

*Journal of the
American Musical
Instrument Society*

VOLUME XXIV • 1998



Copyright by the [American Musical Instrument Society](#).
Content may be used in accordance with the principles of fair
use under [Section 107 of the United States Copyright Act](#).
Content may not be reproduced for commercial purposes.

Art Brownlow. *The Last Trumpet: A History of the English Slide Trumpet.* Bucina: The Historic Brass Society Series No. 1, Stewart Carter, general editor. Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1996. xxiv, 277 pp.: 36 musical exx., 45 black and white illus. ISBN 0-945193-81-5. \$54.00

The Last Trumpet deals with the history, makers, players, and music of the English slide trumpet from its invention, about 1789, until its demise early in the twentieth century. It focuses on the literature of the slide trumpet, or, as Brownlow must so often admit, the literature that *could* have been played on the instrument. More than two hundred works written during the period of the slide trumpet were examined for evidence of idiomatic slide trumpet writing, or at least notes requiring a slide, keys, or valves. About fifty compositions are discussed in detail, many with musical illustrations. A preliminary section brings together what is known about the history of the English slide trumpet and its predecessors, and a final section details its demise. Appendixes include valuable checklists of English trumpeters and slide trumpet makers. The bibliography contains a slide trumpet discography as well as lists of written and musical sources. This volume is intended by the publisher to be the first in a series of monographs on the history of brass instruments, their music, and their social function.

Although Dr. Brownlow's efforts in searching for slide trumpet music have been heroic, he has found much less music specifically written for the instrument than might have been expected. This is due in some part to the loss over the years of a large part of the repertoire that may have included works for slide trumpet, but more importantly to the indifference of the best English composers to the improvements this invention offered. The slide trumpet is shown to have had the misfortune of appearing in the midst of numerous other designs for making brass instruments chromatic; only in England, a country with the most conservative of musical tastes, did it really take hold. Curiously, the same conservatism that inhibited composers from exploiting the possibilities of the slide trumpet also served to prolong its life, since compositions performed and composed so often called only for notes no more adventuresome than those the old natural trumpet could produce. Its use was also prolonged by several fine trumpet players who promoted it above the other more popular inventions. The contributions of trumpeters James Sarjant, John Hyde, Thomas Harper Sr., Thomas Harper Jr., and Walter Morrow are described in some detail.

The most interesting repertoire discussed is that of the English trumpet song. These vocal arias with trumpet obbligato—based on examples by Scarlatti, Bach, and Handel—were cultivated in England for almost two hundred years. Although rooted in the classical tradition of opera and oratorio, they became a popular facet of English pleasure garden programs beginning in the late eighteenth and continuing into the nineteenth century. Vocal soloists even competed for the services of leading trumpet players like Thomas Harper Sr. and Jr. This popularity is illustrated in an appendix of nine cadenzas that were to be inserted into Handel's "Let the bright Seraphim," eight of them written for specific sopranos. Although the Handel trumpet arias have been the most enduring, similar works by Henry Purcell, Thomas Arne, William Shield, James Hook, William Reeve, Henry Bishop, Alfred Bennett, and J. L. Hatton are mentioned. Tantalizing reference is made to the British Library's holdings of volumes of music, both printed and manuscript, of songs written for Vauxhall performances including many pieces either labeled as trumpet songs, or with soloistic trumpet parts written in the scores.

Although on the whole the book is excellent, some of the acoustical and technical information required for the reader to understand the examples is imprecise, available only in sources referred to, or totally lacking. Some questions to which the reader with only a casual acquaintance with slide trumpets might expect answers are: How is the music usually written? in C for each crook? in concert pitch? either way? And what crook is to be used? The author's discussion of the first musical examples, in chapter 2, does not clearly answer these questions. Only after reaching a table of recommended procedures in chapter 3 is it possible to understand the examples in the previous chapter, and even then considerable interpretation by the reader is needed. The table (from an 1875 tutor) states, for example, that a piece in the key of A should be written in G and played on a trumpet in D. But the first musical example (Figure 9), "Drink to me only with thine eyes," from John Hyde's tutor of 1799, seems to be written in concert pitch, not as recommended by the table, and only after studying the table does it become clear that it is to be played on the D crook. Evidently, players were expected to read from concert pitch as well as figure out their own crooking. It also becomes apparent that slide trumpeters could play in different keys with one crook, as is shown by another example, "Se l'arco," which is written out in F; it later becomes clear, however, that the discussion of the possibilities of playing this aria is based on use of the C crook for both the

original and a possible transposition up to C. The "March in Scipio" can be played easily on the slide trumpet only if it is transposed up a fifth to A and played on the D trumpet. It would have helped this reader enormously if clear information about keys and crooks had been given for these examples.

The historical section of the book is excellent, bringing together much information about how, when, and by whom the instrument was first produced, and tracing its development. Reference is made to other sources where more detailed and more technical descriptions of the mechanical workings of the instrument are found, but lack of technical information in this book makes it difficult for the average reader to understand the capabilities of the instrument in different periods of its history. Again there are questions the reader expects to be answered: What length of slide is required to produce lower notes on specific crooks? A table showing the lengths theoretically required to produce notes a half-tone and whole-tone below notes of the harmonic series for each crook would have been very helpful in understanding the possibilities of the instrument. How long is the slide extension? This measurement, so crucial to understanding the half-tone or whole-tone capability of the instrument, is not included in descriptions of specific instruments, and is only vaguely referred to except for a few late and unusual models. A table of known instruments with their dates and slide dimensions would have given a much better picture of the evolution of whole-tone capability.

As stated in the book's publicity material, Art Brownlow's study is a new and thorough assessment of the slide trumpet. It is the first comprehensive examination of the orchestral, ensemble, and solo literature written for this instrument. Although the amount of music found was less than hoped for, the book represents a lot of necessary research work. It has effectively brought together some literature specifically for the instrument and has drawn a much better picture of how the slide trumpet was used and thought of by English performers and composers.

ROBERT E. ELIASON
LYME, NEW HAMPSHIRE