

## 6 ‘Sackbut’: the early trombone<sup>1</sup>

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On 20 November 1906, Francis Galpin, the Anglican cleric and pioneering organologist, delivered a paper to members of The Musical Association in London. His paper, ‘The Sackbut: Its Evolution and History’, was one of the great contributions to musicology. In it Galpin explained the story of the exotic-sounding ‘sackbut’.<sup>2</sup> His narrative was clear, straightforward and based on the systematic evaluation of diverse primary-source evidence. Before that evening, it was believed by some, even perhaps by some members of his distinguished audience, that the sackbut was an instrument of deep antiquity, and that its citation in the Book of Daniel (‘That at what time you hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut. . .’)<sup>3</sup> was no less than a literal testimony of musical practice at the time when the Old Testament was written. The unarguable truth that Galpin placed before them was that ‘sackbut’ was no more than a word by which one of the most familiar musical instruments – the trombone – was once known. Furthermore, he showed that it could be dated no earlier than the fifteenth century, and that a comparison of an early example (Galpin owned an instrument made in Nuremberg in the sixteenth century) with a modern trombone revealed, on the face of it, more similarities than differences.

In the twentieth century, research has improved our knowledge of the early trombone and the way in which its idiom and repertory changed over the years. We know more now than Galpin knew at that time. It is not just that we have more information about instruments, their players, their music and the cultural contexts into which music fitted and to which it conformed. We now also have evidence drawn from sophisticated musical experiments by performers on period instruments. Even in the middle of the twentieth century, musicologists could speculate only in abstract terms on what the true idiom of the early trombone was: how it really sounded, and what its articulations and sound colours were like. Their practical source of reference was the sound of modern trombones and the performance values of their players, most of which were formulated to deal with the post-classical orchestral repertoire. Since the 1970s the best period-instrument players have travelled deep into the sound

world of the Renaissance and Baroque. Their example has shown how different the idiom of the early trombone was, compared to that of its modern equivalent.

## Nomenclatures

'Sackbut' was but one of the names by which the trombone was known in its early life. Indeed, the rendering 'sackbut' was only used in England and it was never universal – 'sagbutt', 'sacbut' and 'shagbut' were equally popular. The Italians always used *trombone* and the Germans *Posaun(e)*, both of which are derived from other words (*tromba* and *buzine*) which mean trumpet. On the other hand, 'sackbut' comes from a different and more interesting etymological strain. The word (but not the instrument) almost certainly originated in south-western Europe – France, Spain or Portugal – where the first element, *sac-*, is derived from words meaning to draw, in the sense of pulling, and the second, *bu-*, probably has its origin in a Teutonic root meaning to push. The French ended up calling the trombone *saquebute*, the Spanish *sacabuche* and the English rendered it 'sackbutt', 'sagbut', 'shagbosh' or whatever seemed reasonable to long-suffering scribes recording payments to yet another foreigner for blowing a new musical gadget.

The relevance of the etymology of the sackbut-type words is that, from the time that they were first applied to a musical instrument, they did not simply denote their subject – they probably also described it. This line of nomenclature has almost certainly always been applied to a slide instrument, whereas this could not be assumed of early citations of words like *trombone* and *Posaune*, which need to be qualified in their context because they might easily have meant 'big trumpet'.

There were other words that also meant trombone in the Renaissance. Documents originating in Scotland in the early sixteenth century record payments for players of the 'draucht trumpet'. The most frequently cited player of this instrument was a man called Julian Drummond. Until recently it was assumed that Drummond was a Scot who had briefly emigrated to Italy and then returned to Scotland. It now seems certain that he was an Italian who settled in Scotland.<sup>4</sup> He assumed a common local surname, perhaps to disguise a Jewish identity; there are other instances of sixteenth-century immigrant musicians doing this. The existence of a source that describes the 'weir trumpattis' ('war' trumpet) and the 'draught trumpattis' in the same sentence suggests that the latter was different to the former and that it had a slide.<sup>5</sup> It is, of course, possible that draucht trumpet is another term for the Renaissance single-slide

trumpet, but this seems unlikely: the single-slide trumpet must have been entirely anachronistic by such a late date.

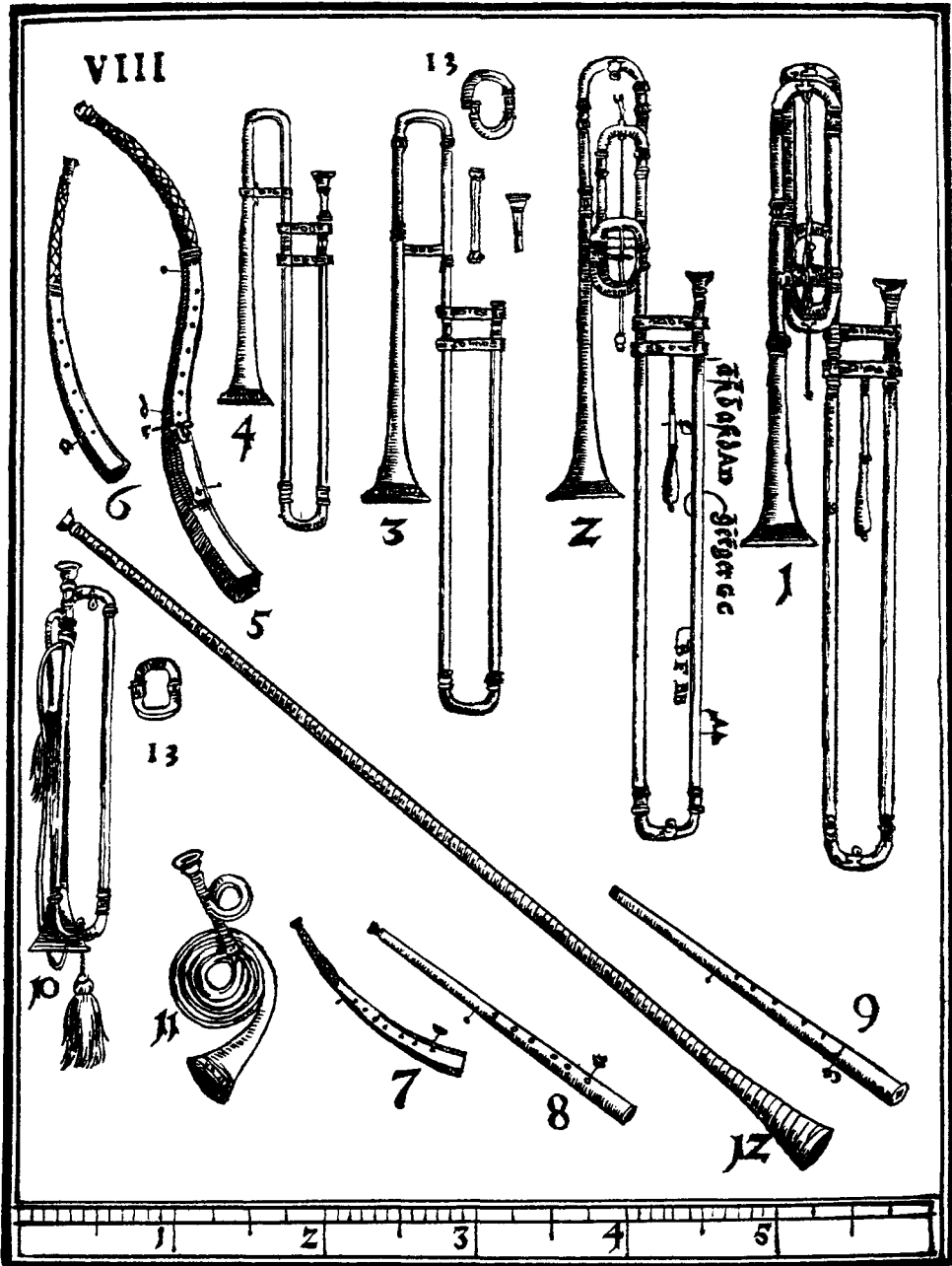
‘Draucht trumpet’ was not used outside Scotland and is not found in any sources after the 1530s, but yet another relevant term, *tuba ductilis*, can be found in several sources in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many sixteenth-century writers took it to be the Latin expression for trombone. Praetorius and Mersenne understood the phrase in this sense, and ‘The Custom Book of St Omer’, a document originating in 1609, which refers to musical practices at the Jesuit school at St Omer, France, systematically gives proper and common names for instruments, describing the trombone as ‘Tuba ductilis (vulgo Sacbottum)’.<sup>6</sup>

By whatever name it was known, it is certain that in the second half of the fifteenth century the trombone was widely used in the courts of mainland Europe, where it was one of the standard instruments in *alta cappella* groups. Professional trombone players were employed in Italy, the German-speaking countries, the Low Countries, France, Spain and, at the very end of the century, in England. We do not know exactly when and where the trombone was invented but it is likely to have been in the north. In the late fifteenth century, players and makers of slide instruments from northern Europe – particularly Germany<sup>7</sup> – were influential in southern countries such as Italy. It is likely too that it was players from Germany or the Low Countries who were the first to arrive in England, where the first trombonists to be named in payment records are Hans Nagle and Hans Broen.

By the sixteenth century and for most of the seventeenth century the trombone was one of the most important professional instruments. Towards the end of the seventeenth century its popularity declined in all but a few centres, though where it did survive – most notably Austria – it continued to be deployed to great effect. In the second half of the eighteenth century, leading composers started writing once more for the trombone, and by the closing decades of the eighteenth century the trombone was again a familiar instrument in all places in Europe that had a thriving musical life. It is from this time that the modern idiom of the instrument can be traced.

## The instrument

The majority of trombones which survive from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were made in Nuremberg, the major centre for their manufacture. When, in 1545, the King of England purchased trombones for Italian players in his court band, it was the Nuremberg firm of



1. 2. Quart-Posaunen. 3. Rechte gemeine Posaun. 4. Alt Posaun. 5. Corna, Groß Tenor-Cornet. 6. Rechte Chor-Zinck. 7. Klein Discant-Zinck, so ein Quint höher. 8. Gerader Zinck mit ein Mundstück. 9. Still Zinck. 10. Trommet. 11. Jäger Trommet. 12. Hölzern Trommet. 13. Krummbügel aus ein ganz Ton

Figure 12 Illustrations of brass instruments from Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum*.

Neuschel that supplied them. Neuschel's business letter confirms the order of five 'grosse busonen' (big trombones) and a 'Myttel busone' (medium trombone).<sup>8</sup> This almost certainly means bass and tenor instruments respectively, because the alto instrument (which must surely have been described as *kleine* in this terminology) was used less widely in the sixteenth century than subsequently. Indeed, despite the English need for five 'grosse busonen', the fact that by the seventeenth century the tenor instrument was referred to as *gemeine Posaune* (common or usual trombone) suggests that this instrument had the widest utility.

Information about how different sizes of trombones were distributed becomes clearer in the seventeenth century, when Praetorius provides details of the trombones in most common use. He describes four types of instrument: the alto (*Alto oder Discant Posaun*) pitched in D or E; the tenor (*Gemeine rechte Posaun*) pitched in A; the bass (*Quart Posaun* or *Quint Posaun*) in E and D; and the double bass (*Octav Posaun*) pitched an octave below the tenor with a range from E<sub>1</sub> to A<sub>3</sub>. Praetorius believed the alto to have a less satisfactory tone-colour than the tenor, and says that the double bass trombone was rarely used.<sup>9</sup>

There was also a soprano trombone, but this too was rarely used and was probably played by trumpeters. It is easy to understand why the soprano trombone never really caught on. It was introduced at about the same time that the trumpet had acquired its own clearly defined idiom and repertory, and in any case the cornett was a perfectly suitable and established treble partner for the trombone.

Another slide instrument was being used in England at the end of the seventeenth century. This, the 'flatt trumpet', is one of a number of brass instruments which have had a negligible impact on music history, but it has nevertheless engendered hot, if largely inconclusive, debate among brass instrument historians. Few pieces were written for this, the seventeenth-century manifestation of the slide trumpet (not to be confused with the fifteenth-century or the nineteenth-century versions, which were both different), but the most famous work in which it is cited is Purcell's *Funeral Music for Queen Mary* (1695). It is tempting to think of the flatt trumpet as merely a trombone – perhaps the English version of the soprano trombone – but the existence of a manuscript prepared by James Talbot,<sup>10</sup> a contemporary observer, providing a clear description of two separate instruments, the one called sackbut, the other flatt trumpet, seems to make this theory unlikely. No flatt trumpets survive, but modern makers have produced perfectly credible 'copies' of them on the basis of extrapolations from documentary sources.

The morphology of surviving early trombones is more or less consistent. None, of course, had thumb valves to change the pitch of the instru-

ment, but otherwise they lacked only three mechanical features that almost all modern instruments have: a tuning-slide placed on the final bow of the instrument (though crooks and shanks were commonly used, and some Nuremberg bass instruments seem to have had a tuning device on the final bend of the bell section), touch springs (small springs fitted in the housings of slides to finely adjust tuning in the first, or closed, slide position) and a water key to release the condensed moisture of the player's breath. The tubing was narrower than is the case on modern instruments – diameters of tubing vary, but H. G. Fischer's survey of measurements shows most of them to be about 10 mm. The bells were smaller with a much less extravagant terminal flare – seldom more than 10.5 cm. wide – and the metal of which the instruments were made was much thinner.<sup>11</sup>

Since the 1960s a number of period reproduction instruments have been available. Some such instruments do little more than capture the cosmetics of early instruments, and equally often the sound they make is indistinguishable from that of a modern medium- to narrow-bore trombone. However, there are some excellent reproduction instruments which closely follow the proportions and other material features of extant period specimens.

Few authenticated trombone mouthpieces survive from before the seventeenth century. The most important of these is a tenor trombone mouthpiece, inscribed with the mark of the Schnitzer family, and accompanying a tenor instrument bearing the same mark, dated 1581. It is impossible to determine whether this mouthpiece was typical of others of the period. Evidence gathered from drawings in treatises such as Mersenne's *Harmonie universelle*<sup>12</sup> suggests that, in general, early mouthpieces had flat rims, shallow cups and narrow, sharply defined apertures. There must have been hundreds of mouthpieces in use in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so one can only speculate about their design in very general terms – there is no reason to believe that they all conformed to an identical pattern.

On early instruments – certainly those made in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – it was probably not possible to obtain a true harmonic series with the slide fully closed for every note; consequently the 'first position' was not with the slide closed but with it slightly extended, so that players could sharpen and flatten notes as necessary. The earliest diagrammatic representation of trombone positions is contained in Aurelio Virgiliano's *Il dolcimelo*.<sup>13</sup> Virgiliano, like every authoritative writer up to the end of the eighteenth century, shows not seven positions but four. Modern players are taught to use seven positions which are a semitone apart: they learn the trombone as essentially a chromatic

instrument. The thinking of early players was not chromatic but diatonic. Half tones were conceived as adjustments between the basic diatonic notes.

## Idioms and styles

The physical characteristics of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century instruments mean that trombones had two types of sound: they could be played loud with a brassy timbre similar to what one would expect from a field trumpet of the time, but primarily they were instruments of medium to quiet dynamics, suitable for intimate and delicate ensemble playing. The best copies of early trombones give modern players a valuable insight into the music culture of early players. It is easy to play these instruments quietly and with a clear and precisely focused sound, and one can readily understand why trombones were used so often to accompany vocal music. It is not hard to accept Henry George Fischer's contention that Praetorius's use of the phrase 'einer stillen Posaun' in describing the inclusion of a single quiet trombone in broken consorts in England reflected the characteristic expected of trombones rather than a special effect.<sup>14</sup>

This type of musical identity was the most important feature of the trombone in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Early trombones had a wide dynamic range, but virtually every piece that specifies their use, particularly those that also name other instruments on different parts, seems to assume these subtle and restrained qualities. However, on the other hand, when copies of early instruments are blown really hard, the sound characteristic is entirely different. The timbre 'breaks up' and the sonority changes markedly, becoming brassy. Mersenne warned against this type of playing which, he said, 'is deemed vicious and unsuited for concerts';<sup>15</sup> but presumably he had heard trombones played that way, and there are abundant sources, particularly from the sixteenth century, which indicate that trombones played with trumpets and shawms for declamatory fanfares outdoors.

In the sixteenth century, trombone players and, to a lesser extent, cornettists had facilities on their instruments that most others did not: they could adjust to more widely varied pitch standards, they had a broad dynamic range, they could be used as effectively out of doors as indoors, and a variety of articulations could be produced to blend with other instruments or voices. This meant that they were versatile instruments well suited to a wide variety of functions. In consort music in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, single trombones were used with other



instruments. Praetorius suggested that the trombone was a suitable bass instrument, but it was not restricted to bass lines. The favour that the trombone found in groups accompanying sacred vocal music is the most consistent feature of its story before the late seventeenth century, though it was used in secular vocal music too, both to double and to substitute vocal lines. Madrigals sent to the Accademia Filarmonica in Verona in 1552 included one 'with low voices arranged for the trombones'.<sup>16</sup>

Trombone players decorated and embellished phrases in a manner similar to other instrumentalists. Mersenne noted that 'those who use . . . [the trombone] well perform diminutions of sixteen notes to the measure'.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Praetorius lists trombones among 'ornamenting melodic instruments'.<sup>18</sup> Many trombonists doubled on other instruments, so their knowledge of other instrumental idioms and their sense of ensemble must have been keen. The best early trombonists were virtuosi; Praetorius noted the merits of the 'famed master, Phileno of Munich' and Erhardus Borussus who had apparently moved from Dresden to Poland.<sup>19</sup> Of the Italian Lorenzo da Lucca it was said that he had 'in his playing a certain grace and lightness with a manner so pleasing' as to render his listeners 'dumbstruck'.<sup>20</sup>

The idiom of the trombone in the latter half of the sixteenth century can to a large extent be deduced from what composers specified and wrote for the instrument in the early seventeenth century. At this time the balance of authority between composers and performers in European music culture was changing, decisions about performance devolving less to the players. In the earlier phases of this process the written and labelled parts almost certainly give evidence of current or long-established practices, rather than radical new experimentation by composers. The repertory that Venetian trombone players encountered in the first decades of the seventeenth century provides a good illustration of this phenomenon. The Gabriellis' choral and polyphonic writing for trombones has a poise and maturity which suggests that they were continuing and refining, rather than inventing, an idiom for the instrument. Also, it is easy to see the florid trombone writing in the 'Sonata sopra Sancta Maria' from Monteverdi's Marian Vespers (1610) in terms of the embellishment formulae contained in the late sixteenth-century diminution manuals (Ex. 3).

Homogeneous trombone ensembles were used in the sixteenth century and more widely employed in the seventeenth century. But the three-trombone format that became the basis of the modern orchestral trombone section – alto, tenor and bass as constituents of a single block of sonority – does not really take root until the late Classical period. When Romantic symphonists – most notably Brahms – call up this



Ex. 3 Claudio Monteverdi, *Vespro della Beata Vergine*, trombone parts from 'Sonata sopra Sancta Maria' (bars 89–95), 1610

timbre evocatively, their musical reference is unlikely to have been stimulated by a sense of history that went further back than the second half of the eighteenth century.

## Centres and practices

There were few centres of musical activity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries where trombones were employed which did not also employ cornetts. It is unnecessary for me to repeat here what is said in Chapter 5 of this book, except perhaps to emphasise that what Bruce Dickey refers to as the 'marriage' of cornett to trombone is one of the fundamental features of the history of the trombone before 1700. However, the perception that trombones and cornetts were each other's sole partners can be exaggerated. In the two centuries following 1500, cornetts and trombones formed the core of many types of ensemble – particularly those that served liturgical functions – but there is ample evidence to show that trombones were used among more diverse collections of instruments too.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, professional trombone players were employed by several different types of musical foundation and institution. There is also a tantalisingly small body of evidence which hints that some amateurs played too. Trombonists were a standard feature of civic bands such as *Stadtpfeifer* in Germany, *piffari* in Italy and, from the mid 1520s, the waits in England and Scotland. Throughout Europe these bands had similar functions. They marked both the important and the commonplace rituals of their towns. These rituals were often routine and regular: they may have been daily – the sounding of fanfares



**Figure 13** Seventeenth-century town waits, wash drawing attributed to Marcellus Laroon (c.1649–1702).

and other declamatory pieces – or seasonal – perhaps marking annual civic progresses or anniversaries. Most major towns in the German and Italian states had such bands, and in England they existed in those places that had the status of being a city (by virtue of having a cathedral). Civic bands were essentially secular, but there is no doubt their trombonists, along with other players, were hired for religious services too.

Players also found employment in royal or religious centres of power. Records of payments to players have, to a greater or lesser extent, survived for many such centres. What does not survive – and it is likely that it never existed – is a corpus of musical sources from the sixteenth century which have labelled trombone parts. But the extent to which trombone players were in receipt of regular payments from the major musical centres usually makes deduction of what type of music they were playing easy. They played both secular and liturgical music. Even players attached to ecclesiastical foundations would have performed secular ceremonial music as well as accompanying liturgical settings.

Trombonists were paid well and seem to have had a high status. As early as 1497, a musician called Piero Trombone was the highest-paid instrumentalist at Ferrara. He was not one of the court ‘trombetti’; neither was he termed ‘piffaro’.<sup>21</sup> Such was his celebrity that foreign monarchs courted his services. Other Italian trombone virtuosi of the sixteenth century included ‘Bartolomeo’ (perhaps Tromboncino), Zaccheria da Bologna and Lorenzo da Lucca.<sup>22</sup> In England, by the 1530s payments to trombone players took up the greatest proportion of expenditure on instrumentalists’ wages. Most of the recipients of these payments were members of the Bassano family, one of the most influential dynasties of the sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup> They were almost certainly Venetian Jews who arrived in England as distinguished players. Many representations of music making in Germany – at the Bavarian court, for example, where Orlando di Lasso was *maestro di cappella* – show trombone players prominently.

In Spain, trombones were used in 1478 at the baptism of Prince Juan, the son of Ferdinand and Isabella, when ‘The prince was brought to the church in a great procession . . . with infinite musical instruments of various types – trumpets, shawms and trombones.’<sup>24</sup> It appears to have been in 1526, however, that Seville Cathedral took trombone players into regular employment, when the cathedral chapter decided that

it would be very honourable in this holy church and in the praise of the divine worship to have on salary, for their own use, some loud minstrels, trombones and shawms, to use in various of the most important feasts and the processions that the church makes.<sup>25</sup>

Almost all sixteenth-century trombone players were specialist professionals but morsels of evidence suggest that there were some amateurs too, because these sources refer to women – the named professionals who are mentioned in payment records are always men. Nuns in a Ferrara convent appear to have played trombones in accompaniment of the liturgy. A German embroidered table-cloth from the 1570s shows an aristocratic woman playing the trombone – the representation is clearly not allegorical. A further source advocates the view that a rounded education for boys should contain music instruction, and lists among the suitable instruments for that purpose sackbuts and cornetts.<sup>26</sup>

Music in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not merely an entertainment. It was a tool of diplomacy and a potent signal of status. The musical life at a court had to have a high standard, but it also had to reflect the character, preferences and tastes of its principal patron. Though there is abundant evidence that trombone players performed in ceremonial music, in court entertainments and in worship, it would be

wrong to assume that practices and flavours were identical throughout Europe. For example, at the famous meeting of Henry VIII and Francis I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, the differences in musical practices were brought into sharp relief when the French king's *cors de sabutttes* (*sic*) accompanied a sung mass, while the English singers sang *a cappella* even though the players from the London court were present. This almost certainly signifies that in England, unlike other parts of Europe, instrumentalists did not accompany the liturgy.<sup>27</sup>

Most of the music for which trombones are specified (or for which their specific use is easily deduced) in the sixteenth century originated in Italy. This includes the pieces played at the extravagant Medici wedding celebrations of 1539 and 1589, containing the so-called 'Florentine Intermedi'. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the picture of what exactly trombone players played is less ambiguous, because the practice of labelling parts was more common. The earliest surviving English pieces to be labelled with trombone parts are John Adson's *Courtly Masquing Ayres . . . framed only for instruments* (1611), which have three pieces with sackbut parts. The next and only work of any substance to be so labelled in Britain is also the last – but equally the best – Matthew Locke's *Music for His Majesty's Sagbutts and Cornetts*, a suite of pieces apparently performed at the Restoration coronation of Charles II in 1661.<sup>28</sup> The Adson and Locke pieces are, interestingly enough, among what is only a tiny handful of works found in a British source which specify trombones and cornetts alone. The few other pieces with labelled parts also include other instruments.

Venice, and the music establishment at St Mark's in particular, was the pre-eminent centre of excellence in the early seventeenth century. It was not just the size of the instrumental ensemble at St Mark's that was so important, but also the quality of the music that was written to be performed there. The intrepid English traveller Thomas Croyat's barely contained enthusiasm for the sound of 'Sometimes sixteen [instrumentalists] playing together on their instruments, ten sagbuts, foure Cornetts, and two Violdegambaes of an extraordinary greatnesse', which he encountered at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice in August 1608, was a response to the music of Giovanni Gabrieli, one of the first composers whose writing for the trombone was truly idiomatic. Venice was an important microcosm for the high Renaissance and early Baroque periods, and the inclusion of the instrument in operas as early as Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1607; first performed in Venice, 1609) suggests a recognition of the potential of its sound as a dramatic device. It is difficult to determine exactly where and when the symbolic association of trombones with darker facets of the emotional and spiritual

spectrum originates, but by this time such meanings were widely understood. For example, at the first performance of Beaumont and Fletcher's masque *The Mad Lover* in 1616, a stage direction called for 'A dead march within, of Drums and Sagbuts'.<sup>29</sup> The influence of Venice spread north too. Scheidt, Schein, Praetorius and particularly Gabrieli's protégé, Heinrich Schütz, also wrote idiomatically for the instrument. The latter's *Fili mi, Absalon* is a fine example of this facet of seventeenth-century style.

Before the end of the seventeenth century, most places in Europe witnessed a sharp decline in the instrument's popularity. The fall of the trombone from fashion is often attributed to the new preference for balanced sonorities of homogeneous instrumental groups, particularly of strings, after the French style. In fact it is unlikely that such explanations tell the whole story. In places where the trombone died, it usually died completely. In England, for example, the decline of the use of trombones in the royal music establishment was matched by a similar decline in cathedrals and civic waits in London and the provinces, perhaps reflecting the strong influence of London as the cultural centre of the country.

The trombone only survived in places where its traditional function as a supporter of vocal lines in sacred music was sustained. This was the case in the Habsburg empire, where, even in 1790, Albrechtsberger was complaining that 'Many usages sanctioned by long custom can hardly be justified . . . trombones written in unison with alto, tenor, or bass voice'.<sup>30</sup> There were excellent trombonists in Vienna throughout the eighteenth century. Stewart Carter has determined a continuous line of players at the Habsburg court from 1679 to 1771. The Imperial opera had five trombonists in 1747 (Christian, Loog, Stainprugger, Tepsser and Leopold Ferdinand Christian). In 1790 Albrechtsberger names twelve yet different players who had 'handled this difficult instrument skilfully'. Among them are Braun and Fröhlich, both of whom wrote methods for the instrument. A number of works containing trombone obbligati were written by composers working in Austria in the eighteenth century and there is also a small but important solo repertoire.<sup>31</sup>

It was not just in Vienna that the trombone lasted. The instrument also survived in Germany, and, for a time in Rome, where, at the start of the century, a wind band in Castel Sant Angelo (*musici del concerto di Campidago*) was described as 'concerto de tromboni e cornetti del Senato et inclito Popolo Romano'.<sup>32</sup> In Germany J. S. Bach used trombones in fifteen of his cantatas, all but one dating from his time at Leipzig. Again the link with vocal music is clear. C. Stanford Terry has made the point that in every case where Bach used the trombone, it is used with a chorale





POSAUNE

*Ich suche fast den Ruhm an allen Ort und Enden.  
so wohl den Alterthum als auch der Wirkung nach.  
man sehe was ich kan in beeden Testamenten  
ich warff die Mauren ein als man mich recht besprach  
kein Opffer oder Fest würd recht ohn mich vollführet  
und heunt zu Tag bin ich was grosse Chör bezieret.*

Figure 14 'The Trombone', Johann Christoph Weigel (1661–1726),  
copper engraving from *Musicalishes Theatrum*.

of the older motet form, and – with only three exceptions – it doubles a vocal line without sounding independently.<sup>33</sup>

Another pocket of culture where the trombone survived in the eighteenth century was in the eastern edge of North America, where immigrant Moravians continued to use trombones for chorales and to accompany voices. The Moravians are unlikely to have been the first to take trombones to the New World. Spanish colonisation of South America in the sixteenth century caused one of the first major engagements of Catholicism with a non-European country. Music was embedded so deeply into Catholic religious practices that it is likely that instruments were introduced at an early stage; they were certainly used in Mexico in the late Renaissance.

The modern era for the trombone begins with the operas composed for Vienna in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. These include Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), but it was the dramatic use of trombones in Mozart's operas, particularly *Don Giovanni* (1787) and *Die Zauberflöte* (1791), that must have had the greatest influence on other composers. The scoring for trombones by Mozart is poised and idiomatic, and similarly in sacred vocal works, particularly the C Minor Mass (1782/3) and the *Requiem* (1791), his writing takes the use of trombones to a new level of sophistication.

In England there was not a single native-born trombone player throughout the eighteenth century. Genuine confusion surrounded the requirement for what Burney called a 'Trombone or Double Sackbut' for the Handel celebrations at Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon in 1784. German trombonists were eventually found (Zink, M[ü]ller and Niebhuer) who had recently arrived in the country as part of Ely's band. But a mystery surrounds the identity of the trombone players who took part in the first British performances of Handel's oratorios *Saul* and *Israel in Egypt* in 1739. Both these works have idiomatic independent trombone parts, but no local players could have been available to play them. Otherwise, apart from a single instance in 1741 when trombones took part in a concert for the benefit of the trumpeter Valentine Snow, there is not one source that shows that trombones were used in England between the late seventeenth century and 1784. The most likely answer is that German players came to London to play the parts. When they left, the instruments were again quickly forgotten. A member of the audience in 1784 found them so novel that he described them in a marginal annotation to his programme as 'something like a brass bassoon with an ear trumpet'.<sup>34</sup> In England in the late eighteenth century it was as if the trombone had just been invented. But in effect the idiom of the trombone was being redefined across Europe. Opera orchestras, and later sym-



phony orchestras, incorporated trombones as part of their establishment. In Paris the first of a long line of trombone professors was appointed at the Conservatoire, and soon a new brand of players emerged whose values and techniques were appropriate for the age of Romanticism.