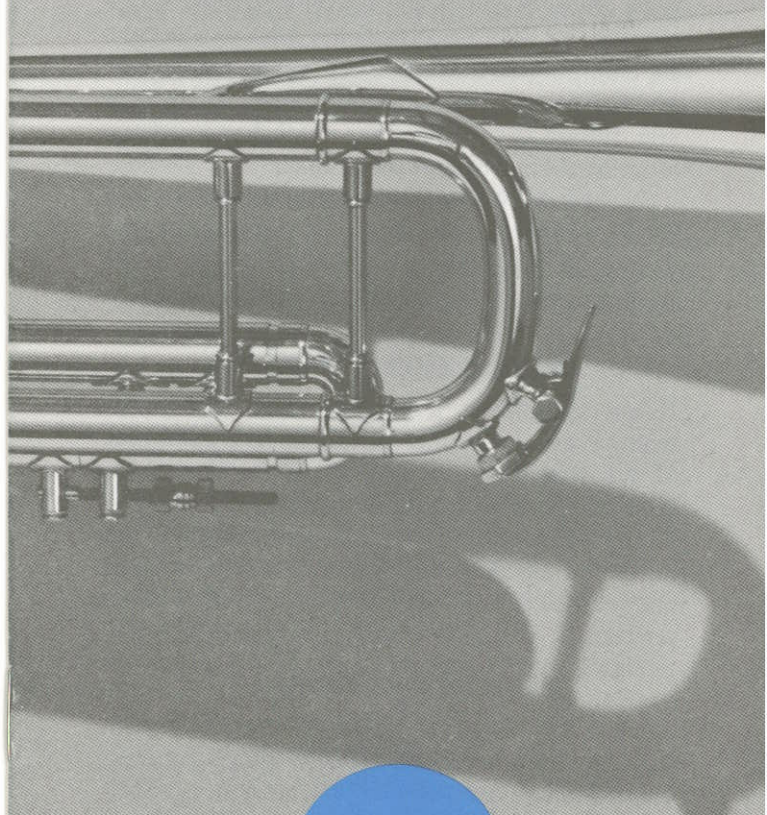


# Know Your Brasses

by Vincent Bach



The Selmer Company  
P.O. Box 310  
Elkhart, IN 46515

The modern symphony or opera orchestra trumpeter must be prepared to play instruments varying in pitch and bore. This is not for the purpose of avoiding the difficulties of transposition, but to facilitate the execution of difficult technical passages, to overcome problems of intonation, and to produce the particular tonal quality which best suits a composition or which a composer prescribes.

For instance, the D trumpet prescribed in Bach oratorios was originally a low D trumpet, only a major third higher than our trombone, used in the extreme high register. Symphony men of today are not accustomed to playing this instrument and most Bach oratorios are today performed on a soprano high D trumpet, the soprano trumpet in high F or high G, or the piccolo trumpet in high B $\flat$ .

Composers do not always write their trumpet parts either to facilitate execution or produce the best tone quality. Instead they sometimes follow the road of convenience by writing the trumpet part in the key in which the composition is written. They take it for granted that a trumpet player knows how to transpose and will select the right instrument. Some composers assume that every player uses the B $\flat$  trumpet predominant in Germany and Russia. But composers who lived in France or Austria, where C trumpets are used, have written most of their trumpet parts in C.

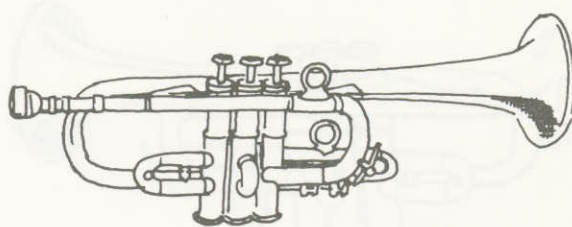
There are so many variations in music and musical instruments that I have prepared this descriptive catalog as a guide to choosing the best instrument for a particular purpose.

### Mezzo-Soprano Trumpet in C

Every symphony trumpeter must have a C trumpet available and should use it a good part of the time — if not altogether. In France, C trumpets are used almost exclusively in symphony and opera orchestras, and to a great extent also in Austria. A good many modern compositions are very strenuous to play when written in the high register. A trumpeter can perform these parts more effectively and with greater ease by using a C trumpet than by forcing the high tones on a B $\flat$  trumpet. Even advanced students are using C trumpets more and more.

The instrument is particularly effective in Wagner's *Parsifal Prelude*; Strauss' *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *Symphonia Domestica*, tone poems and other compositions; Brahms' *First*, *Second*, and *Fourth* symphonies; Men-

### SOPRANO TRUMPET IN D



delssohn's *Italian* and *Reformation* symphonies; Dvorak's *New World*; Debussy's *Festivals*; Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*, Respighi's *Pines of Rome*; and all chamber music, because of the light singing tone of the instrument.

### Mezzo-Soprano Trumpet in B $\flat$

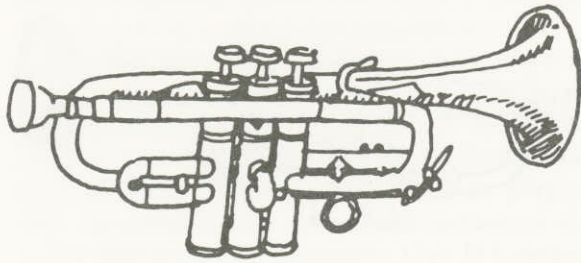
Because of its sure response in attack and its heroic, martial tone, this versatile instrument is especially effective for heavy fanfares, flourishes and other staccato work, but it is also the most practical all-around orchestral instrument. For solo and band work, the cornet should be given preference.

The B $\flat$  trumpet is popular in the United States, England, Germany, Italy, Russia and the German speaking part of Switzerland. In France, Austria and the French section of Switzerland, trumpet players are accustomed to C trumpets.

### Soprano Trumpet in D

This is another "must" for the symphony trumpeter playing modern works or oratorios by Bach, Handel, etc. This instrument's brilliant tone is effective in the high register in Bach's *B Minor Mass*, *Christmas Oratorio*, *Suite in D*, and most other orchestral compositions by Bach; Handel's *Water Music*, and *Messiah*; and Purcell's *Trumpet Voluntary*. Mozart and

#### SOPRANINO TRUMPET IN HIGH F



Haydn symphonies are played advantageously on a D trumpet (which blends well with the strings) as are Beethoven's *Seventh* and *Ninth* symphonies. Respighi's *Pines of Rome* was written for B $\flat$  trumpet, but parts lie better within range of D trumpet. Prokofieff's *Lieutenant Kije* is written in B $\flat$ , but the backstage bugle call should be played on D trumpet. Prokofieff's *Scythian Suite*, the second part of Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* are effective on D trumpet. For Ravel's *Bolero* it is a "must."

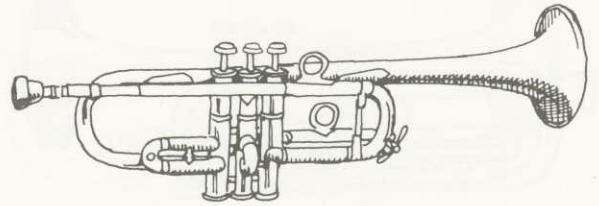
#### Soprano Trumpet in High E $\flat$

This is a very important instrument for modern symphony work and every symphony trumpeter should own and be ready to play it on quick notice. The instrument is used for compositions such as William Schuman's *American Festival Overture*, Vincent d'Indy's *Symphony*, and Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* (written for D trumpet but the first part is better performed on the E $\flat$  trumpet).

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The high F trumpet, an important instrument for a symphony musician, is used today for most of the difficult oratorio performances. It is the most popular instrument for some of the very high parts in the Bach *B Minor Mass*, and for Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 2*.

#### MEZZO-SOPRANO TRUMPET IN C



#### Sopranino Trumpet in High G

The high G Trumpet has been designed principally as an alternate to the high F Trumpet for the performance of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 2*. This can be executed with greater facility on the high G trumpet because the high G-A trill can be played one tone lower (F-G trill). The instrument has a very brilliant tone and is suitable for work in the extreme high register. Like all piccolo instruments it should be used with small, shallow mouthpieces to do justice to both instrument and player.

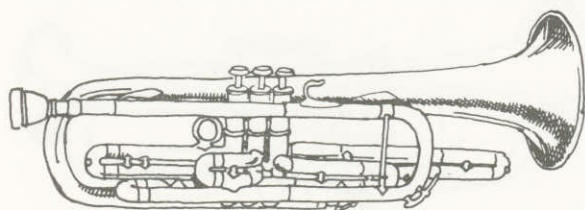
#### Piccolo Trumpet in High B $\flat$

This instrument, though not much used, is well suited for the performance of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 2*, *Christmas Oratorio*, *B Minor Mass*, and other baroque compositions in the extreme high register.

#### Contralto Trumpets in Low E $\flat$ and F

These instruments, little known in the English-speaking countries, are popular in Austria and other Germanic countries, as well as in Russia. In European orchestrations they share the work of third and fourth cornet parts, and of French horn parts, playing to a great extent the afterbeat in march music. These instruments are also effective in brass quartets or

### TENOR (BASS) TRUMPET IN C



quintets and in combination with the tenor trumpet in B $\flat$ .

#### Tenor (Bass) Trumpet in C

Although it is now confined to Italy, Spain, and Mexico, where most tenor instruments are in C, this instrument was originally designed for the performance of Wagner, Strauss, and other late Romantics.

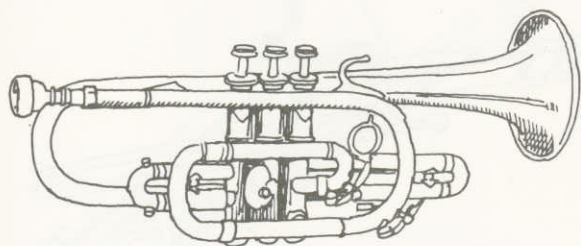
#### Tenor (Bass) Trumpet in B $\flat$

This instrument is designed principally for replacing the valve trombone. It is suitable for the Wagner operas, and as a solo instrument, and can be used to advantage in jazz. It is ideal for brass quartets (two trumpets, a low E $\flat$  trumpet, and a tenor trumpet in B $\flat$ ). It is surprising that this instrument has not been adopted for general orchestra work in place of slide trombones, whose musical advantages diminished with the invention of valves a century and a half ago.

#### Mezzo-Soprano Flugelhorn in B $\flat$

This instrument represents the contralto voice of opera. It has a rich, mellow lyric timbre well suited for song playing, especially in the middle register (contralto range). It is of exactly the same pitch and range as the B $\flat$  trumpet or cornet. It is widely used in European military bands and should be used much more in Amer-

### MEZZO-SOPRANO CORNET IN B $\flat$



ican bands. In the proper place, the instrument is very effective, but it should not be used in unison with cornets and trumpets, which gives a mixture of different tone qualities without giving each instrument a chance to display its own characteristic timbre. When flugelhorn are used for mellow passages, trumpets and cornets should not play the same melody. In Austria and France, where they call them bugles, they also use flugelhorn built in C.

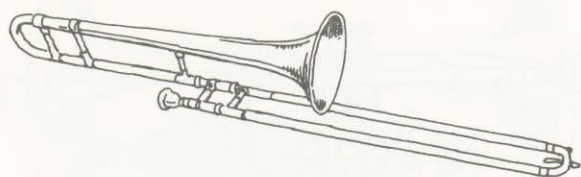
#### Mezzo-Soprano Cornet in B $\flat$

This is the instrument for the solo artist. Because of its two windings and more conical bore, the instrument has more resistance and is, therefore, more flexible and better suited for coloratura work, for slurring, triple tonguing, and other technical performances. The tone is smooth and not as heroic or martial as that of the B $\flat$  trumpet. The large bore cornet (having a more mellow, richer tone) is very effective for melody playing and the instrument should, therefore, be given preference for use in the concert band or by solo artists.

#### Soprano Cornet in High E $\flat$

While this instrument is rarely prescribed in symphony scores, it is widely used in those European concert and military bands where flugelhorn are used instead of cornets.

#### TENOR TROMBONE IN B $\flat$



#### Alto Trombone in E $\flat$

The alto trombone is specified in a number of symphony scores, notably Schumann's *Rhenish Symphony*, Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, Brahms' *Second Symphony*, and Mendelssohn's *Reformation Symphony*. Mozart calls for it in his *Requiem*. European trombone players are accustomed to playing the instrument, but the average American symphony man does not like to risk playing it on account of the shorter slide position.

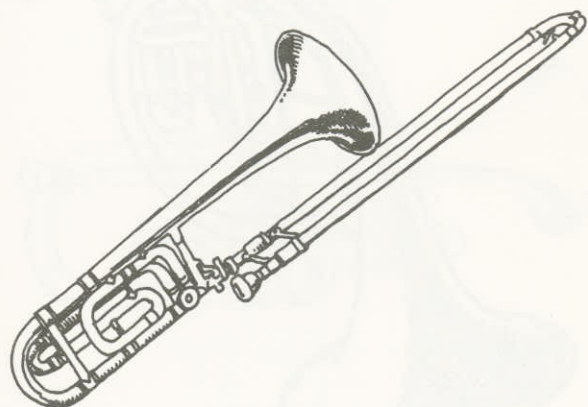
#### Tenor Trombone in B $\flat$

The most popular instruments for all-round work in orchestras and bands are generally built in medium bore. These models are also well suited to solo work.

#### Symphony Tenor Trombone in B $\flat$

These instruments for the first and second trombone players in symphony, opera, or large concert bands are built in a rather large bore. They produce a rich, organ-like timbre. The second trombone player of a symphony orchestra might use to better advantage a tenor trombone equipped with an F valve in order to play the tones below E (which appear only too frequently in symphony parts and Wagner's operas).

#### BASS TROMBONE IN B $\flat$



#### Bass Trombone in B $\flat$

This instrument (with F valve) is used by the third trombone player, or bass trombonist, of symphony and opera orchestras, and by large bands. Without the F valve, the instrument is of the same pitch and range as the tenor trombone, but larger in bore and bell diameter.

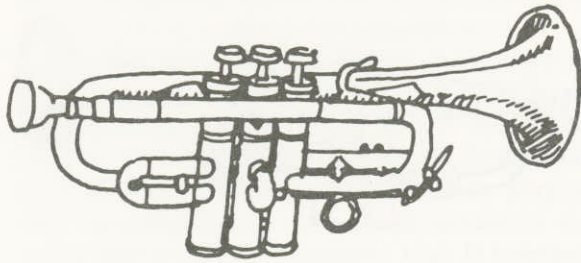
Unfortunately, it is not well enough represented in the smaller concert bands and especially not in high school and college orchestras, perhaps for the reason that players do not know how to use the F valve. School band directors should insist that serious students of the trombone acquaint themselves with the function of the F valve.

#### Alto Horn in E $\flat$

The upright alto is a practical instrument for the marching band. The French horn is not. Marching makes it difficult for a French horn player to perform without risking the loss of precision — or even of his teeth. The upright alto can be held firmly with the right arm, without impairing the use of the right hand fingers. In addition, the brassy and more penetrating tone quality of the E $\flat$  alto horn lends more emphasis to the rhythm of the marching band, and rhythm is its primary purpose.

Conductors and composers have frequently prescribed its quality of tone for certain symphony parts.

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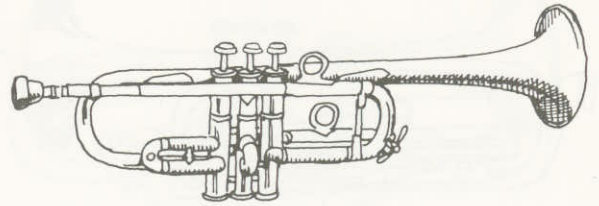
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## THE B $\flat$ BARITONE HORN



horn for fast coloratura work, or triple tonguing. It is well suited for playing the type of music written for baritone voice in opera. The B $\flat$  baritone horn is featured primarily in American bands.

### The Euphonium

The euphonium belongs in a class with the two previously mentioned instruments. But it has a very large bell bore, and so produces a rich, heavy, mellow tone. It should be used in solo performances for a slow lyric melody, as written for the basso singer in opera. It is not meant for fireworks, for the heavy tone is too clumsy, dull, and inflexible to be effective and does not develop sufficient brilliancy to impress the audience.

For the large concert band with a complete instrumentation, I suggest using one tenor horn, one baritone, and one euphonium. Then it can be left to the discretion of the conductor to assign the solo parts to whichever instrument has the best timbre for the proper interpretation of the music.

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*This commentary on the brass instruments is excerpted from a series of articles written by Mr. Bach for The Instrumentalist. The articles appeared in issues for January-February, March-April, and November-December, 1950.*