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The Romantic Trombone in Italy. Music, Treatises, Instruments

The development of the trombone and trombone playing in nineteenth-century Italy – less well-known than in German-speaking lands and France – deserves more attention. While Italian instrument makers were not leaders in the development of the valve trombone, Italian pedagogues churned out numerous method books for the instrument, many of which clearly demonstrate the transition from slide to valves. Italian composers such as Giovanni Simone Mayr and Giovanni Pacini produced compositions, both sacred and secular, that feature the trombone as an obbligato instrument, often in virtuoso fashion, while Giuseppe Verdi broke new ground in orchestral writing for the instrument. Verdi, working with the Pelitti firm of Milan, helped to develop a new valve instrument, the trombone contrabbasso Verdi, which essentially banished the tuba from the Italian orchestra until well into the twentieth century.

This ancient instrument [i.e., the trombone], neglected for many centuries, has retaken its place in the realm of music, and can be effective if employed with considerable caution. It reinforces the entire orchestra when doubling the bass line.¹

With these words, the Polish-Italian composer and music theorist Francesco Mirecki, writing around 1824, summed up the general opinion of Italian composers towards the trombone in the early nineteenth century. In that time, attitudes towards the trombone were beginning to change south of the Alps, and trombones ultimately became essential to the Italian orchestra. Italy could boast no famous trombone virtuoso of the likes of Friedrich August Belcke (1795–1874) or Carl Traugott Queisser (1800–1846) in Leipzig, or Antoine Dieppo (1808–1878) in Paris. The objectives of the present paper are (1) to describe the customary practices for the use of the trombone by Italian composers in the early nineteenth century; (2) to bring to light certain little-known Italian works that feature soloistic writing for the trombone; and (3) to offer evidence on the introduction of the valve trombone into Italy.

Gioachino Rossini

The compositions of Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868), the best-known composer of Italian opera in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, are an obvious choice for a baseline in determining the use of the trombone in Italy during that time. Rossini employed it only sparingly. The trombone part in the sinfonia to *La gazza ladra* (1817) is one of very few passages by an Italian composer from this period to appear in modern books of orchestral excerpts. It is an

¹ “Questo antico stromento negletto da tanti secoli ha ripreso il suo seggio nel regno dell’armonia, e riesce d’effetto quando con gran precauzione s’impieghi. Serve di rinforzo ad un’intera Orchestra raddoppiando le note del basso.” (Mirecki 1824, p. 14).



Fig. 1 Slight differences between the trombone (l. 5 from below) and cello/bass part (last line) in the sinfonia of Gioachino Rossini's opera *La gazza ladra* (Rossini 1817; Courtesy of Archivio Storico Ricordi, Milano).

interesting part of moderate difficulty, though it is typical in that the trombone merely doubles the cellos and basses. At the beginning of each phrase of the excerpt given in Figure 1 (sourced from Rossini's autograph), the triplets appear only in the strings, while the trombone has a rest. Some later editions of the score add the missing triplets to the trombone part, and this is how it appears in most books of orchestral excerpts for trombone that include this work.² Rossini wrote more demanding parts for the trombone in *Guillaume Tell* (1829), though it is notable that this opera was written for Paris, not for Italy.

Soloistic writing for the trombone

In general, composers rarely wrote soloistic parts for the orchestral trombone in the nineteenth century. Two Italian exceptions were the German-born Giovanni Simone Mayr (1763–1845) in Bergamo and Giovanni Pacini (1796–1867) in Lucca, though their works featuring the trombone are little known today.

Giovanni Simone Mayr's settings of *Tuba mirum*

Mayr was born Johann Simon Mayr in Bavaria. He moved to Bergamo in 1787, then moved on to Venice where he established himself as a rising young opera composer. In 1802 he returned

² This figure and its variants appear ten times in the sinfonia. The Eulenburg edition adds the triplets to the trombone part in four of these ten instances. See Rossini n.d., pp. 19–21, 39–41, and 57f.

to Bergamo, taking up the position of *maestro di cappella* at the city's leading church, the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. In the mid-1820s he gave up opera composition altogether, concentrating instead on sacred music and teaching. In around 1815 he founded a music school in Bergamo, the *Lezioni caritatevoli*. He translated several treatises on music into Italian for the students of the school and also wrote a few of his own. Among his didactic works is a manuscript entitled *Trattatello sopra agli stromenti ed istromentazione* ("Short treatise on Instruments and Instrumentation"),³ which includes a brief section on the trombone. His remarks are not particularly informative, though they do offer an indication of contemporary thinking about the trombone in Italy. He says:

If in [Rossini's] *Semiramide* the trombone part fills 20 pages; if this strong imposing instrument must, like a second violin, imitate the bass in eighth-notes; if every solo in the ballet must be accompanied by three trombones; then this very instrument has lost every importance, and we can only restore that to it by employing it rarely, and never solely as a means to generate noise. Rather, I would permit one bass trombone to reinforce the bass line, and mark it, since the majestic perfect chord should only appear thus and proceed slowly. Otherwise, how could the spirit of the Commendatore in *Don Giovanni* speak, [or] how should we make heard the voice of Thanatos [in Gluck's *Alceste*]?⁴

Mayr composed at least seven complete settings of the Requiem Mass, as well as some 100 settings of individual movements from it.⁵ Most of these were written late in his life, between 1824 and his death in 1845. Both of the obbligato parts he wrote for solo trombone in settings of the *Tuba mirum* clearly reveal the influence of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's (1756–1791) writing for trombone in the *Tuba mirum* of his own *Requiem* K.626. Mayr knew Mozart's *Requiem* well; he organised a performance of it in Bergamo in 1835.

The text of the *Tuba mirum* as set by most composers comprises five verses of the sequence *Dies irae*. Mozart's *Requiem* sets all the verses of the *Tuba mirum* (in the key of B-flat major), but uses an obbligato tenor trombone only in its first verse (Fig. 2). The first of Mayr's two settings of this text (Bergamo, Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai, ms. fald. 41/11) uses just the first two verses of the *Tuba mirum*. This version, in the key of E^b major, combines obbligato trombone with solo bass voice, just as in Mozart's setting, accompanied by an orchestra consisting of flute, clarinets, oboe, horns, trumpet, timpani and strings. The trombone plays throughout both verses, but soloistic passages are confined to the first verse. Figure 3 shows Mayr's setting of this verse in a reduced score showing only the parts for trombone, bass voice and violone. His obbligato part bears a certain similarity to Mozart's solo for tenor trombone, particularly in its outlines of triads and seventh chords (see, *inter alia*, Fig. 2, mm. 1–8). The range of the trombone part is quite modest, ascending no higher than e^b₁.

Mayr's second setting of this text (Bergamo, Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai, ms fald. 36/5) is a single movement from a complete Requiem mass, accompanied by wind instruments only. It is also in the key of E^b major, though the *Tuba mirum* is in g minor/G major. In addition to

3 Transcribed by Arrigo Gazzaniga in Mayr 1977, pp. 71–82.

4 "Se nella *Semiramide* la parte de' Tromboni importa 20 fogli, se questo forte, imponente strumento, al pari d'un secondo Violino deve imitarsi il Basso colle crome, se ne' balli ogni *a solo* viene accompagnato da tre tromboni, allora quest'istromento stesso ha perduto ogni importanza, e non si può ridargliela se non adoperandolo assai di rado, e giammai come solo mezzo di fare dello strepito. Piuttosto permetterei che un Trombone di Basso rinforzasse il basso, e lo marcasse, poiché il maestoso accordo perfetto non deve comparire se non che come tale e progredire lentamente. Come potrebbe altrimenti parlar lo spirito del Commendatore col Don Giovanni, come farsi sentire la voce del Tanato ad *Alceste*." (Ibid., p. 80. Transl. in Sisk 1986, p. 289).

5 See Calvi 1848.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows the solo trombone, basso solo, and violoncello and bass parts. The solo trombone part is in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. The basso solo and violoncello and bass parts are in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. The lyrics are: 'Tu - ba mi-rum spar-gens so - num per se - pul - chra re-gi-'. The second system continues the music, with the solo trombone part featuring a melodic line and the basso solo and violoncello and bass parts providing harmonic support. The lyrics are: 'o - num co-get om - nes an - te thro-num co-get om - nes an - te thro - num.' The third system continues the music, with the solo trombone part featuring a melodic line and the basso solo and violoncello and bass parts providing harmonic support. The lyrics are: 'o - num co-get om - nes an - te thro-num co-get om - nes an - te thro - num.'

Fig. 2 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *Requiem*, beginning of *Tuba mirum* (reduced), mm. 1–18.

the solo trombone obbligato in the *Tuba mirum* (see Fig. 4), there are obbligato parts for other wind instruments, including bassoon and horns. The trombone has the longest and arguably most significant obbligato part in this piece. It does not play at all in the movements preceding the *Tuba mirum*, but in contrast to Mayr's other setting of this text, the trombone obbligato here continues through to the fourth verse. It is also given an accompanying role throughout the remainder of the *Requiem*.

Mozart's writing for the trombone is generally more ambitious than Mayr's. He takes the trombone up to ab^b , whereas Mayr never exceeds eb^b in either of these two compositions. These two works, together with his writings on orchestration, suggest that Mayr did not have a great deal of confidence in his trombone players. His parts for this instrument are active and relatively interesting, but not virtuosic. To the best of my knowledge, these two settings of the *Tuba mirum* contain (with just one exception) the only obbligato parts for trombone that Mayr wrote in any of his more than 550 sacred compositions.⁶

Giovanni Pacini

Like Mayr, Giovanni Pacini is best known for his operas. He composed more than seventy of them, though they are largely unknown today. Originally from Sicily, he accepted an offer from Maria Luisa, Duchess of Lucca, to serve as her *maestro di cappella* from 1821 onwards. His operatic career thereafter took him to various parts of Italy, but he maintained close ties to Lucca for the rest of his life. In 1839 the Duke of Lucca appointed him Director of the ducal music school.

6 Ibid.

The Romantic Trombone in Italy

Trombone

Basso solo

Violone

8

14

19

26

33

40

44

Tu-ba mi-rum

Mi-rum spar-gens

so-num per se-pul-chra re-gi-o-num

co-get om-nes an-te thro-num co-get om-nes an-te thro-num Tu-ba

mi-rum spar-gens so-num per se-pul-cra re-gi-o-num

per se-pul-cra re-gi-o-nem co-get om-nes an-te thro-num

Fig. 3 Giovanni Simone Mayr: *Tuba mirum* in E^b major (beginning, reduced), mm. 1–48.

The image displays three pages of handwritten musical notation for Giovanni Simone Mayr's *Requiem*, specifically the *Tuba mirum* section, folios 27r-28r. The notation is in Italian and features various instruments including Flauto, Clarinetto, Fagotto, Corni, Trombe, Tromboni, Violini, Viola, and Contrabbasso. The music is written in a single system across three pages, with a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 3/4. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 4 Giovanni Simone Mayr: *Requiem*, Tuba mirum, fols. 27r-28r (Bergamo, Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai, ms fald. 36/5, www.internetculturale.it).

Table 1 Giovanni Pacini's compositions with soloistic parts for trombone (all in manuscript in Lucca, Biblioteca Diocesana "Mons. G. Agresti").

- B. 114. *Concertone* per Oboe, Clarinetto, Tromba e Trombone, E $\flat$ major (1855)
- B. 46. *Gran Concertone* per Flauto, Clarino [i.e., clarinet], Corno, Tromba e Trombone, B $\flat$ major
- B. 72. *Qui tollis* per Tenore, Clarino [clarinet] e Trombone obbligati, with orchestra, d minor
- B. 116. *Tre Domine* per due Bassi con Corni, Trombe e Tromboni obbligati, with orchestra, in e $\flat$ minor (1859)
- B. 123. *Virgam virtutis* per Basso e Trombone obbligato, with orchestra, F major (1861)

Five of Pacini's compositions – three sacred vocal works and two instrumental works – contain obbligato or soloistic parts for trombone (see Table 1). Three of these works bear dates between 1855 and 1861. If the two undated compositions fall in the same period, the trombonist for whom Pacini wrote them must have been Luigi Giorgi, who joined the orchestra of the Cappella Comunale di Lucca as first trombonist in 1847 and was still on the payroll in 1878.⁷ Two of these five works will be examined closely. Pacini's *Gran Concertone* in B $\flat$ major, scored for flute, clarinet, horn, trumpet and trombone, survives as a set of parts and in a short score featuring the bass line and the solo voices. This piece consists of twelve brief sections, with the solo trombone appearing in sections 4, 5, 6 and 12. Pacini's writing for the trombone is more ambitious than Mayr's. The trombone part for this piece has occasional trills, is replete with sixteenth notes, and ascends as high as ab^1 (Fig. 5).

Pacini's setting of *Qui tollis*, whose text is taken from the Gloria of the Latin Mass, survives in a manuscript full score.⁸ It is scored for tenor voice with obbligato clarinet and trombone, accompanied by an orchestra. The opening 58 measures of the piece, before the tenor voice enters, comprise what could be described as a miniature double concerto for clarinet and trombone. The clarinet part is particularly elaborate, but the trombone often matches it. With its rapid chromatic passages, arpeggios and wide leaps of up to two octaves, this is probably the most virtuosic part for trombone in any of Pacini's works (Fig. 6). The chromatic run in thirty-second notes on the first page of this excerpt would be challenging on a slide trombone, though if this piece was composed in the late 1850s or 1860s, it was probably intended for a valve instrument.

Italian didactic works for trombone

The Italian works of Rossini were certainly written with the slide trombone in mind. The same probably applies to Mayr's settings of the *Tuba mirum*, but since these two works of his are undated, the situation is less certain. Method books and orchestration treatises offer some clues to the type of trombone that composers wanted. At some point before his death in 1832, probably around 1828, Bonifazio Asioli published a short method for the trombone. The cover of his book bears the title *Transunto dei principj elementari di musica & breve metodo per trombone*, but the word "trombone" has been added by hand at the bottom of the page (Fig. 7). The book begins with three pages of basic information on music (notation, musical terms, etc.), then continues with six pages of instruction, with a heading on page 4 that reads, "Scale o metodo per il

⁷ Nerici 1879, pp. 252f.

⁸ Pacini *QuiT*.

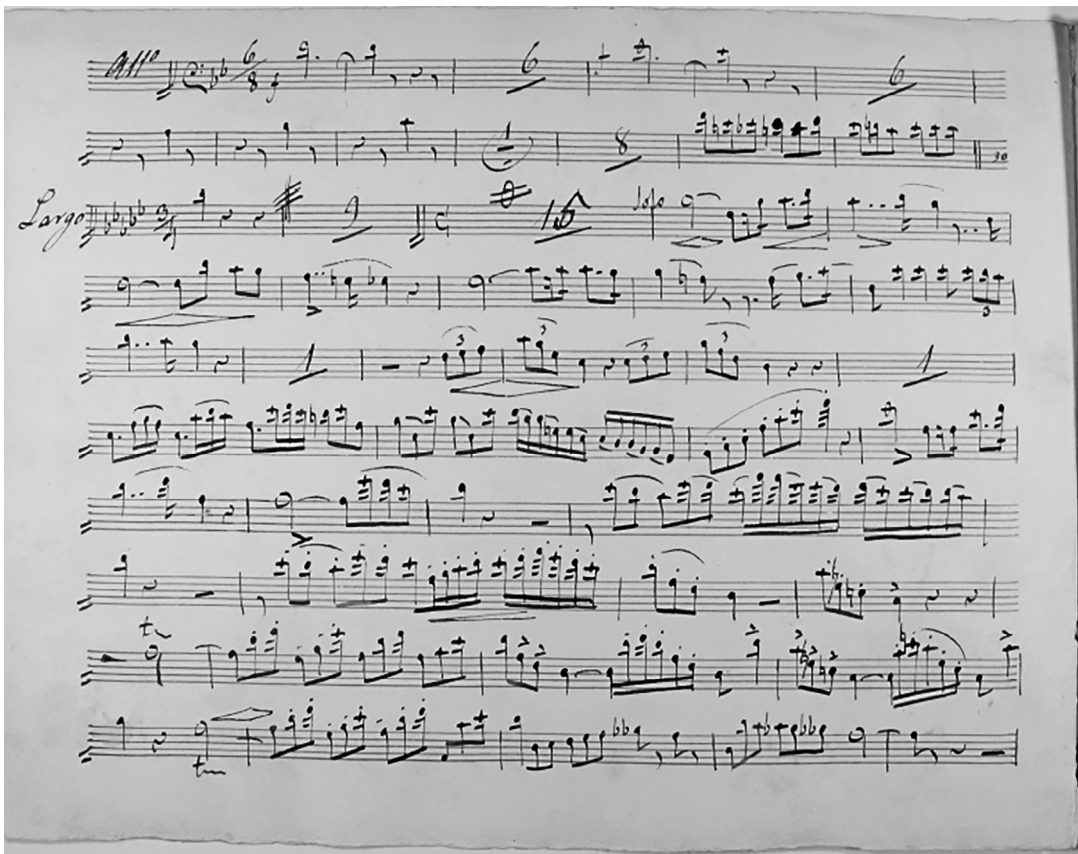


Fig. 5 Giovanni Pacini: *Gran Concertone*, trombone part, p. [2] (Lucca, Biblioteca diocesana, B. 46).

Fig. 6 Giovanni Pacini: *Qui tollis*, p. [14] (Lucca, Biblioteca diocesana, B. 72).

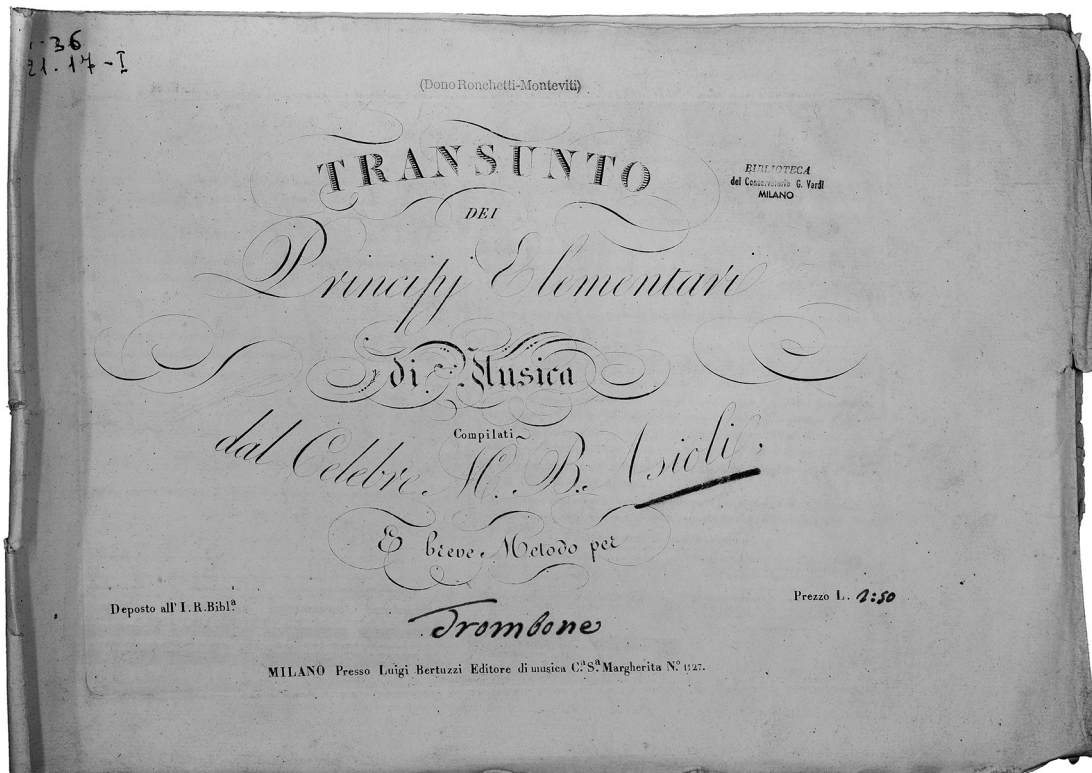


Fig. 7 Cover of Bonifazio Asioli's trombone method (Asioli 1828).

basso trombone.”⁹ The diagram on page 5, however, clearly reveals that the trombone in question is actually an instrument that we would call a tenor, with a range of $E-g^1$ (Fig. 8), though in this period the instrument that played the lowest trombone part was sometimes called a bass, even if its ambitus was identical to that of the tenor. In some instances, this so-called bass trombone may have had a somewhat larger bore and a larger mouthpiece.¹⁰ Asioli's trombone is an over-the-shoulder slide instrument in B^b . Interestingly, three of the six pages of Asioli's tutor that pertain specifically to technical aspects of the trombone (the structure of the instrument, slide positions, range, etc.) were cribbed from the Italian translation of [Jean-Frédéric] Braun's trombone method, originally published by Scotti of Milan in ca 1828.¹¹

In 1841 or thereabouts, the violinist, trombonist and orchestral conductor Fermo Bellini (1804–1865) published two slightly different versions of a method book for trombone.¹² One is entitled *Metodo per trombone* (Milan: Ricordi, n.d.);¹³ the other, *Metodo per trombone si duttile che a piston* (Milan: F. Lucca, n.d.). The former provides a position chart for a slide trom-

9 Asioli produced elementary method books for several different instruments, each beginning with identical material relating to basic instruction in music, then proceeding to technical material particular to each specific instrument and concluding with simple exercises. Asioli apparently used the same title page for each tutor, entering by hand the name of the specific instrument. I am grateful to Albert R. Rice for sharing this information with me, personal communication, November 2018.

10 Weiner 2005.

11 Weiner 1999. All four pages of the Scotti edition of *Scale et metodo per il trombone* are reprinted in Figs. 1–4 of Weiner's article.

12 There are some references in the literature to an earlier edition of Bellini's *Metodo per trombone si duttile che a piston*, published in Milan in 1833, but I have been unable to locate a copy. See, for example, Herbert 2006, p. 331. Herbert cites the author himself as the publisher of this version of the treatise.

13 The plate number for Bellini's *Metodo per trombone*, 12346, indicates that it was published in 1841. See Zecca Laterza 1984, p. 420. However, Zecca Laterza gives the title as *Metodo per Trombone tenore a piston con seguito di Lezioni ed Esercizi utilissimi* (nuova edizione).

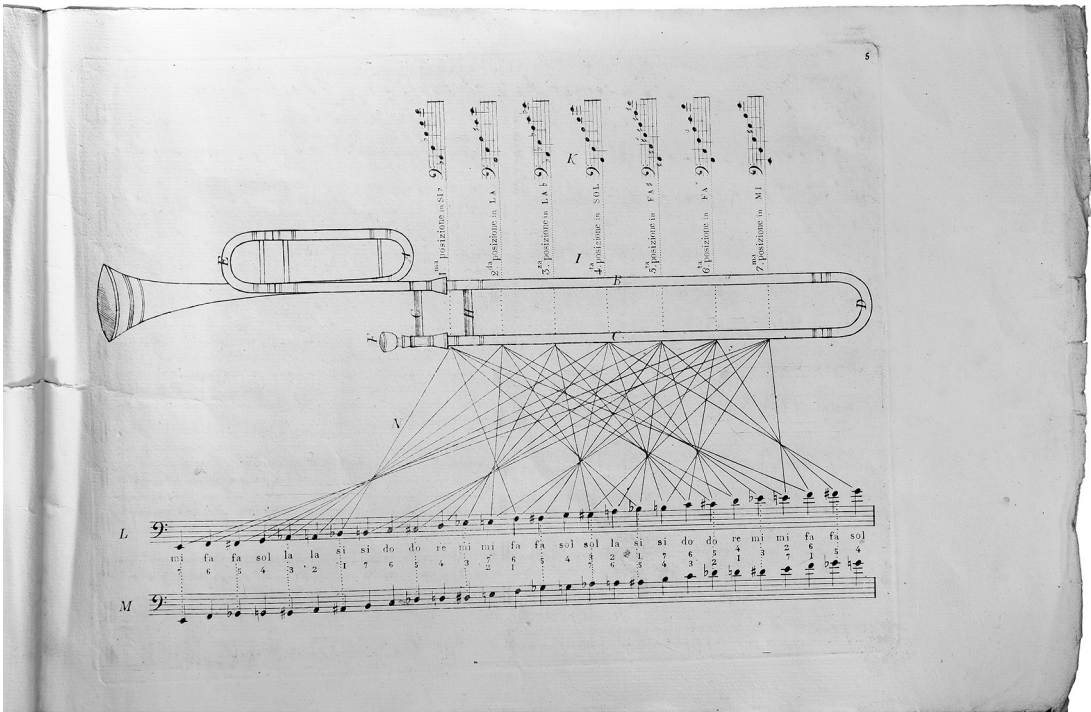


Fig. 8 “Bass” trombone in Asoli’s method (Asoli 1828, p. 5).

bone, a fingering chart for a trombone with three double-piston valves and illustrations of both instruments (Figs. 9, 10), while the latter duplicates the drawing and fingering chart for the valve trombone but does not provide a drawing for the slide trombone.¹⁴ The *Metodo per trombone si duttile che a piston*, however, does have slide positions marked in some of its illustrative materials. It is almost twice as long as Bellini’s other trombone method book, though much of the text is the same in both volumes, as are many of the etudes. Bellini must have known Asoli’s treatise, for his drawing of an over-the-shoulder slide trombone (Fig. 9) is quite similar to Asoli’s, as is his manner of indicating pitches corresponding to specific slide positions.

In his orchestration treatise, *Teoriche musicali su gli istromenti e sull’istrumentazione* (1844),¹⁵ Bellini discusses soprano, alto, tenor and bass forms of the instrument. The lowest note given for Bellini’s alto trombone is *E* below the bass staff, identical with the lowest note of his tenor trombone, though the alto’s range ascends higher, to *d*². The bass trombone in this book is not a tenor trombone with a larger bore, nor even a *B*^b trombone that plays the lowest part, as appears to be the case with Asoli’s bass trombone. Bellini gives *BB*^b–*f* as the range for the bass trombone¹⁶ and further states that the valve trombone has greater agility in fast passages than the slide instrument, though the latter is superior in intonation and sounds better in cantabile passages.¹⁷ Bellini’s bass trombone could have been either a valve or a slide bass instrument, probably in the key of *E*^b, since sixth position on a slide instrument would yield *BB*^b, as would the combination of valves 1 and 3 on a valve instrument. Slide bass trombones made around this time were more common-

14 In both versions of Bellini’s treatise for trombone, drawings of instruments appear on unnumbered pages at the beginning of the book. It is possible that an unnumbered page containing a drawing of a slide trombone is missing from the copy that I have consulted.

15 Bellini 1844.

16 Ibid., pp. 70f.

17 Ibid., p. 72.

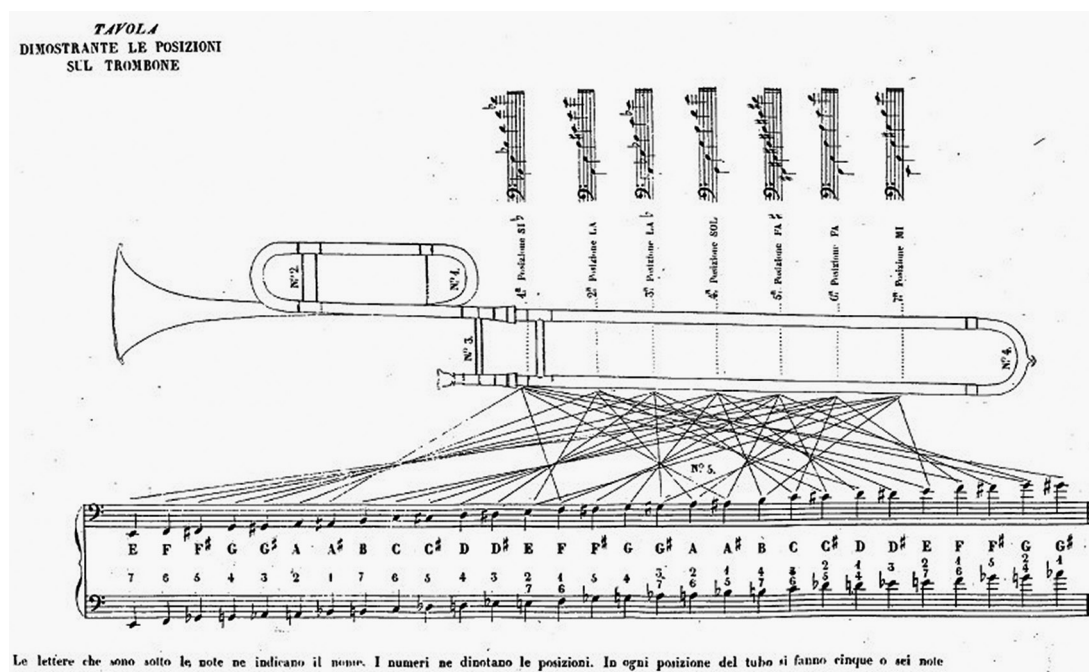


Fig. 9 Slide trombone chart from Bellini: *Metodo per trombone* (Ricordi version), p. [ii].

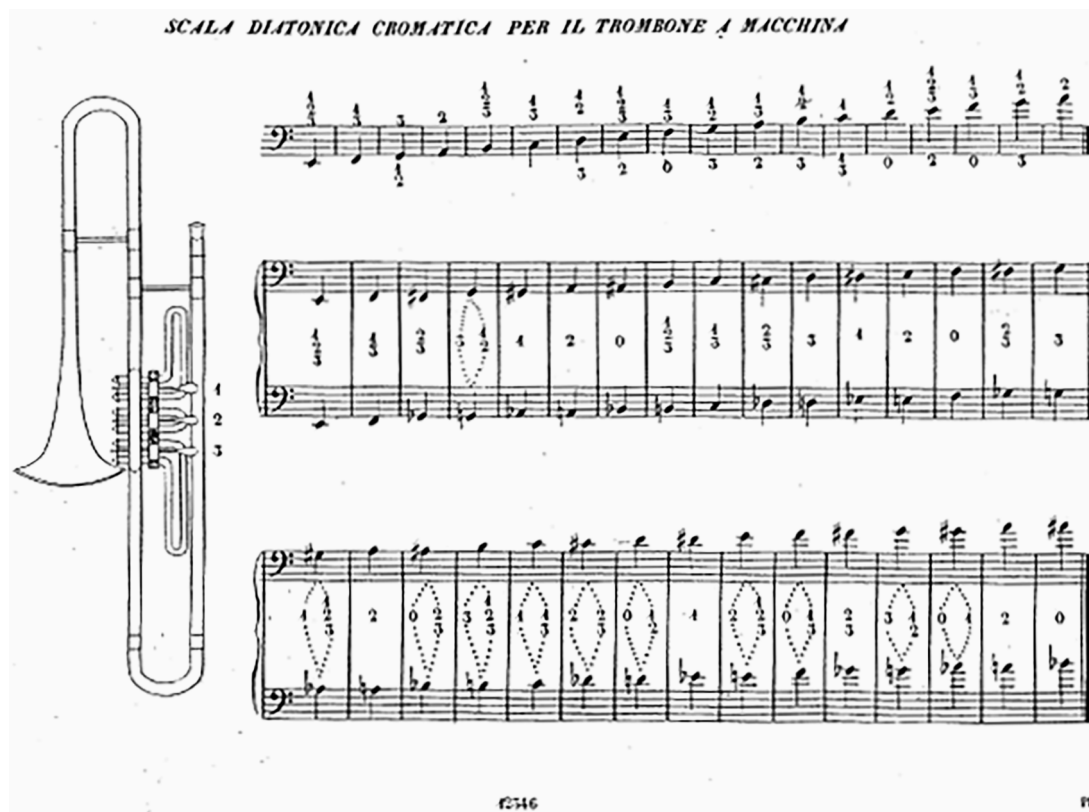


Fig. 10 Valve trombone chart from Bellini: *Metodo per trombone* (Ricordi version), p. [iii].

ly in the key of F, but the original French version of Berlioz's well-known orchestration treatise identifies E $\flat$ as the key of the bass trombone, as does the Italian version.¹⁸

18 Berlioz 1844, pp. 200–202; Berlioz 1847, pp. 213f.



Fig. 11 Early Italian valve trombone by Carlo Bernardi, Milan (1838) (Courtesy of Francesco Carreras).

Exactly when the valve trombone came into common use in Italy is unclear, but it is unlikely to have occurred before the early 1830s, when Johann Tobias Uhlmann in Vienna became the first instrument maker to produce valve trombones in quantity.¹⁹ Northern Italy was under Austrian rule in the 1830s, so it is not surprising that the earliest Italian-made valve trombone known to me is an instrument with four double-piston valves. It was made by Carlo Bernardi of Milan in 1838 and now resides in Milan's Castello Sforzesca (Fig. 11).²⁰ The only other Italian maker of trombones known to have been active in the 1830s and '40s, Antonio Apparuti of Modena (fl. 1831–1849), produced at least a few valved brasses, but the only trombone of his that survives is a slide instrument.²¹

By the mid-1840s the valve trombone had probably largely supplanted the slide instrument in Italian orchestras. The original French edition of Hector Berlioz's *Grand traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* (ca 1844) concentrates on the slide trombone, mentioning only the alto version of the valve instrument,²² but in the Italian translation of this treatise (ca 1846/47), Alberto Mazzucato added a footnote to the article on the trombone, stating that the valve trombone was in use in most orchestras in Italy.²³ The 1873 catalogue of the Pelitti firm of Milan provides illustrations of fifteen different trombones, all with valves (Fig. 12); nine of

19 An instrument by Uhlmann with three double-piston valves is illustrated in Nemetz n.d. [after 1830], p. 20. See Herbert 2006, pp. 184f. and Illustration 50. See also Weiner 2011.

20 I am grateful to Francesco Carreras, former owner of this instrument, for this information (personal communication, November 2018). See also Carreras/Meroni 2015.

21 Apparuti's slide trombone survives in Modena, Museo Civico di Storia e di Arte Medievale e Moderna, SM 56-1981. See Museo 1982, pl. 5. Regarding Apparuti's other brass instruments, see Waterhouse 1993, p. 10.

22 Berlioz 1844, pp. 199–224. See p. 224 for the *trombone alto à pistons, ou à cylindres*.

23 See Berlioz 1847, p. 212, n. 2: "In parecchie delle nostre orchestre trovansi i tromboni così detti *a macchina*, i quali mediante un meccanismo particolare offrono maggiore facilità d'esecuzione, e risparmiano la necessità dell'allungare ed accorciare del corpo dello strumento; ed in conseguenza l'incomodo movimento del braccio." ("In many of our orchestras one finds trombones called *a macchina* [i.e., mechanised, valved], which by means of a particular mechanism offer great facility of execution and obviate the necessity of elongating and shortening the body of the instrument, and in consequence the uncomfortable arm movement.") Translation by the present author; see also Meucci 2010, p. 28.

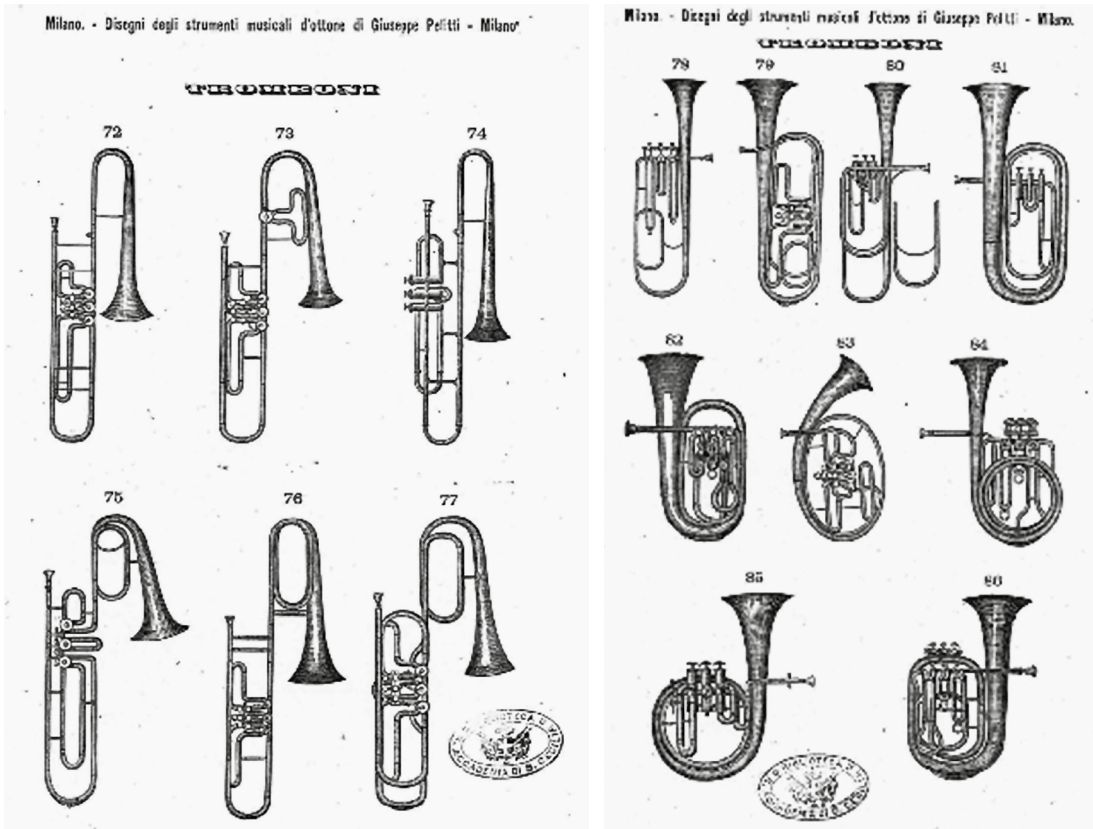


Fig. 12 Trombone models from the Pelitti catalogue of 1873.

these are upright models; there are no slide instruments.²⁴ Significantly, not one of Pelitti's trombones has double-piston valves; all are equipped either with rotary or single-piston valves. As Table 2 shows, Italian method books for trombone published in the second half of the nineteenth century clearly favour the valve instrument, though Giovacchino Bimboni's *Metodo per trombone* (ca 1885) discusses both models.²⁵

Table 2 Nineteenth-century Italian didactic sources relating to the trombone.
OTS = over-the-shoulder; S = soprano; A = alto; T = tenor; B = bass

Author	Title	Place of publication	Date	Remarks
Francesco Mirecki	<i>Trattato intorno agli istrumenti ed all'istrumentazione</i>	Milan/Florence	[1824]	slide; A/T/B*
[Jean-Frédéric] Braun	<i>Scale e metodo per il trombone</i>	Milan	[ca 1828]	slide (OTS); B*
Bonifazio Asioli	<i>Transunto dei principj elementari di musica e breve metodo per trombone</i>	Milan	[ca 1828]	slide (OTS); B*

24 Ibid., p. 29.

25 Bimboni n.d.

Giuseppe Pilotti	<i>Breve insegnamento ... per tutti gli strumenti d'orchestra</i>	Bologna/Milan	[ca 1836]	?slide; A/T/B
Fermo Bellini	<i>Metodo per trombone</i>	Milan	[ca 1841]	slide (OTS), valve; T
Fermo Bellini	<i>Metodo per trombone si duttile che a piston, Op. 28</i>	Milan	[ca 1841]	valve; T
Fermo Bellini	<i>Teoriche musicali su gli istromenti e sull'istrumentazione</i>	Milan	1844	slide, valve; S**/A/T/B
Hector Berlioz	<i>Trattato d'istromentazione e d'orchestrazione</i>	Milan/London/ Florence/Mendrisio	[ca 1846/47]	slide, valve
Georges Kastner	<i>Metodo elementare per trombone</i>	Milan	[ca 1849]	valve; A/T/B
Gustavo Rossari	<i>Metodo per trombone e bombardino in si bemol</i>	Milan	[before 1881]	valve
Giovacchino Bimboni	<i>Metodo per trombone</i>	Florence	[1880/89]	slide, valve; T
Domenico Gatti	<i>Gran metodo teorico pratico ... per trombone tenore a cilindri e congeneri</i>	Milan	[before 1891]	valve; T
Giuseppe Sianesi	<i>Metodo per duplex bombardino-trombone (S♭) di invenzione Pelitti</i>	Milan	[before 1892]	valve; T

* signifies a "bass" trombone with essentially the same range as a tenor trombone.

** Bellini indicates that the soprano trombone is very rare.

Giuseppe Verdi and the trombone

The giant among Italian composers in the mid-to-late nineteenth century was of course Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901). By the time of Verdi's maturity, valve trombones were in common use in Italian opera orchestras. Circumstantial evidence for the use of valve trombones in his mature operas may be seen in Figure 13, an excerpt from Verdi's *La forza del destino* (1862). It may have been intended for one trombone or for all three trombones,²⁶ but a performer on a tenor slide trombone would be faced with many instances of seventh-position B[♭]. If played on a slide bass trombone in F, no notes in seventh position would be required, but the passage would still be quite challenging. In any case, there can be little question that the valve trombone prevailed in Italian opera orchestras at this time.

By the 1880s, Verdi had become dissatisfied with the sound of the ophicleide as the foundation of the brass section; he sought an instrument with a more focused sound that would blend well with the other trombones. As reported in the *Gazetta musicale di Milano* for 4 Septem-

26 Douglas Yeo, personal communication, April 2019. I am grateful to Yeo for sharing this excerpt with me.



Fig. 13 Giuseppe Verdi: *La forza del destino*, Overture, trombone part, mm. 68–86.

ber 1881, the composer visited the establishment of instrument-maker Giuseppe Clemente Pelitti (1837–1905) on two occasions that summer for the purpose of examining Pelitti’s low brass instruments.²⁷ On his second visit, Verdi heard Pelitti’s new contrabass trombone in B $\flat$, pitched an octave below the tenor, which won his enthusiastic approval. Pelitti manufactured such an instrument and the maestro wrote parts for the *trombone contrabbasso Verdi* in his last two operas, *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893). This instrument provided the foundation for a four-part low-brass section consisting of two tenor trombones in B $\flat$, a bass trombone in F and the *trombone contrabbasso Verdi* in B $\flat$, one octave lower than the tenor trombones. Soon, this instrument was being used in revivals of the composer’s earlier operas, often to cover the part labelled *cimbasso*.²⁸ No examples of the *trombone contrabbasso Verdi* by the Pelitti firm survive, but an undated instrument with three rotary valves by the firm of Maino & Orsi of Milan that survives in a private collection may be the closest thing we have to Pelitti’s original design (Fig. 14). The inscription on the instrument reads “MAINO E ORSI / PROF R. ORSI SUCC / PREMIAT.^A E PRIV.^A FABB^A / INSTRUM.^I MUSICALI / MILANO”. The instrument’s owner suggests 1902/1918 as its date of manufacture.²⁹

27 Anonymous 1881.

28 See Meucci 1996, pp. 158f.

29 Private communication, 1 May 2018.



Fig. 14 *Trombone contrabbasso Verdi*, 3 valves, Romeo Orsi, Milan, 1902–1918. Collection of Arnold Myers. Currently on loan to the Edinburgh University Collection of Historical Musical Instruments, No. 660 (Photo courtesy of Arnold Myers).

Conclusion

Rossini and his contemporaries in the early nineteenth century did not hold trombonists in high regard. Judging from treatises by Asioli and Bellini, both Mayr and Rossini may have had an over-the-shoulder slide trombone in mind for their works. Italian treatises from the 1840s demonstrate that the valve instrument was gaining the upper hand at that time. Later in the century, as the valve trombone became more and more popular, composers such as Pacini and Verdi wrote more demanding parts for the instrument. Clearly, the valve trombone was in the ascendancy in late-nineteenth-century Italy.

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