

CORRESPONDENCE

Antique Trumpet Mutes

Many thanks for editing and publishing a publication as interesting and scholarly as the Historic Brass Society Journal I particularly enjoyed the articles "Antique Trumpet Mutes" by Jindřich Keller and "Antique Trumpet Mutes; A Retrospective Commentary" by Don Smithers in Vol. 2, 1990. The mystery of the transposition caused by the use of 17th and 18th century mutes seems to be insoluble. Was it a whole or a half-tone transposition?

Don Smithers, in footnote 15 on page 110, concludes from a reading of the English translation of Mozart's letters by Emily Anderson¹ that "the use of muted trumpets was becoming a thing of the past for most composers and orchestras, at least in Munich." Unfortunately, a reading from this translation alone gives a false picture of Leopold Mozart's and perhaps by extension, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's ideas about trumpet mutes.

Leopold Mozart, in a letter of Wolfgang Amadeus from Salzburg on Dec. 7, 1780, says in regard to the trumpet mutes that his son is looking for to use in *Idomeneo*,² "...Die Haupsache kommt ja ohnehin nur auf die Trompeter Thunlich ist, wieweil sie den Kessel nahe bey der Hand haben, alle Waldhornisten wissen so einem piano vortheil. ..." (English translation: "The main thing anyway is the trumpet mutes. That is something strange and new. Hornists have always been able to play such a piano and to help by putting a handkerchief in the bell. It is easier with the horn than the trumpet because the bell is near the hand. All hornists know the advantage of such a piano.") This passage, not found in the translation of Emily Anderson, certainly gives the impression that Leopold Mozart views the use of trumpet mutes as something new, not the end of an old tradition. Leopold's picture of the trumpet mute as something "strange and new" indicates that the tradition of the use of mutes did not exist in his lifetime and/or musical circles and he views the use of trumpet mutes as an orchestral innovation.

The transposition of trumpet mutes at this time is further complicated by the use of mutes in *Idomeneo*. The March, No. 14 in Act II of *Idomeneo* requires the trumpets to play the March, first *con sordino* and then without pause on the repeat, to remove the mute and play *senza sordino*. There is no time to change trumpets or crooks to keep the pitch of the open trumpet the same as the pitch of the muted trumpet. This passage could only have been played with the use of a non-transposing mute. Thus, along with the existing mutes that only transpose a half-tone and the whole-tone mutes indicated in most sources, we have a third possibility. Does a non-transposing mute from Mozart's time exist?

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1. *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, translated by Emily Anderson, Vol. II, 1938, revised London 1985.

2. Mozart, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, Vol. III. Kassel, Bärenreiter, 1963.

More on Mutes

In "Antique Trumpet Mutes: A Retrospective Commentary" (Journal II, pp. 104-111), Don L. Smithers has proposed a more widespread use of the muted trumpet in musical performances of the 17th and 18th centuries than one might expect from the surviving musical sources. In so doing, he has referred to a number of theoretical writings and musical compositions in support of his argument. His conclusion is challenging and thought-provoking. However, it is unfortunate that a number of errors of fact and of omission are found in the article, which must be taken into account before the proposal may be properly assessed.

The first concerns the writings and compositions of Michael Praetorius. Although Praetorius noted, in *Syntagma Musicum* ii, that boy sopranos could be trained to sing as high as g" and a" and thus participate in his "Erster Art" compositions with trumpets and timpani—*In dulci jubilo*, *Nu lob mein Seel' den Herren* and *Allein Gott in der Höh sey Ehr*, of which the first two survive¹—he qualified this in paragraph 28 of the *Ordinantz* to the *Polyhymnia Caduceatrix & Panegyrica* and suggested that "since in the 34th piece, *In dulci jubilo*, the soprano part is very high and ascends very often to a" and one seldom has three boys who can reach all these high [notes], it is better, then, that it be performed one tone lower in Bb major: then trombone crooks of one whole-tone can be placed onto the trumpets so that they sound correctly one tone lower."² Performance in Bb major was suggested to facilitate boy soprano singers, not "some young trumpeters [who] might have difficulties playing this work in C major" as Smithers claims in footnote 6, by mistranslating paragraph 16 of the same *Ordinantz*, the first half of which contains the same information as paragraph 28. Moreover, in *Syntagma Musicum* ii he states that "these compositions are arranged so that five, six, or seven trumpeters, with, or without one timpanist ... may be used"³ and even suggests performance by "a trio with 2 *Clarien* and one *Quinta* (that is, *Principal*)" after the manner of Michael Altenburg's collection *Gaudium Christianum* (Jena, 1617),⁴ but not "either with four or six trumpets" as is also claimed in footnote 6.

Despite the assertion that "Speer said nothing about the mute whatsoever," he actually wrote, on p. 219 of the *Grundrichtiger Unterricht*, that "if one wishes the trumpet sound to be more delicate, then a mute that is placed into the bell should be used so that it sounds one tone higher and as if one were in the distance; but if one places a crook on it the pitch will fall by one tone to Bb, which is also somewhat easier in blowing, against which it is more difficult to blow with the mute."⁵

Concerning the *Toccata* to Monteverdi's *l'Orfeo*, the indication "Vn Clarino contre trombe sordine" given in the printed instrument list leads Smithers to conclude in footnote 10 that "only the lower trumpets were to have been muted, the 'Clarino' not," and to ask if "a *clarino* [was] a high-pitched instrument, perhaps made differently than other trumpets?" However, the list of "stromenti" is unreliable: four trombones, two chitarroni, one regal and one recorder are mentioned in the list, yet five trombones, three chitarroni, two regals, two recorders and ceteroni are required by scoring indications in the music itself. The *Toccata* is itself set for the standard late Renaissance/early Baroque five-part trumpet ensemble, and the scoring indication should read "Vn Clarino[,] quattro trombe sordine." At this time terms such as "clarino" merely indicated range. The famous trumpeter, cornettist and composer Alessandro Orologio, for example, described "the upper voice of this instrument [i.e., the trumpet]" as that "which they call *Clarín* in Germany,"⁶ and neither he nor anyone after him mentions any difference in pitch between the "clarino" and the trumpets used for the lower parts. However, trumpets were usually supplied in sets at this time, and there is evidence that these sets may have included instruments designed for particular ranges. Jean Nicot stated, in 1621, that "it is usual for a trumpeter to 'clairon' [i.e., to play in the high register] and to 'trumpet' [i.e., to play in the low register] on the same trumpet by reinforcing the air pressure or by not forcing it to the utmost, [respectively,] but the Clairon in earlier times ... had narrower tubing than the trumpets,"⁷ and an entry in a Stuttgart musical instrument inventory of 1589 mentions "two trumpets for playing 'niider' and 'grob' at court."⁸

Praetorius explained the use of the one-tone crook to lower the pitch of the older military trumpet to Cammerton C in *Syntagma Musicum* ii, and described how it could be employed on a trumpet already pitched in Cammerton C, and also how it could be used in conjunction with the transposing mute to permit a softer performance at the instrument's usual pitch, in paragraph 16 of the *Ordinantz* to the *Polyhymnia Caduceatrix & Panegyrica*. However, despite Smithers' footnote 13, Praetorius did not suggest that trumpets already crooked down from Chorthon to Cammerthon C were further crooked down to Bb. He merely wrote that "some prefer that they [i.e. trumpets] be used one half- or one whole-tone, lower [than their usual pitch of C], in Bb,"⁹ He did state, however, that trumpets could be crooked down by a fourth, both on p. 175 of *Syntagma Musicum* iii and in the first direction printed before the second piece of the *Puericinium* collection of 1621, the former statement being a compressed version of the latter. *Quem pastores laudavere, Frewt euch ihr lieben Christen* and *Ubi Rex est Gloriarum*, which are all in F major, "may be raised by a tone into G major so that they may sound brighter. And then, particularly in the chorus section *Geborn ist Gottes Söhnlein* of the second piece [*Frewt*

euch ihr lieben Christen], one or two trumpets may be added [on the chorale melody]. But as this is a perfect fourth lower than the trumpet pitch, I would have a two-and-one-half-tone crook (as is often placed on the trombones) placed on the trumpets so that the correct pitch in *G sol re ut* may result."¹⁰

Praetorius was not the first to crook trumpets down by a fourth, either! The *Tutta l'arte della trombetta* of Cesare Bendinelli includes "a sonata with three Clarini for Christmas Day, made by commission of the Most Serene Duke Wilhelm in 1588".¹¹ The clarino part, exceptionally, is given. It is notated a fourth lower than usual, in G major, is also based on a Christmas hymn, in this case *Joseph, lieber Joseph mein*, and requires that the trumpets be crooked with a two-and-one-half-tone crook. (Bendinelli implies that three clarini play this part in unison.) The second part appears to be written in the Principal trumpet range (c', e', g' and c"), but Bendinelli has added "questo serue p. alto e basso alla di sopra Sonatta." When the part is played on a similarly crooked trumpet the pitches fall to g, b, d' and g', and all of these are within the limits of the *alto e basso* range (from g to g'). The third part, for Vulgano, sounds a rhythmic drone on the pitch g and can be played on either a crooked or an uncrooked trumpet for the pitch is available on both.¹² Thus it must be that crooking by up to a fourth was not unusual at the turn of the 17th century. Incidentally, it also indicates that trumpeters were able to perform chorale melodies at congregational pitches at this time without there being a need for any movable slide mechanisms whatsoever.

Finally, privileged tones are no new phenomenon. Mersenne was well acquainted with them and discussed them in his *Harmonicorum*¹³ and *Harmonie Universelle*.¹⁴ He indicated that there were three privileged tones, one a perfect fourth below harmonic 1, another a minor third below that harmonic, and a third a minor third below harmonic 2, and added that "the four notes lower [than harmonic 2, which are] marked by 9, 4, 2 and 1, do not sound well and are worthless for performance. However, it must be remarked that all those who know how to play this instrument usually descend directly from this note marked 11 [harmonic 2] to the note marked 4 [harmonic 1], which is one octave lower, and that i have only met one person who could make the three other notes marked by 9, 2 and 1 [the three privileged notes]."¹⁵ That is, despite what Smithers states in footnote 19, there is no evidence for the use of privileged harmonics to supply the note a perfect fifth above harmonic 1 on a trumpet — rather the opposite, in fact. Nor is there any evidence that late Renaissance or early Baroque trumpeters found it impossible to perform the second harmonic when using a mute. As Smithers himself noted, Praetorius did recommend the use of muted trumpets for the performance of *In dulci jubilo* without any qualification whatsoever, and one of the trumpet players — the Grob — had to play harmonic 2.

In conclusion, it must be that the surviving mutes are unrepresentative for the period under consideration, that our present knowledge of natural trumpet performance practice has not yet reached the heights that existed during the Renaissance and Baroque, and that the consistent and corroborating evidence of all of our sources of information from the period under consideration — both theoretical and practical — must be

accepted unless *prima facie* evidence of some conspiracy theory can be found. It must be concluded, then, that crooks of up to a perfect fourth were being employed from as early as 1588, that late Renaissance and Baroque mutes did raise the pitch of the trumpet by one tone, that the trumpet was generally played without a mute and that, when a mute was to be employed for a particular piece of music, the occurrence was rare enough for specific directions to be given by the composer.

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1. Wolfenbüttel, 1618, p. 157.

2. Wolfenbüttel, 1619: "Dieweil in dem XXXIV (*In dulci jubilo*:) die *Discant* gar zu hoch / vnd sehr oft ins oberste *alamire* hinauff steigen / vnd man selten drey Knaben / so alle diese höhe erreichen / haben kan: So ist es besser / daß es vmb einen Thon tieffer / außm *B musicirt* werde: So man dann die Krumbbügel von den Posaunen / so einen gantzen Thon halten / vff die Trommeten stecken kan / daß sie vmb einen Thon tieffer / recht mit einstimmen können."

3. Wolfenbüttel, 1619, p. 170: "Es sind aber diese Concert-Gesänge also vnd dergestalt anzuordnen / daß fünff / sechs oder sieben Trommeter neben oder ohne einem Heerpauker ... gestellt werden."

4. "... auch noch wol mit 2. *Clarien* vnd einer *Quinta* (daß ist / *Principal*) ein *Trium* darzu gemacht werde..." Bach's normal trumpet group consisting of two *Clarini* and one *Principal* stems from the practice first met in Michael Altenburg's works, which was common in Lutheran Germany, rather than for the reason implied in Smithers' footnote 18: see below.

5. Ulm, 1697: "Verlangt man aber den Trompeten-Schall in subtilem Gehör / so gebrauchte man sich eines Sertins / das man in Hauptstück stecket / so lautet es um einen Thon höher / und gleichsam / ob man von ferne wäre; setzt man aber einen Krumbogen darauf / so kommt der Thon von einem Thon nidriger / nemlich ins *b mol*, ist auch um etwas leichter im Blasen / dahingegen es mit dem Sertin schwerer zu blasen fället."

6. Copenhagen, Rigsarkivet, TKUA Alm del 58, a letter to King Christian IV of Denmark dated Oct. 12, 1599: "...superiorem huius instrumentj vocem, quam Germanico jdiomate *Clarini* appellitant..." The complete text may be found in MfMg xxxi (1899), pp. 43-4.

7. *Thésor de la Langve Francoise* (Paris, 2nd edn 1621; facs Paris, 1960), p. 12: "On void toutesfois qu'un trompette claironne & trompe, d'une mesme trompette, quand il renforce son vent, ou ne l'efforce tant à outrance, mais le clairon anciennement ... estoit de tuyau plus estroit que les trompetes."

8. Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, A282 Bu 1711, f 1: "Zwo trommetes, so zu dem Hoffgestilm zu niider, vnnd zu grob..."

9. Syntagma musicum ii, p. 33: "Etlichen aber gefelts / das sie noch vmb ein halben oder gantzen Thon tieffer in B gebracht werden."

10. Frankfurt, 1621: "Dieser ... Concert-Gasang, können vmb einen Ton höher aussm *G# fictè* musicirt werden: So lassen sie sich etwas frischer anhören. Und als dann kann man, sonderlich im andern, in *Pleno Choro* (Geborn ist Gottes Söhnelein) mit einer oder zwo Trommeten einstimmen. Weil es aber vmb eine *Quart* niedriger ist, als der Trommeten Ton, so hab ich zween gantze und ein halben Krumbbügel (so man sonsten vff die posaunen zu stecken pflegt) auf die Trommeten stecken lassen, so gibt es einen rechten ton ins *G sol re ut*."

11. 1614 (facsimile edition Kassel/Basle, 1975), Sonata number 328, fol. 53v: "una Sonata fatta con trei Chlarini — per Comision del Sen:mo Duca gulielmo del 1588. per il giorno di nottale."

12. An additional Alto e Basso part follows in the manuscript, but it is so much in error that Bendinelli abandoned it after a few bars.

13. Paris, 1635, pp. 108-9.

14. Paris, 1636 (facsimile Paris, 1965) pp. 267-8.

15. *Harmonie Universelle*, p. 268: "les quatre notes plus basses marquées par 9, 4, 2, 1, ne font pas de bons tons, & ne valent rien pour chanter. Il faut neantmoins remarquer que tous ceux qui sçauent sonner de cet instrument, descendent ordinairement tout d'un coup depuis dette note marquée 11, iusques à la note marquée de 4, qui fait l'Octaue en bas, & que ie n'en ay rencontré qu'un, qui aye fait les trois autres notes marquées par 9, 2 & 1."