldy F, Eb, and G bass trombones.
- Trombone soloists became especially popular in the early nineteenth century in Leipzig, Germany, and surrounding areas. Prominent players such as Friedrich August Belcke and Carl Traugott Queisser were featured in concerts along with the finest string and piano soloists of the day. Later in the nineteenth and early twentieth century American soloists associated with the bands of John Philip Sousa, Arthur Pryor, and others demonstrated an unprecedented level of technical facility on the trombone. Pryor himself was the most famous of these soloists.
- In the twentieth century the trombone was more frequently used and used in more diverse roles than ever. Increasing amounts of solo and ensemble music were written for the instrument, and jazz opened up an entire new medium of performance. In the early twenty-first century fine trombonists were making a living as soloists, small and large ensemble performers, studio performers, and teachers in both the classical and jazz genres.

### Instruments

The most commonly used trombones today are the Eb alto, Bb tenor, and Bb bass. Other instruments will receive cursory mention here, but are rarely used today.

- Soprano trombone in Bb. This rather small instrument uses a similar mouthpiece and plays in the same register as the trumpet. A few makers do produce these now, but they are little more than novelties. Due to the extremely short slide, intonation is very difficult on these instruments and is likely a reason that they never really caught on.

- Alto trombone in Eb. This was the preferred solo instrument in the trombone family during the eighteenth century; thus all solo literature for trombone written before 1800 would most likely be best played on this instrument. In the orchestra the alto trombone should be used for the first trombone parts in most eighteenth century and many nineteenth century works.
- Tenor trombone in Bb. This is the most common trombone in use today. The small-bore straight tenor (no F-attachment) is preferred for beginning students, and professional versions of this instrument are preferred by most jazz/commercial players. Large-bore straight tenor trombones are sometimes used by principal players in bands and orchestras, although the large-bore tenor with F-attachment is usually preferred for all forms of classical music.
- Bass trombone in Bb. Really an extra-large-bore tenor trombone, this instrument most often uses two valves in order to provide a fully chromatic lower register, and the large bore and mouthpiece helps this instrument to effectively reproduce the sound of “true” bass trombones in F, Eb, or G. These instruments come in two varieties: “independent,” with the two valves in F and Gb or G (D or Eb combined) on the main body of the instrument, so that both valves can be used individually, or “dependent,” with the second valve in D or Eb on the F-attachment tubing, making it where the second valve can be used only when the first valve is depressed.
- Bass trombones in F, Eb, or G. These instruments are still occasionally used today, but have mostly been replaced by the Bb bass trombone because the long slides require a handle to operate, making them rather clumsy.
- Contrabass trombone in BBb. The modern version of this instrument has a quadruple-slide, making the slide the same length functionally as that of the Bb tenor or bass trombone. This instrument usually uses a tuba mouthpiece, and has a very deep, dark sound. The older version of this instrument was EXTREMELY long, requiring a huge handle to operate.

### Choosing Students for the Trombone

- Facial structure. An extremely small mouth and/or thin lips may make the student a better candidate for a higher brass instrument, while very large-lipped individuals may be more successful on tuba. Extreme overbites or underbites can be a problem on brass instruments but can in some cases even be beneficial for woodwind players. A student with a lisp may have difficulty articulating properly on any wind instrument, but more so with the brasses. A Cupid’s bow or Cupid’s tip lip structure is generally undesirable (although Dr. Everett has one).
- Physical stature. It’s hard to tell with young students, although if a student is REALLY small at age 10-12 they might never grow in to the instrument. It’s a good idea to have a parent meeting before choosing instruments for many reasons, but one of these is to see if certain students are likely to be able to eventually reach seventh position!
- When allowing students to try instruments, have them try to create a buzz first of all. No really special embouchure formations – just buzz the lips, then do it in the mouthpiece. If a student can get at least an octave or so, they may be a good candidate for the trombone. If they favor higher or lower ranges, try those brasses. If they can’t buzz at all, strings, percussion, or woodwinds may be better.
- After letting them buzz the mouthpiece, you can let them play the instrument while you hold it and manipulate the slide.
- Again, if they get a reasonably good sound on the mouthpiece and/or instrument, and they LIKE the trombone, they’ll probably be ok (with practice, of course).

### Pedagogical Concepts

- Instrumentation. For beginners, small-bore, straight tenor trombones are preferable, as F-attachment instruments are often too heavy, and using an attachment too early often keeps the student from mastering the longer positions. For high school players moving to a large-bore F-attachment instrument is usually preferable.
- A daily warm-up routine of some sort is a must for trombonists (and all brass players), as these not only prepare the player for the day’s playing, but also reinforce the fundamental aspects of trombone playing and even help prevent injuries from overexertion.
- Make sure players learn at least a short chromatic scale as early as possible. This will help to avoid a great many difficulties later on, as students will be familiar with a fuller spectrum of notes and slide positions
- Make sure that students use the fingers, wrist, and elbow together as a sort of “system of hinges” in order to operate the slide. Overdependence on the elbow leads to “herky-jerky” slide movements, and eventually to alignment problems.
- Teach players to take a deep, low breath, and make sure they are blowing as efficiently as possible. Often students will try to do more work with the embouchure than with the air and tongue, producing a thin, strident sound. Have students use the air to manipulate the embouchure, rather than putting a great deal of direct pressure on the lips. This will help maintain a better tone quality and also gives students more playing stamina.
- Also, do NOT press the mouthpiece into the face. Use no more pressure than is necessary to create a proper seal between the lips and mouthpiece – to do otherwise is physically taxing and can cause long-term damage. As stated above, let the AIR do most of the work.
- The trombone slide is very delicate, with tolerances much tighter than those of the valves on other brass instruments. Teach students to be very careful with the slide, and teach them how to properly clean and lubricate the slide. A thorough cleaning process should be completed at least once per semester.
- Tonguing should be simple – just say “tah” (or “tee,” “taw,” or other manipulations). For multiple-tonguing use “tu-ku” for double tonguing and “tu-tu-ku” or “tu-ku-tu” for triple tonguing.
- Lip slurs are great for developing the embouchure, but trying to mix natural slurs with legato tongue in “slurred” passages produces a very inconsistent and often sloppy legato sound. Teach them to use the tongue and AIR properly to produce a smooth,

but CLEAN legato. \*You may need to work with trombonists individually or at least separately as a section on this, as this is an problem unique to the trombone.

- Scales and arpeggios should be learned, memorized, and practiced EVERY day.
- As with all instruments, individual practice is a MUST, and obtaining a private teacher is HIGHLY desirable.
- Trombone players will encounter passages needing straight mutes fairly early on. High school players may need cup mutes, plungers, and perhaps Harmon or bucket mutes.
- Advanced players will want to begin learning to read in tenor and perhaps alto clefs. While music requiring these is rarely encountered in high school level band music, orchestral pieces employ them frequently. The method books by Reginald H. Fink on this topic are excellent for initial training in clef reading.

### Assembly, Lubrication, Care

- When assembling the trombone, set the case on the floor, or a sturdy table – NOT on a chair. Remove the slide section first, hold it vertically, and place the bell section on it, TAKING CARE NOT TO CRASH THE BELL INTO THE SLIDE. Then place the mouthpiece in the receiver and twist slightly – do NOT hit or force the mouthpiece.
- Lubrication. The product I recommend is SLIDE-O-MIX RAPID COMFORT. This works as well as any slide cream, but is as easy to apply as slide oil, which I do NOT recommend. Make sure the slide is clean, place a thin line of product about halfway down each inner slide tube, reassemble the slide, work the outer slide up and down to spread the product, spray with a small amount of water, and go! Lubricate rotary valves by placing rotor oil on the spindle under the valve cap and under the stop screw, and on all moving parts. Remove the valve slides and squirt some regular valve oil down into the valves for even faster action (excess will have to be emptied). Don't let this valve oil run into the handslide, or it will cause serious dragging! Do NOT allow students to remove rotary valves. You can do this to clean them if you so desire – instructions for the process can be found on various Internet sites. If in doubt, leave this to repairmen. Tuning slides require just a small amount of tuning slide grease to keep them moving.
- If you have to restring a rotary valve (most trombones today have mechanical linkages, though), follow the instructions at the following site: [http://www.morehead.edu/files/fs/l.hammon/restring\\_valve.pdf](http://www.morehead.edu/files/fs/l.hammon/restring_valve.pdf).
- Tips for care.
  - When placing the trombone on the ground place it somewhere away from heavy foot traffic, with the mouthpiece receiver on the ground (the mouthpiece should be removed). This keeps the weight of the instrument off of the slide, which can bend quite easily.
  - DO NOT place the instrument on a chair, etc.
  - The slide and mouthpiece should be cleaned regularly. The slide especially should be wiped clean before applying additional lubricant to avoid buildup and dragging, and it may even be necessary to wipe clean the insides of the outer slide tubes using a cleaning rod and cloth. Occasionally a more thorough cleaning is needed—an article detailing such a process is listed below.
  - Very little lubricant is needed to make the slide work well. Both Slide-O-Mix and the various available creams will cause dragging if allowed to build up excessively.
  - Emphasize to students that the instruments are VERY delicate, and must be cared for. Still, I hate to say it, but they WILL drop the slides.

\*\*For a detailed and thorough slide cleaning process visit <http://www.slide-o-mix.com/rbkohlenb.htm>. Follow steps 1-3 in this article only, and then apply Rapid Comfort as described above.

### Suggested Method Books for Individual Practice

#### Tenor Trombone:

- Arban, J.B./Alessi, Bowman: *Complete Method*
- Bordner, G.: *Practical Studies for Trombone*, vols. 1 and 2
- Bordogni, M./Rochut: *Melodious Etudes for Trombone*, Book 1
- Fink, R.H.: *Introducing the Alto Clef*
- Fink, R.H.: *Introducing the F-Attachment*
- Fink, R.H.: *Introducing Legato for Trombone*
- Fink, R.H.: *Introducing the Tenor Clef*
- Gower, W. and Voxman, H.: *Rubank Advanced Method for Trombone*, vols. 1 and 2
- Lafosse, A.: *School of Sight Reading and Style, Book A*
- Long, N.: *Rubank Elementary Method for Trombone*
- Remington, E./Hunsberger: *The Remington Warm-Up Studies*
- Tyrell, H.W.: *40 Progressive Studies for Trombone*

#### Bass Trombone:

- Aharoni, E. *New Method for the Modern Bass Trombone*
- Bordogni, M./Ostrander: *Melodious Etudes for Bass Trombone*
- Getchell, R./Hovey: *Practical Studies for Tuba*, vols. 1 and 2
- Gillis, L.: *20 Etudes*
- Gillis, L.: *70 Progressive Studies*
- Grigoriev, B./Ostrander: *24 Studies*
- Ostrander, A.: *Method for Bass Trombone*
- Raph, A.: *The Double-Valve Bass Trombone*
- Tyrell, H.W.: *Advanced Studies for BB-Flat Bass*

### Suggested Reading

Bate, Phillip. *The Trumpet and Trombone: An Outline of Their History, Development, and Construction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978.

Farkas, Philip. *The Art of Brass Playing*. Rochester, New York: Wind Music, Inc., 1962.

Fasman, Mark J. *Brass Bibliography*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Fink, Reginald H. *The Trombonist's Handbook*. Athens, Ohio: Accura Music, 1977.

Griffiths, John R. *Low Brass Guide*. Roswell, Georgia: E. Williams Publishing Company, 1991.

Guion, David. *The Trombone: Its History and Music, 1697-1811*. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988.

Herbert, Trevor. *The Trombone*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006.

Kleinhammer, Edward. *The Art of Trombone Playing*. Evanston, Illinois: Summy-Birchard Company, 1963.

Kleinhammer, Edward and Yeo, Douglas. *Mastering the Trombone*. Hanover, Germany: Edition Piccolo, 1997.

Lane, G.B. *The Trombone: An Annotated Bibliography*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1999.

Sloan, Gerald. *Orchestral Recordings for Low Brass*. Troy, Michigan: Encore Music Publishers, 1996.

Tanner, Paul and Ployhar, James. *Practical Hints on Playing the Trombone*. Miami, Florida: Warner-Brothers Publications, Inc., 1983.

Wick, Denis. *Trombone Technique*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Wigness, C. Robert. *The Soloistic Use of the Trombone in Eighteenth-Century Vienna*. Nashville, Tennessee: The Brass Press, 1978.

### Suggested Instruments

- Beginner Tenors
  - Yamaha YSL-354
  - King 606
  - Conn 22H "Director"
- Professional Tenors
  - Conn 88H series
  - Bach Stradivarius 42 series
  - Benge 165F, 190F
  - Yamaha YSL-682G, YSL-882G
  - Getzen 1047F, 3047F
  - Blessing B-88

- Professional Bases
  - Conn 62H series
  - Bach Stradivarius 50 series
  - Yamaha YBL-622, YBL-613
  - Getzen 1052FD, 1062FD, 3062FD
  - Holton TR-181
  - Bengel 290

### Suggested Mouthpieces

- Tenor
  - Bach 7, 7C, 6.5AL, 5GS, 5G, 4G
  - Schilke 47, 51, 51C4, 52

\*The Schilke 47 and Bach 6.5AL are *great* first mouthpieces for trombonists.

- Bass
  - Bach 1.5G, 1.25G, 1G
  - Schilke 58, 59
  - Yamaha Yeo

\*The Schilke 58 and Bach 1.5G are probably the best first bass mouthpieces.

### Prominent Players (worth listening to)

- Classical Tenor
  - Christian Lindberg
  - Joseph Alessi
  - Mark Lawrence
  - Alain Trudel
  - Jorgen van Rijen
- Jazz Tenor
  - Carl Fontana
  - Bill Watrous
  - Wycliffe Gordon
  - J.J. Johnson
  - Conrad Herwig
  - Kai Winding
- Bass (all)
  - Douglas Yeo
  - Blair Bollinger
  - David Taylor
  - Charles Vernon
  - Ben van Dijk

### Online Resources

- International Trombone Association. <http://www.trombone.net>
- Online Trombone Journal. <http://www.trombone.org>
- Douglas Yeo Trombone Web Site. <http://www.yeodoug.com>