

Bass trumpet

The **bass trumpet** is a type of low trumpet which was first developed during the 1820s in Germany. It is usually pitched in 8' C or 9' B \flat today, but is sometimes built in E \flat and is treated as a transposing instrument sounding either an octave, a sixth or a ninth lower than written, depending on the pitch of the instrument. Having valves and the same tubing length, the bass trumpet is quite similar to the valve trombone, although the bass trumpet has a harder, more metallic tone.

^[1] Certain modern manufacturers offering 'valve trombones' and 'bass trumpets' use the same tubing, valves, and bell, in different configurations - in these cases the bass trumpet is virtually identical to the valve trombone.^[2]



Bass trumpet in C with rotary valves

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History

The earliest mention of the bass trumpet is in the 1821 *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, in which Heinrich Stölzel's *Chromatische Tenor-trompetenbaß* and Griesling & Schlott's *Chromatische Trompetenbaß* are described. Several other variants were produced through the 1820s and were employed in military bands. Wide-bell versions in 9' B \flat are still used today in Austria and Bavaria under the name *Baßtrompete*, and narrow-bell versions in 9' B \flat are used in Italy under the name *tromba bassa*. They perform no melodic function, but are used solely to fill out harmonies.

Wagner's bass trumpet

Richard Wagner's first intention for *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was a bass trumpet in 13' E \flat , based on the instruments he would have come across during his dealings with military bands. However, while the opening section of *Das Rheingold* might indicate the use of such an instrument, the part quickly rises to G \flat 5, which would be the nineteenth partial on this long instrument; Wagner understood brass instruments very well and saw that this was impractical. While it was argued during the late nineteenth century (Oskar Franz: *Zeitschrift für Instrumentenbau*, 1884) that the instrument in question was actually pitched an octave higher, the

instrument actually built by Moritz of Berlin on Wagner's personal instruction for the Munich theatre (according to *Zeitschrift für Instrumentenbau*, 1908) was pitched in 8' C with crooks for B \flat and A and sounded one octave lower than written. The records of Moritz were not preserved, though a wide-bell bass trumpet with military-band proportions in 8' C with B \flat and A crooks does make an appearance in their post-1900 catalogue, while Gebrüder Alexander of Mainz offered a narrow-bore model in either E \flat or C.

The model normally used today is in 8' C with four rotary valves, and is played by a trombonist owing to the size of the mouthpiece. Bass trumpets in E \flat are usually played by trumpeters as the mouthpiece is closer in size to that of the standard B \flat trumpet.

Wagner wrote adventurously for his new addition to the brass section, exploiting open and muted effects, and extremes of range and dynamics. The bass trumpet is frequently featured in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, playing solos in every register, as well as playing in octaves, unison or harmony with trumpets, trombones, and Wagner tubas. Its very distinctive timbre is easily identifiable and Wagner used this new and unique tone colour extensively. However, as with the Wagner tuba and the contrabass trombone, Wagner's other additions to the opera house orchestra for *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the bass trumpet has not become a regular member of the orchestral brass and is seen rarely.



Duncan Wilson playing rotary bass trumpet in C with the BBC Symphony Orchestra

Other composers who have used the bass trumpet in the orchestra include Arthur Sullivan (in the opera *Ivanhoe*), Richard Strauss (in the tone poem *Macbeth* and the opera *Elektra*), Arnold Schoenberg (in the cantata *Gurrelieder*), Igor Stravinsky (in the ballet *Le sacre du printemps* - fourth trumpet doubling bass trumpet in E \flat), Leoš Janáček (in the *Sinfonietta* - two bass trumpets in B \flat). György Ligeti used the bass trumpet as one of Nekrotzar's "Entourage" instruments in his opera *Le Grand Macabre*.

Range

Notation

The bass trumpet is usually notated in the treble clef. The bass trumpet in C sounds one octave lower than written, the bass trumpet in E \flat sounds a major sixth lower than written and the bass trumpet in B \flat sounds a major ninth lower than written. Wagner's transpositions include bass trumpet in E, E \flat , D, C and B \flat , though players often have parts for the bass trumpet transposed into C to play on the C bass trumpet.^[3]

Performers

Cy Touff was one of the few jazz musicians to play the bass trumpet and while the bass trumpet is usually played by a trombonist, British trumpeter Philip Jones performed on the bass trumpet while employed by the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Johnny Mandel is perhaps the best-known bass trumpeter from the jazz world.

Salsa musician and trombonist Willie Colón plays a Getzen bass trumpet and can be heard improvising on the Fania label recordings *Maestra Vida* part 1 *La Fiesta*, *Siembra* *Buscando Guayaba*, *Cruz* and *Colón* *Zambullete*, *Doble Energia* *Cuando Tu Quieras* and *Canciones Del Solar De Los Aburridos* *Tiburón*.

Leonhard Paul of Mnozil Brass (an Austrian-based brass group consisting of three trumpets, three trombones and a tuba) plays bass trumpet regularly with the ensemble, incorporating its use in many different styles. Up until late 2006, he played a traditional rotary valve bass trumpet made by Gebr. Alexander of Mainz. Now he plays a totally redesigned bass trumpet by Schagerl (<http://www.schagerl.at/>).

Jazz trombonist Elliot Mason, who plays with Wynton Marsalis's Jazz at the Lincoln Center Orchestra as well as leading his own bands, regularly plays the bass trumpet.

Rashawn Ross, trumpet player touring with the Dave Matthews Band, who has also performed and recorded with the likes of Usher, Ludacris, Maceo Parker, Robert Randolph and Roy Hargrove regularly plays bass trumpet. His equipment includes a silver-plated Getzen bass trumpet and a Mount Vernon B flat trumpet made by the Vincent Bach Corporation.

See also

Other trumpets:

- Piccolo trumpet
- Contrabass trumpet
- Pocket trumpet

References

1. "Brief Description - Vienna Symphonic Library" (https://www.vsl.co.at/en/Bass_trumpet/Brief_Description/). *www.vsl.co.at*. Retrieved 2019-06-02.
2. "The Bass Trumpet- A Brief Overview" (<https://www.musikalessons.com/blog/2016/04/the-bass-trumpet/>). *Musika Lessons Blog*. 2016-04-20. Retrieved 2019-06-02.
3. Trent Hamilton (2014-12-29), *The Bass Trumpet - Discussion and Demonstration* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yofsWu-kEOY>), retrieved 2019-06-02

External links

- Bass & Contrabass Trumpet (<http://www.contrabass.com/pages/cbtp.html>)

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