

A History of Trombone before the 20th Century
Focusing on the Spread of the Trombone around the World

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Antiquity to the Middle Ages

- The earliest examples of brass instruments are most closely related to the horn or trumpet. They are found in various regions of the world, most notably in the Early Roman Empire and Egypt.
- The earliest form of the trumpet dates back to nearly 10,000 BC in Ancient Rome.



(Roman Cornu, 200 AD)

- Examples of these early brass instruments include the Roman *Cornu*, *Lituus*, and *Buccina*, the Greek *salpinx*, The Scandinavian *Lur*, and the Hebrew *Shofar*.
- In antiquity, these brass instruments were often used as hunting horns, or to signify important people or events (particularly in the Early Roman Empire.) Other uses included war-horns.



(In the back left of this image, in Ancient Rome a man is depicted playing an early brass instrument, most likely a *lituus*, an early war horn.)

- It is important to note that these instruments were not coated with “brass” as we understand the metal and its composition today, but they were likely created using wood or animal bones/horns and coated in bronze.
- As time passed, metal instruments became more sophisticated. Ancestors to the modern trumpet and horn are very prominent. Metal instruments begin to have curves and began to resemble more modern instruments that we may see today.
- These early metal instruments were lacking in their ability to change notes- with no modern valves instrumentalists were forced to stay in one partial, or put their hands in the instruments bell to change notes. Some early trumpets used different sized crooks to alter notes, and eventually a slide function was added to further adjust pitch and add more notes to the instrument’s range. It is here, in the fifteenth century, that we see the bones of the modern trombone.

The Trombone in the 15th Century

- It is here in the 15th century that most scholars agree that the first “trombone” is truly seen. There are arguments as to whether the trombone was truly invented in Germany, Northern Italy, or Southern France.
- The first trombones are seen in Italy and France, but it is believed by some that these were simply performance or manufacturing areas.
- In the first two decades of the 1400’s, the trombone is spotted in various locations around Italy, Germany, Hungary, and France. It is easily accepted into the performance scene, and payment records from various German cities show that there were professional trombone players at this time.
- In 1439 in Italy, the first reference to the word “trombone” is made.
- As the 1400’s progressed, trombones seemed to be used as bass parts in contrapuntal music.
- As time progresses into the mid 1400’s, the trombone begins to pop up in areas like Belgium, Austria, and many more cities in Germany and Italy. This shows that the trombone was becoming a widely popular instrument.
- In 1460, “sackbut” becomes the common term for trombone.
- Progressing into the later part of the 1400’s, the trombone has been used in wind bands, sacred and secular settings, at parties, weddings, and other events of great importance.



(Depiction of what a sackbut likely looked like during this time period.)

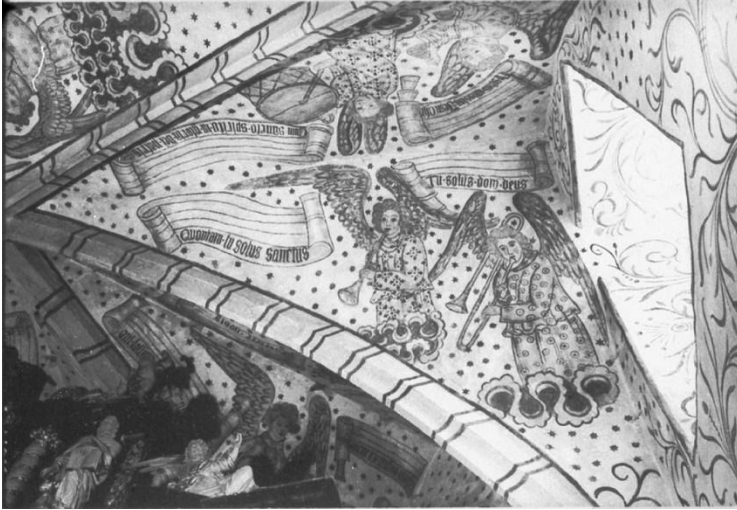
- In 1474, a trombone is first seen in the Netherlands.
- Sometime between 1488 and 1493, what is considered the earliest reliable artistic depiction of the trombone is painted in the Church of Santa Maria in Rome, Italy



(Close up depiction of this image in the Church of Santa Maria.)

- In 1490, the trombone is seen in London, England.
- In 1497, a man named Hans Neuschel is honored as the first recorded maker of the trombone in Nuremberg, Germany.
- As the fifteenth century draws to a close, trombones were now used in a variety of ensembles, including vocal based groups. The trombone is described as having a less flared bell, with an

“ideal timbre” for working with the human voice. Most historians accredit the Neuschel family of Nuremberg with the technological advancements to the trombone/ sackbut that occurred in the fifteenth century.



(Image of an angel playing trombone.)

(Image of an angel playing

The Trombone in the Sixteenth Century

- In 1503, the trombone is first seen in Spain.
- In 1520, the trombone is first seen in Portugal.
- In Portugal in 1520, the first artistic depiction of a black trombonist is shown.



This can possibly be due to Portugal’s rapidly growing trading empire at this point in history. In the early sixteenth century, Portugal has trading ports in two coastal areas of East Africa, Mozambique and Zanzibar. With these trading ports, also comes the Portuguese slave trade. Though we cannot know for certain the life and identity of the man depicted in this painting, we do know that Portugal was acquainted with Africa at the time of its creation.

- Also, in 1520, the first artistic depiction of a female trombonist is shown in Rome, Italy. The painting is titled *Apollo with the Muses*, and one of the muses is seen playing the trombone. This is the first time that a woman has been depicted in a piece of art playing trombone, however it can be assumed that men were not the only trombonists prior to this depiction.



- The early sixteenth century is the first time that individuals other than white European men are shown playing the trombone. Though we only have art to go off of, we can possibly assume that women and men of other nationalities were also trombonists, they just were not usually painted.
- In 1541, the trombone is seen in Prussia (Now Russia). By the mid 1500's, the trombone has reached many areas of Europe at this point, including Denmark, Poland, and Romania.
- In 1545, the current king of England (Henry VIII), purchases 5 bass sackbuts and one tenor sackbut from Neuschel, showing that the trombone is present in some of the highest courts in Europe and beyond. When Henry VIII dies in 1547, a sackbut consort plays at his funeral.
- Sometime between 1550 and 1556, a stone carving at a chapel in Huejotzingo, Puebla, Mexico is found to have carvings of two trombone players. They are both depicted as angels.



In the mid 1500's, Spain has colonized much of Mexico and European influence is very present. Since trombones were seen in Spain as early as 1503, it can be assumed that Spanish colonizers brought the instrument overseas. This is perhaps the first instance of the trombone in the New World, and the second region outside of Europe to possibly have non-white trombonists, besides various parts of Africa. This is also perhaps the first instance of Aboriginal Native Americans (referring to the area of the world Mexico is located) came into contact with and played the trombone. Later on, in the sixteenth century (sometime between 1571 and 1596), it is mentioned that Mexico (at the time called *New Spain*) has more shawms, recorders, and trombones than anywhere in the world.

- In 1551, the oldest sackbut that still exists was made in Nuremberg, Germany. It is currently held at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum.

- In 1562, an embroidered tablecloth depicting an aristocratic woman playing the trombone is made. It can possibly be inferred that trombone was played regularly by women and men. Other artistic depictions of the time show women playing trombone in processions and at parties (not just as angels), so this is very possible.
- In 1576, the trombone is seen in Peru. This shows that trombone is now being played by the native people of the Americas, and that it has spread into many areas of Central and South America.
- In 1592, the trombone is seen in the Czech Republic.
- In 1597, Giovanni Gabrieli composes *Sacrae Symphoniae*, which calls for a huge amount of trombone use. Different pieces in this *symphoniae* call for two different choirs (both of which include 3 trombones), a piece with 2 trombones, and a piece with a remarkable 12 trombones. Historians describe the sackbut as “second only to the organ” in this particular composition.

The Trombone in the 17th Century

- In the early 17th century, the trombone is seen in Switzerland. This first evidence of the trombone in Switzerland is in a fresco (painting) on the church of San Martino. Since it is depicted in such a way, it can be inferred that the trombone was present in Switzerland for a decent amount of time before this painting.
- By the early 17th century, the trombone is flourishing in a majority of Europe and areas that would eventually become Russia. At the same time across the sea, it is rapidly spreading around Central and South America. There is also evidence of the trombone in various regions of Africa. The trombone is now also used in plays, street performances, and church orchestras.
- In 1600 in Venice, Italy, a performance is given by nuns at Ferrara’s San Vito. A number of the nuns are playing trombone in this performance, showing that women also played the trombone in sacred settings. Their playing was described as “graceful.”
- In 1608, the trombone is mentioned by renowned playwright William Shakespeare in *Coriolanus*.
- In 1627, the trombone is seen in Ireland. Due to its extensive use in England, it can be assumed that Ireland was exposed to the trombone prior to this date.



Various artwork of the time still often depicts angels playing trombone. This can possibly be due to the fact that the trombone is the only instrument that has been closely compared to “the voice of God”, largely due to its similar timbre to the human voice.

- In 1639, the oldest existing contrabass trombone is made in Stockholm, Sweden.
- In 1651, the trombone is seen in Colombia, South America.
- In 1661, the trombone is used in a piece written for King Charles the II of England’s coronation. The piece called for 3 sackbuts and 2 cornetts.
- In 1662, the trombone is seen in Norway.

- In 1674, an Indigenous man from Peru is shown playing the trombone.



- The use of trombone by indigenous peoples is on the rise throughout the 17th century. In 1677, trombones are now present in Oceania, specifically on the Mariana Islands. This is due to Spanish colonizers bringing the trombone there from Mexico.
- In 1697, a female group of 14 musicians performs in the Czech Republic. This group included one female trombonist. This is possibly one of the first known examples of an all women instrumental ensemble.
- In 1699, the trombone is seen in Ecuador.
- At the end of the 17th century, the trombone has now made its way into many more areas of Central and South America, and more remote areas of Europe. It is used in a large variety of ensembles, and at this point in time, many compositions that call for sackbut or are written specifically for large numbers of sackbut are commonplace.

The Trombone in the 18th Century

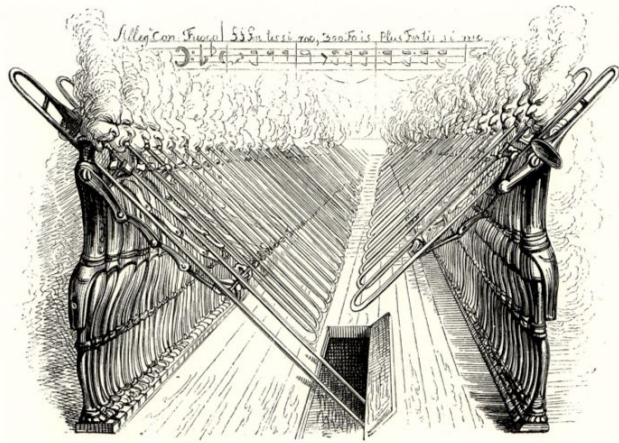
- In the 1700's, the world is well into what we call "The Baroque Period." Composers like Bach, Telemann, Biber, Fux, Handel, and many others are composing works for or including trombone.
- The trombone is still making its way around Europe and Central/South America.
- In 1740, the first major change is made to the sackbut. The bell is widened to produce a stronger sound.
- In 1749, the word "trombone" (not sackbut), is used to describe the instrument in an orchestra in France. This is also the earliest documented use of a trombone in a French orchestra.
- In 1750, the trombone is seen in areas of West Africa, as well as different regions of Asia.
- In 1754, the trombone is seen in what would soon become the United States of America. Four trombones are purchased from Europe to be used at a festival in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
- In 1755, the trombone is used to "ward off an Indian attack" in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The Native American tribe involved in the incident supposedly interpreted the sound of the trombone as a sign that the Great Spirit was intervening, and they called off their attack.
- In 1768, the trombone is seen in North Carolina.
- In 1782, the Moravian Trombone Choir of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania performs for General George Washington, who would eventually become the first president of the United States.



- In 1789, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart includes trombones in his arrangement of *Messiah*, originally composed by Handel.
- Throughout the 18th century, the trombone's use in the orchestra is gradually decreasing, favoring stringed instruments in the violin family over brass instruments. However, the trombone is still spreading rapidly around the world, and new compositions are written for it or including it nearly every year.
- By the end of the 18th century, the trombone has now made an appearance in the United States, now signifying the use of the trombone in the entire Western Hemisphere (it had been seen in Central and South America prior to the 18th century.)
- The trombone is now also used as a military instrument or a symbol of the military and is often used to signify the approach of soldier's or to use in their honor.
- The trombone has now also been seen by a few North American Native tribes.

The Trombone in the 19th Century

- As the century turns, the use of trombone in military bands is on the rise. The trombone is now used in military settings in Germany, France, England, and many other European countries.
- The trombone is now also spreading to various areas of Central and South America, as well as the newly formed United States. Trombones rapidly spread across Pennsylvania and into North Carolina and are now spreading to other areas of the continental United States.
- In 1832, the trombone is seen in New Orleans, Louisiana.
- In 1835, the trombone is seen in New York, New York. One New York trombonist, Felipe Cioffi leaves New York to go to New Orleans, Louisiana. He brings with him an entourage of talented musicians, and their goal is to join the St. Charles theater orchestra in New Orleans, which at the time was the largest concert hall in the United States. At this time, New Orleans is quickly becoming a cultural and musical hot spot in the United States.
- Ferdinand David writes his *Concertino* for trombone in 1837, and it is largely recognized as a staple work in the trombonist's repertoire.
- In 1840, the trombone is seen in Holland.
- In the 1840's, the trombone is seen in Brazil. In this instance, the trombone is being played in an orchestra on the Soldade Plantation. The orchestra consists entirely of African men brought to South America via the Slave trade. It was said that the trombone players played their instrument with "admirable skill and precision", suggesting that it was not uncommon for African men or South American slaves to have played instruments for many years prior.
- In 1841 in Paris, France the trombone was criticized by Hector Berlioz. Berlioz describes the trombone as "a barking hound" and says that a majority of their use in the orchestra was "unnecessary", and that the trombone should be reserved only for fanfares or "solemn prayers."



- In 1841, New Orleans trombonist Felipe Cioffi is considered “the best trombonist in America.”
- In 1842, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra starts its first season. The first three trombones of the New York Philharmonic are Tom Dodworth, W. Plain, and C. Schutz. They are each paid \$25 for their playing.
- In 1843, an alto trombone is manufactured in Berlin.
- In 1843, advertisements show the trombone in Boston, Massachusetts and Cleveland, Ohio.
- In 1844, one of the first American brass quartets is made in Boston, Massachusetts. The instrumentation is two B-flat bugles, one trombone, and an ophicleide (most similar to an early tuba.)
- Also, in 1844, Hector Berlioz now claims that the trombone is one of the noblest and grandest instruments of all. He describes his “dream orchestra” as having four alto trombones, six tenor trombones, and two bass trombones.
- In 1845, another depiction of a black man playing trombone is found in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.



- In the 1850's, large bore trombones begin to become more commonplace. Large bore bass trombones in F or B-flat are also becoming common.
- In France, trombones in b-flat with F attachments briefly appear in 1850. They use piston valves, instead of rotary valves. Valved trombones as we know them will not appear until 1900.
- Indigenous trombonists of Peru are depicted again in 1860, showing that the trombone is still very common in South America at this point in the 19th century.



- In 1864, the US Marine band employs four trombone players. One of these trombone players is Antonio Sousa, the father of composer John Philip Sousa.
- In 1865, a satirical image is published in a Parisian newspaper, making a social commentary on all female orchestras. In this image, one woman can be seen playing trombone. For a social commentary to be made on female musicians, it can be inferred that all female orchestras were relatively well-known.
- In 1873 in Germany, The Women's Orchestra of *Frau Amann-Weinlich* is drawn. This orchestra includes one female trombonist.
- In 1891, the trombone is seen in more areas of the US, including Illinois. The Chicago Symphony begins its first season this year and employs three trombonists.
- In 1895, New Orleans trombonist William Cornish becomes recognized as the first "jazz trombonist" in the United States. New Orleans, Louisiana was the birthplace of jazz and the trombone was starting to be established as one of the instruments in this genre.
- In 1896, the Moravian trombone choir of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania has been going on for over one hundred years, making it the longest running trombone choir in United States history.
- In 1898, the trombone is seen in Colorado. At this point in time, this is the furthest west the trombone has ever been in the United States.
- In 1898, the trombone is seen in New Zealand.
- In 1899, trombonist Marguerite Dufay is depicted in a somewhat negative way by artist Louis Anquetin in France. Marguerite Dufay is trailblazing the way for female trombonists in the 19th century. It is said that she performed at a large number of music halls and music cafes throughout Paris.



- In 1899, the trombone is seen in Toronto, Canada. However, it is written at this time by William Henderson that the trombone is "one of the most noble instruments in the Orchestra." For this to have been said, the trombone would have been well established in Canada at this time. The French colonized Canada in 1534, and the sackbut was a very well-known instrument in France at this time. It can be assumed that the sackbut or the trombone was brought to Canada sometime between 1534 and the 1800's.

- In the 19th century, the trombone has truly migrated far beyond its original territory. The trombone is now an established instrument in most orchestras, and it is also used in military bands, chamber music, circus troupes, and sacred performances.
- At the turn of the century, the trombone is coming closer and closer to looking like the modern trombone. Advancements made during the 19th century help this process.
- While a majority of artistic depictions and orchestra payrolls portray a certain vision of white men as trombonists, it is very evident that the trombone was an instrument played by all. Female trombonists, African trombonists, Indigenous Central and South American trombonists, and North American Native trombonists have been present throughout the instrument's history.

Where in the World is the Trombone?

1400's	1500's	1600's	1700's	1800's
Germany	Germany	Germany	Germany	USA
France	France	France	France	Brazil
Italy	Italy	Italy	Italy	Sweden
England	England	England	England	Asia
Hungary	Hungary	Hungary	Hungary	Canada
	Spain	Spain	Spain	New Zealand
	Portugal	Portugal	Portugal	Asia
	Mozambique	Mozambique	Mozambique	
	Zanzibar	Zanzibar	Zanzibar	
	Guinea	Guinea	Guinea	
	Peru	Peru	Peru	
	Mexico	Russia	Russia	
		Mexico	Mexico	
		Switzerland	Switzerland	
		Ireland	Ireland	
		Norway	Norway	
		Ecuador	Ecuador	
		Romania	Romania	
		Denmark	Denmark	
		Oceania	Oceania	

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