

SENSATION OR FORGERY? THE 1677 SOPRANO TROMBONE OF CRISTIANN KOF AHL

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(Translated by Howard Weiner)

About two years ago the Musica Kremsmünster Society (which since the spring of 1996 has been responsible for and has exhibited the museum holdings of the Streitwieser Foundation in Schloss Kremsegg at Kremsmünster, Austria) purchased an unusual instrument that until then had been unknown to the public, and has since provided for controversial discussion among organologists. The instrument in question is the oldest surviving soprano trombone. It was made in 1677, according to the inscription on the garland, and has come down to us in remarkably good condition (Figure 1). The instrument was displayed in public for the first time from July to October 1999 in the exhibition “Für Aug’ und Ohr’ Musik in Kunst- und Wunderkammern” in Schloss Ambras near Innsbruck, and is now in the Musical Instrument Museum in Kremsegg.

The trombone is 1320mm long (without mouthpiece), of which 778mm are taken up by the slide (measured up to the beginning of the bell section), and 542mm by the bell section. The barely flared, cone-like bell has a length of 235mm (measured from the middle of the last ferrule to the opening) and expands from ca. 13mm (exterior) to a final diameter of 74.5mm. The engraving on the garland reads (from the play’s viewpoint), “CristiaNN KOFAHL : 1677” (Figures 2, 3). The garland itself was attached by bending the edge of the bell outwards. The upper bow is cylindrical. Attached to the middle of the upper bow is an eyelet (Figure 4). The bell section is stabilized by a richly engraved cross-stay in the typical Baroque style, which is fastened to the bell by a hinge. The nicely turned hinge-pin is of brass (Figure 5).

The first thing that attracts attention as being unusual on the slide is the presence of a crested protective cap on the slide bow (Figure 6). The two inner slide tubes have differing diameters: the descending tube (10.45mm) is wider than the ascending tube (10.1mm). This unusual state of affairs leads to speculation that the two tubes—whenever or wherever—were possibly switched (Figure 7). All the parts have been solidly soldered together—undoubtedly in the course of a restoration.

Little is known of the maker. Documents exist showing the Kufahls (Kofahl is a Low-German variant of this name) to have been a widely branched family of musicians in the Mecklenburg region (northeastern Germany) over many generations. On 14 August 1677, Christian Kofahl received a license to work as *Kunstpfeifer* at weddings and other celebrations in the administrative district and in the town of Grabow. On 31 October 1681, this license was extended to include the Eldena district. His estate, which included several instruments, was probated in 1693. This scanty information is found in documents from

the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern State Archive, Schwerin. According to a communication from the archivist, the archive holds further material on Kofahl and his family that remains to be examined. It is therefore possible that the future will bring to light many interesting details. The name Kofahl could be a German variant of the very common Polish name Kovalsky/Kowalski, which means “blacksmith.”

As already mentioned, the sudden appearance of the instrument has provoked discussions culminating in the suspicion that it could be a forgery. I would not presume to pass judgement in this question, but I did have the opportunity to measure the instrument carefully; in spite of its nearly perfect condition, it made an entirely “old” impression on me. Moreover, if I were ever to receive a commission to forge an instrument (inquiries will be dealt with in strict confidence!), I would never dream of using the name of a town wait from Mecklenburg, whose life possibly left only rudimentary traces in the Schwerin State Archive—traces that could only be discovered by means of a single reference to the family name in a monograph, published in 1913, in Schwerin about the Mecklenburg-Schwerin *Hofkapelle*.

Lars Laubhold is a brass instrument craftsman and a restorer of historical brass instruments. He worked for several years for the brass-instrument maker Jürgen Voigt of Markneukirchen, Germany. Recently he has operated a branch of Voigt's concern on the grounds of Schloss Kremsegg near Kremsmünster, Austria and has undertaken restoration work for the Musical Instrument Museum. In the fall of 2000 he began studies in musicology at the University of Salzburg.



Figure 1

Detail of Figure 2.

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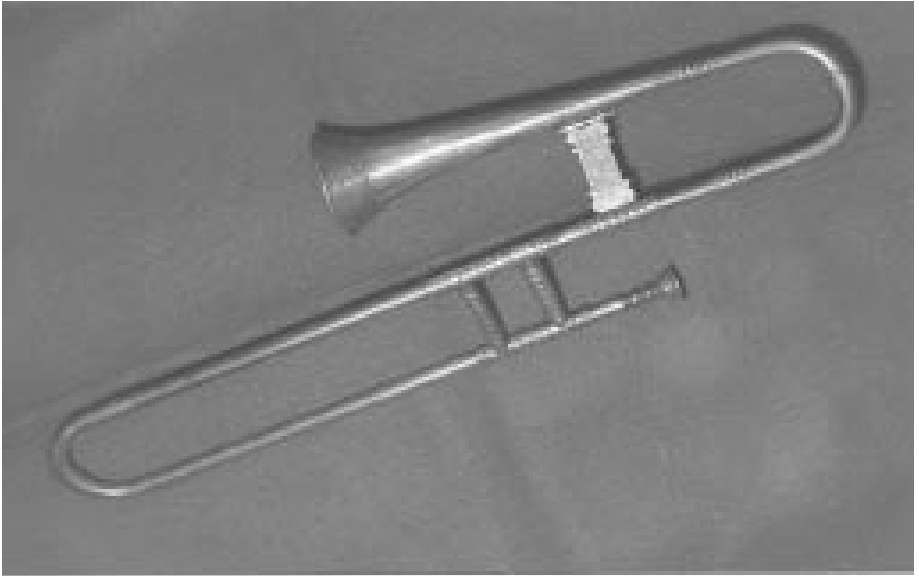


Figure 2

Soprano trombone by Christian Kofahl, 1677.

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Figure 3

Detail of Figure 2.

(Photo by Lars Laubhold. Reproduced by permission.)

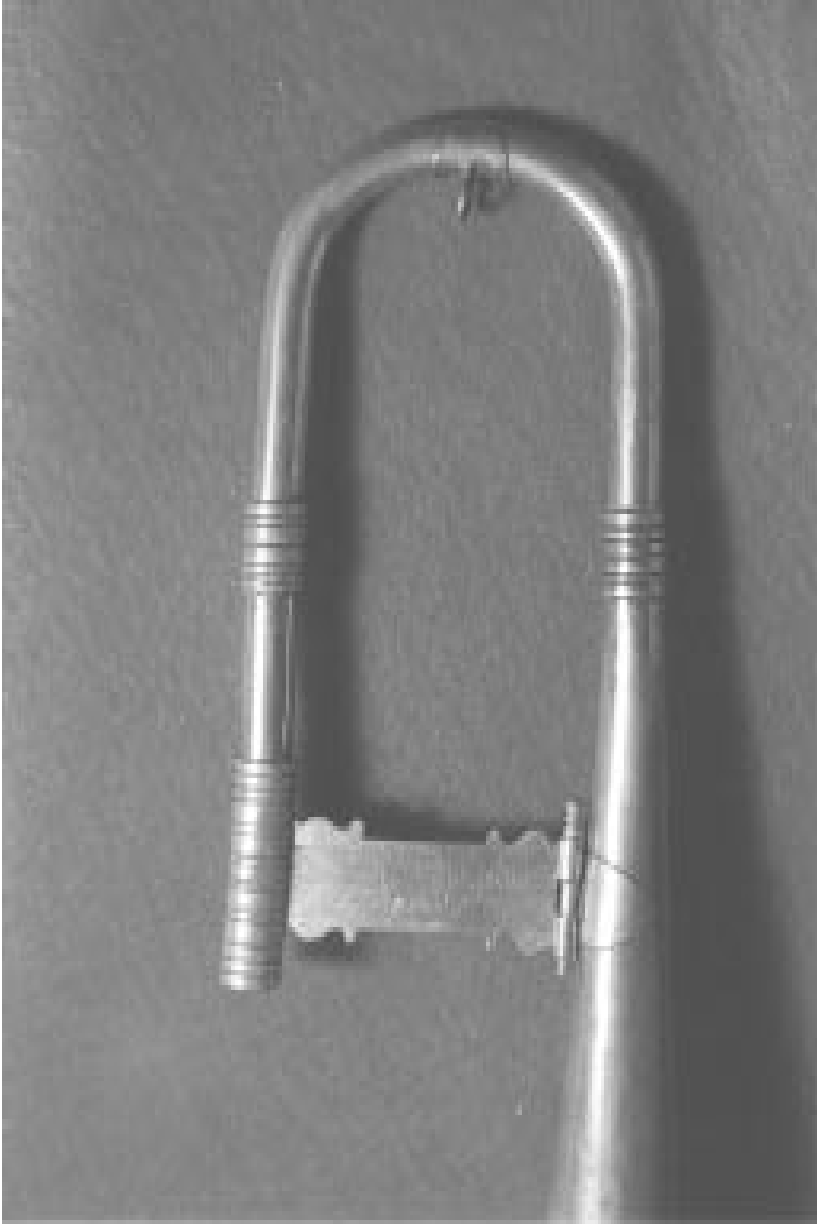


Figure 4

Detail of Figure 2.

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Figure 5

Detail of Figure 2.

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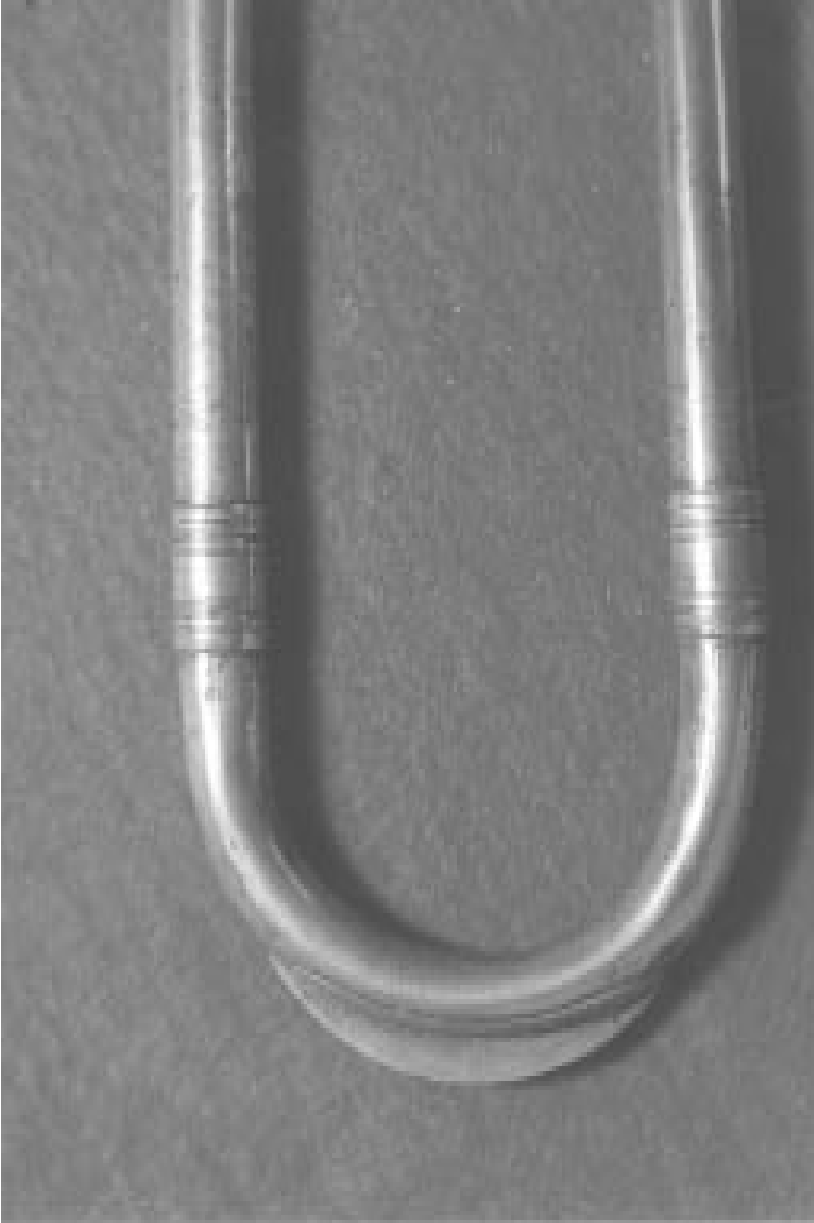


Figure 6

Detail of Figure 2.

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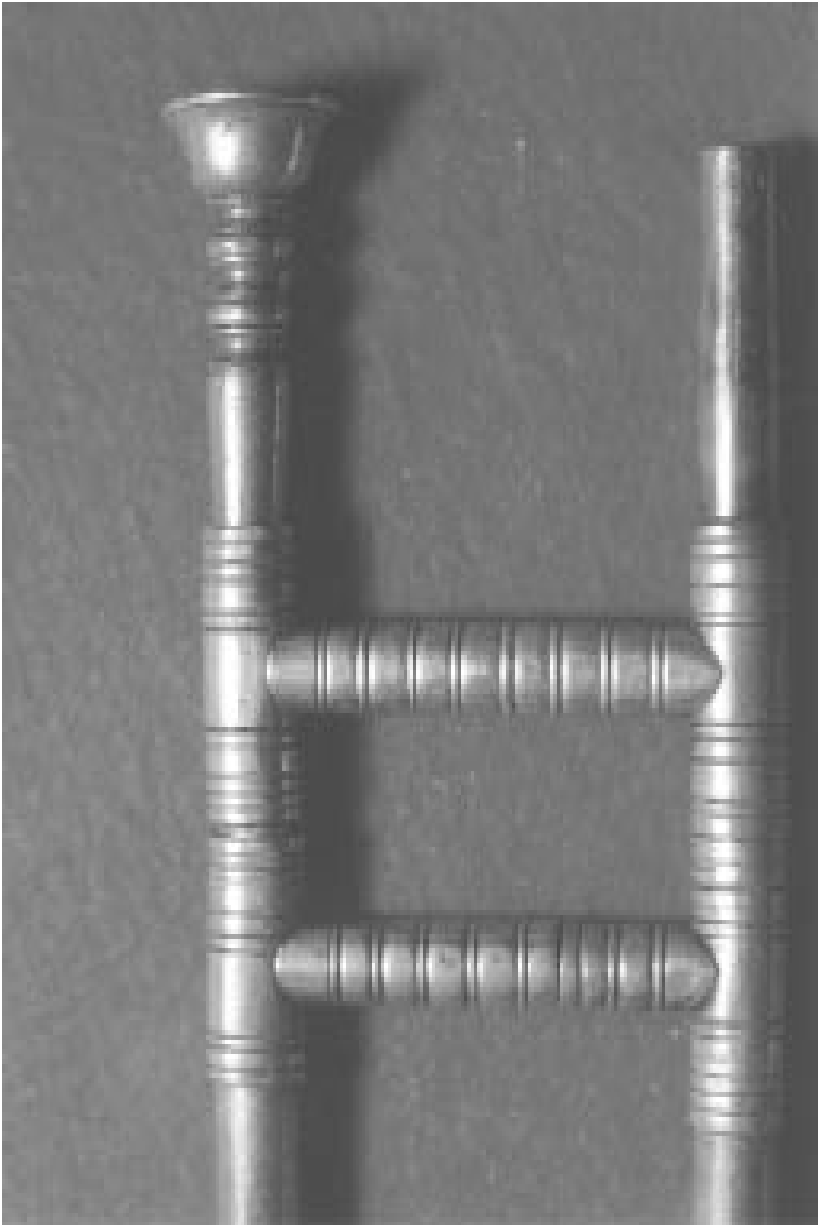


Figure 7

Detail of Figure 2

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