

EPILOGUE:

TROMBONES, TRUMPETS, AND CORNETTI IN
FLORENCE c1500

Keith Polk

Editor's note: The following epilogue to Timothy McGee's article, "Giovanni Cellini, Piffero of Florence," places McGee's remarks in the context of brass performance in Florence in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

During Giovanni Cellini's lifetime the city of Florence maintained a varied stable of instrumentalists, the organization of which had been established a century earlier. In 1386/87 the civic authorities in Florence reorganized the instrumental combinations of the city into three main groups, trumpets, *pifferi* (shawms), and *trombadori* (a more miscellaneous category that included various trumpets, winds, and, apparently, percussion).¹ The thrust of this reorganization was to adjust the musical establishments of Florence to modern trends. Previously the city had supported a varied group of musicians, lumped together (at least for payment purposes) more or less into one group. By late in the fourteenth century trumpet ensembles were enlarging and breaking away from the other instrumentalists, while the shawms were becoming a standard ensemble for processions, banquets, and for dancing. The reorganization in Florence in 1386/87 confirmed these trends, and from that date onward the official trumpets were the primary group to establish the dignity of the city. The *pifferi* were to be present to assure that polyphonic instrumental music of professional caliber was to be available for appropriate occasions. The third group, the *trombadori*, was evidently of a lower level. They were apparently available for routine signal duty, and some of them would be sent, for example, along with city troops during their all too frequent military campaigns. In any case, the musical functions of this last group, as indicated by Prof. McGee above, remain unclear, and the *trombadori* will not be dealt with here.

Trumpets

The official trumpet ensemble quickly became firmly established in Florence. Two civic trumpeters were recorded in 1387, but by 1415 the number was to be six. Even this number was judged insufficient, however, as the group expanded further and included eight players by about 1440. This number was evidently retained until the end of the Commune in 1532.²

While no in-depth study of Florentine trumpet ensembles has been made, we do know a great deal about certain features of the trumpet players in Renaissance Florence. The names of virtually all the players are available through the entire span from 1387-1532. From this information we can see that the situation there is similar to that in Siena,

which Frank D'Accone has surveyed in detail.³ Florentine players, like those in Siena, are essentially local, and often tied by kinship. That is, trumpet playing was not so strongly marked by foreign influence as was the case with the shawm band (which we will take up shortly). Moreover, as in Siena, tenures in office were often very long, with careers of twenty years not being unusual. With overlapping continuities the ensembles were probably rather conservative in such matters as repertory and performance practices. The essential duties of the ensembles were specified in the Statutes of the Commune of 1415.⁴ The trumpets were to perform in the city hall to announce the daily meals of the city council (the council was sequestered, and required to live in the city hall during the two month tenure of office; music at meals was probably one way to relieve some of the tensions of the resulting separation from normal social contacts). They were to accompany main city officials on important civic occasions, and they were to perform at important city events such as processions and entries of important nobles. Some sense of the flavor of this is conveyed in a report of Florentine trumpeters present at the Council of Constance, where on 24 June 1416,

after dinner, the bankers from Florence sent five trumpeters to blow throughout the city. They had hanging from their trumpets the banner of their city, a red lily on a white field. A squire came behind them and shouted that everyone should keep the feast of St. John at St. John's church that night and the next morning. Behind him came three pipers. They did this at noon, at Vespers, at Compline and the next morning, at Matins, and repeatedly thereafter.⁵

For all this detail, we have no information whatsoever concerning the music of the Florentine ensemble. It is likely that given the long terms of service, the groups were conservative in terms of performance practice, especially in the fifteenth century—there are no hints, for example, that any of the players were exploring the upper registers of the instrument. Such exploration did take place very actively from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. And when this happened, Italian trumpeters were providing leadership. This came, however, after the fall of the Florentine republic in 1532.

Trombones

A slide instrument of some kind evidently was developed by about 1400 or shortly thereafter, and one of the early terms for the instrument, *trompette des menestrels*, underlines the fact that its early history was bound up with the shawm band. Current research would indicate that in its initial stages the instrument, evidently a slide trumpet, developed in north Germany and in the courts in the orbit of the Duke of Burgundy.⁶ In Florence a shawm band, the *pifferi*, had been established in 1386, but Florentine records seem clear that a slide instrument was not part of the ensemble in the early decades of the fifteenth century—an odd feature in Florence, which seems to have been so up-to-date in other aspects of instrumental music. The Italian vogue for German wind players, for example, can be traced in Florence by 1399, when a Nicholas Teotonico was engaged as a shawmist in the civic ensemble.⁷

Also, one of the earliest naming of the wind players by parts comes from city records in 1406, when Nicholas d'Alemagna (probably the same player with the band in 1399) was identified as a player of contra tenor shawm (*ceramella contra tenorum*).⁸

In 1444, however, a slide instrument was introduced, as an entirely new ensemble was engaged by the city. This group consisted of four Germans (documents from the time specify that all members of the ensemble must be foreign). Three played shawms, and were given the uncomplicated description of *pifferi*. When it came time to describe the fourth player and his instrument, however, it is amusing to see the scribe tying himself in semantic knots trying to find appropriate terms. In the notice of 1444 the instrument was a “tortuous trumpeter” (*tube tortuose*—tortuous here in the literal sense of characterized by repeated twists or bends). In another contemporary document the scribe terms it a *tuba retorta*. A little later he tried *tuba grossa e torta*.⁹ All these terms were clumsy, and it must have been a great relief when the notion became acceptable of simply calling the instrument a “trombone”—the term was introduced by 1447, although it was not standard until at least a decade later.¹⁰ Note, of course, that this “modern” term for the instrument antedates the earliest known use of *sacqueboute* by at least two decades. The 1447 document specifies a *trombone grosso*, a large instrument, and when all the indications are taken together; a novel instrument, of large size, with many bends in its construction, it is tempting to speculate that perhaps makers by this early date had in fact developed a double slide mechanism. Iconographical sources, however, reveal that what appears to be an instrument with a single slide dominated until the end of the fifteenth century.

The trombonist named in the 1444 document was Giovanni da Colonia (Johannes of Cologne), and the trombonists for the rest of the fifteenth century were German. When the position became vacant in 1489, Lorenzo d' Medici himself entered into the matter, trying first to lure the fine Italian trombonist and composer Bartolomeo Tromboncino to Florence. That effort failed, and Lorenzo then turned to Augustine Schubinger, who did accept the offer and was the trombonist in the ensemble until about 1494. Augustine then moved on (following the unsettled conditions in Florence with the death of Lorenzo in 1492) to serve with the Habsburgs, and by 1500 was probably the most internationally renowned wind player in Europe.¹¹ His replacement in Florence was German, but soon after the turn of the sixteenth century a second trombonist was added to the ensemble, a Bartholomeus Aloysij de veneziiis, that is, Bartolomeo, son of Aloysius, of Venice.¹² The appointment of Bartolomeo was one indication of the resurgence of Italian instrumentalists, for by about 1520 the era of dominance by Germans was over (a phenomenon which is also clear in the ensembles in Siena). In addition, Bartolomeo was most likely a brother of the trombonist Joannes Aloysius de Bassano (i.e. Johannes, son of Aloysius, of Bassano), who performed in 1519 in Bologna. Other related documents make it clear that Johannes too, was not only from Venice but he was a member of the famous family of Jewish musicians prominent in the English court in the sixteenth century. Thus with Bartolomeo in Florence we have yet another Bassano claiming a position in one of the leading ensembles of the day.¹³

The Cornetto

No payment records, or any other kinds of official document from Florence, would appear to refer to the cornetto in the late fifteenth century through to 1532. As McGee points out above, however, Giovanni Cellini evidently could play the instrument, and his son played on the cornetto in his performances of motets for the Pope Clement VII. Moreover, the outstanding virtuoso on the instrument in the first decade of the sixteenth century was Augustine Schubinger. Previous to Augustine's arrival in Florence in 1489, all documents refer to him as a trombonist—only after his stay in the city did he make his reputation on the cornetto. It is possible then, that he acquired his mastery of this instrument in Italy—which suggests that those interested in the early history should consider more carefully Italian sources from the late fifteenth century.

NOTES

¹ This Epilogue represents a supplement to Prof. McGee's article. The same abbreviations will be used (see his note 2, above) and see the above notes for complete bibliographical information on items repeated below. For more detail on the changes in Florence in 1386 and 1387, see Timothy McGee, "Dinner Music for the Florentine Signoria 1350-1450," *Speculum* 74 (1999): 104.

² For the figures for 1383 see Polk, "Civic Patronage," p. 67; for eight players in 1442 see ASF, CC, Provveditori. Entrata e Uscita, #44, folio 257. For eight players in 1530 see ASF, CC, Monte Comune, Camerlingo del Monte, Entrata e Uscita, #2036, folio 65. Concerning the first payment for trumpets in 1387 and the early expansion of the ensemble, see McGee, "Dinner Music," 104.

³ D'Accone, *The Civic Muse*, chapters 8-10.

⁴ *Statuta Populi et Communis Florentiae (1415)* (Freiburg, 1778-83), 2: 541-44. See also Timothy McGee, "The Pifferi and the Mensa of the Florentine Signoria," *Discordia concors: Perspektiven auf die Musik vor 1600*, Beiträge vom internationalen Symposium Neustift/Novacella 1998, ed. Annegrit Laubenthal (Munich: Georg Olms Verlag, forthcoming).

⁵ Louise R. Loomis, *The Council of Constance*, ed. J. Mundy and K. Woody (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 143.

⁶ For a summary of views on this see Keith Polk, "The Invention of the Silde Principle and the Earliest Trombone," *Perspectives in Brass Scholarship*, ed. Stewart Carter (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1997), pp. 19-27.

⁷ ASF, PR #88 (1399), f. 210. On the earliest extant record of payment to a *pifferi* ensemble in 1386, see McGee, "Dinner Music," p. 104.

⁸ Zippel, *I suonatori*, pp. 16-17.

⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 23-25; for the last reference see ASF, CC, Notario de Camera, #6, (1451-52) f. 8; in this instance as was often the case, the scribe added "qui pulsit cum piffaris" (who played with the shawms). For further on the slide instrument in Florence, see Timothy McGee, "Misleading Iconography: The Case of the 'Adimari Wedding Cassone'," *Imago Musicae* 9-10 (1992-95 [1996]): 139-57.

¹⁰ For the 1447 entry see ASF, CC, Notario di Camera, #4, f. 52'. also Zippel, *I suonatori*, p. 23.

¹¹ Keith Polk, "Augustein Schubinger and the Zinck," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 1 (1989): 86-87.

¹² ASF, SC, #123 (1520), f. 165'.

¹³ For the 1519 document in Bologna see Gambassi, *Il Concerto Palatino*, p. 140; on the Bassanos see David Lasocki, with Roger Prior, *The Bassanos: Venetian Musicians and Instrument Makers in England, 1531-1665* (Aldershot, Hants, and Brookfield Vermont: Scolar Press, 1995); for Aloysius (=Alvise), see pp. 4-6.