

BRASS INSTRUMENTS IN THE ORCHESTRA

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH.

FROM about the end of the sixteenth century, when it first becomes possible to trace the beginnings of the growth which slowly developed into the completed orchestral organisation of the nineteenth century, trumpet and trombone parts can always be found in some full scores. Indeed, there is no period during the last three centuries of which it can be said that these heaviest brass voices were entirely absent from the orchestra.

In the first stage of its growth, that is, up to about the third quarter of the seventeenth century, orchestras were of two sorts only, the church and the opera orchestra. The concert orchestra was as yet unknown. Trombone parts appear freely in the scores of seventeenth century church music, and even before that time. Some of the earliest examples of written orchestral music extant, the Sacred Symphonies of Giovanni Gabrielli, dated 1597, show trombone parts in which the instruments are treated polyphonically in exactly the same manner as were the voices and the other orchestral instruments of the time. Throughout the seventeenth century trombones were consistently used in the larger churches in Italy, but always in conjunction with choral voices, and normally in unison with the vocal parts of corresponding pitch, except the soprano part, which was commonly duplicated by the old *cornetti*. Thus, the orchestra under the direction of Legrenzi (1625-1690) at St. Mark's, Venice, is known to have included three trombones and two *cornetti*. Seventeenth century German composers, from Schütz to Buxtehude, likewise often supported their choral parts in unison by trombones and *cornetti*. This custom survived, as is well known, during the time of Bach, after which the treble *cornetti* began to disappear; yet the use of trombones to support choral vocal parts in sacred music continued throughout the whole of the eighteenth century, and in that capacity trombone parts make frequent appearances in the scores of oratorios and masses by Haydn, Mozart and their contemporaries. In the case of opera, however, only a few isolated instances of trombone parts occur in the scores of seventeenth century works. A notable case is Monteverde's opera *Orfeo* (1607), where four trombones are demanded in the introductory remarks, but no specific parts for these instruments appear in the actual score.

They would probably be used to play the parts suitable to their compass in those numbers of the opera which are directed to be played by "all instruments." Another noteworthy instance occurs in Cesti's *Pomo d'Oro* (Vienna, 1663), but here the parts are written out plainly, in conjunction with *cornetti* and bassoons, in solid harmony.

During the first half of the eighteenth century trombones appear to have vanished almost entirely from opera orchestras. Mattheson, writing in 1719, says that "trombones were seldom used except in churches and for solemn occasions"; but soon after the mid-century they began to take their place in the theatre again, this time for always. Some of the later Vienna operas by Gluck and most of his Paris operas, operas by Gossec and other composers who wrote for the Paris stage, include trombone parts for the usual group of three. Incidentally, Gluck's Italian score of his *Orfeo* (Vienna, 1762) shows what is possibly one of the last instances in which the old *cornetto* is written as the upper voice in conjunction with the trombone trio.

Mozart and his contemporaries, particularly those who wrote opera for Vienna and Paris, made frequent demands for trombones in their dramatic scores, and soon after the beginning of the nineteenth century grand opera scores in Italy, France, Germany and England show these instruments firmly established members of the operatic orchestra. Beethoven, Weber, Rossini, Spontini, Boïeldieu, Cherubini and many lesser composers of the same period wrote for three, although occasionally for only one, trombone in the scores of their operas, the Germans specifying alto, tenor and bass instruments, while with the French and Italian composers the prevailing custom was to score for three tenor trombones.

It was in the first quarter of the nineteenth century that trombones began to find their way into the concert orchestra. Beethoven and Schubert appear as pioneers in this respect, although very possibly some of their now forgotten contemporaries may be entitled to share the honour. The next generation—Spohr, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Berlioz—in varying degree allowed trombones to take part in their symphonies and concert overtures, yet it was not till after their time that these instruments gained a really firm footing in symphonic and concert works, thus lagging behind the opera orchestra by at least half a century.

A highly organised form of trumpet-playing was cultivated and flourished almost before the birth of the orchestra. This species of fanfare-playing for trumpets in five parts, with drums, existed quite independently of either church or operatic musical organisation, and was used in connection with the festivities, military and otherwise, the dramatic performances, feasts and other functions of the royal and

noble houses in civilised Europe during the sixteenth century. The organisation provided that trumpeters were trained specially to play one of five different types of part, each lying in a different part of the register of the natural instrument. Thus, the highest or *clarino* part, for example, covered the highest octave of the natural instrument, while the player of the lowest part (called in Germany *Flattergrob*) appears to have specialised in playing only one low note. When the orchestra began to take definite shape, early in the seventeenth century, this whole trumpet-playing organisation appears to have been requisitioned occasionally in order to supply suitable introductory flourishes, as in the oft-quoted five-part introduction to Monteverde's *Orfeo*. Specific trumpet parts appear only occasionally in opera or other scores of the first half of the seventeenth century, but become fairly common after the mid-century. When used orchestrally, it was the two upper or *clarino* parts that survived, and, although the extreme low trumpet parts dropped out of use altogether, a third or *principale* part, playing as low as the third open note of the harmonic series, was still cultivated and appears frequently in scores till about the middle of the eighteenth century. Numerous duet-like high florid trumpet parts from seventeenth century scores might be instanced from the works of such as Pallavicino, Stradella, A. Scarlatti, Purcell and others. Lulli and his successors Collase, Charpentier and Destouches wrote rather less florid parts, and sometimes for three or even four trumpets; similar groupings may be found in the works of the once popular composer of opera, Agostino Steffani (1655-1729), composer, ambassador, statesman and church dignitary.

The period of Bach and Handel showed the cultivation of the high *clarino* part carried to excess in the efforts of composers to make their trumpets play as did their violins and oboes, also the survival of the third or *principale* part. Composers after Bach and Handel were unanimous in rejecting the screaming *clarino* part; the trumpet then soon settled down to its medium register and was played usually in two parts over a compass lying between the third and twelfth open notes, with an occasional excursion up to the high C. Such were the parts of Mozart, Haydn and all the early "classical" composers.

Little further progress was made till the valve trumpet began to be used in some orchestras soon after 1830, and then, but not till then, did the trumpet begin to take its place as the upper voice in association with the harmony of trombones.

The very earliest trumpet parts are for instruments in either C or D, the changeable shank being known, at all events, as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. Other shanks appeared gradually during the eighteenth century, till, just before the advent of

the valve trumpet, a whole collection comprising the keys of low B flat, C, D, E flat, E and F were in general use, and others in low A, B natural, D flat, G and G flat, and even in high A and A flat, were used less commonly. With the increasing use of the valve the shanks used gradually decreased in number till the close of the last century, when only trumpets in high B flat, high A and F remained. The practice of muting trumpets was known at least as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century and had the effect of raising the pitch of the instrument one tone.

The use of the French horn in the orchestra dates from very early in the eighteenth century. A few isolated parts for hunting horns may be found in seventeenth century scores, such as, for example, the parts in Lulli's *La Princesse d'Elide* (1664), and two still earlier, but doubtful, cases in an opera by Cavalli dated 1639, also a part for "coarse horn" in a German *Singspiel* (1644) by J. G. Staden. Such as these, however, must be counted as exceptional; but when Keiser (in 1705), Handel and A. Scarlatti (in 1715) began writing occasional horn parts in their opera scores, these instruments, as it transpired, had joined the orchestral family for good. Mattheson, in his "Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre" (1713), writes that "Waldhörner have lately come into use for church, theatre and chamber music." There can be no doubt as to the welcome extended to the newcomer, for by about 1725 horn parts had become quite common in Italian and German scores, and had only a few years to wait before they gained admittance into the opera orchestra at Paris.

The very earliest horn parts are more or less melodic and florid in style, and, indeed, became more and more florid as time went on. This lively style of horn part prevailed during the Bach-Handel period and was, in its activity, not unlike the *clarino* style of trumpet part. The beginning of the change to the less active Mozart-Haydn style of horn part can be discerned in the works of the transition composers, such as Hasse, the two Grauns, Telemann and Schürmann amongst the Germans, and Rameau as representing the transition in France. The "classical" type of horn part is too well known to require any comment beyond that it was less florid and lower in pitch than the earlier eighteenth century type. The next development came consequent on the discovery by Hampel about 1760 of the possibility of producing certain chromatic notes by means of what is known as "stopping" the horn. Up till then, and before "stopping" came into general use, the horn appears to have been held in hunting-fashion with the bell upwards. In spite of Hampel's discovery in the eighteenth century, stopped notes do not often occur in scores till the period of Beethoven and Schubert.

As in the case of trumpets, the invention of the lengthening-valve by Stölzel and Bluhmel about 1814 was destined in the end to drive the hand-horn completely out of the orchestra; but something like half a century had to elapse before the victory of the valve-horn could be reckoned quite complete. The first valve-horn parts began to appear in full scores about 1830 to 1835, yet many composers, including Mendelssohn and even Berlioz, were still obliged to write for the old instruments, with, however, a free use of chromatic stopped notes.

The earliest horn parts show that the instruments were commonly pitched in the key of F, but Keiser's "Octavia" parts are for C horns, Handel's "Radamisto" parts for D horns, and Mattheson mentions also a horn in G. These four keys appear fairly consistently till about 1740, after which time the available number of crooks quickly multiplied, till, by the end of the century, a whole array, covering practically every semitone from low B flat to high C, were liable to be demanded. The use of the valve actually did away with the necessity for frequent change of crook, and finally gave the horn what is practically a fixed length of about 12 ft., sounding the open notes of the harmonic series of F.

The story of the only remaining member of the brass family in the orchestra, the tuba, is comparatively short. Even eighteenth century composers seemed to feel the want of a low wind voice which should be more powerful than the bassoon and, at the same time, more flexible than the bass trombone. Their choice fell on the serpent, a low-pitched member of the old *cornetti*, and on its lineal successor the ophicleide. During the first half of the nineteenth century either the serpent or the ophicleide fulfilled this want in opera and oratorio orchestras, till the invention and development of the lengthening valve brought into being a new type of instrument, the low-pitched saxhorn, called tuba or bombardon. Shortly after the mid-century the tuba began to establish itself in place of the ophicleide in the opera orchestra, and finally found its way as a companion to the trombone trio into the realm of concert and symphonic music.

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