

History of the trumpet essay sample

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The trumpet has probably evolved more than any other instrument that is presently in use. Its long history began with ancient people using hollow materials such as animal horns and seashells to amplify sounds that they made. The trumpet as we have it today is almost a totally different instrument from what it was thousands of years ago.

Since the beginning of time, man has composed music, both instrumental and vocal. The very first instruments were probably part of the percussion family. People would bang on things to make sounds. After that, people looked for things to amplify their own voice. In order to produce any sound on a trumpet the player needs to “buzz” his or her lips. It is believed that the first ancestor of the trumpet was played while someone was trying to blow a sea animal out of a shell. Instead of blowing, the person somehow buzzed his lips into the shell. After this discovery, people started buzzing into hollow things to send a message from one person to another.

The oldest evidence of trumpets has been found in Egyptian drawings on the inside walls of a Pharaoh’s tomb. These drawings have been dated around 1500 BC. The trumpets shown were made of a long tube and had a bell flaring out on one end. They were probably used for communication purposes, like signaling in battle, or announcing someone’s arrival. In the Bible, trumpets are symbolic for the voices of angels.

During the Middle Ages, a major revolution occurred with regards the trumpet. At this time various trumpeters joined together and began to compose their own music for their own instrument. During the Renaissance, a new kind of trumpet, the slide trumpet, was invented. Its slide was similar

to that of the trombone. In early versions, the slide was part of a very long mouthpiece that was pulled in and out to fill in the gaps of the natural scale of harmonics. The problem with the slide trumpet was that composers wanted the trumpet to be faster and more agile than the slide would allow. Because of this limitation, the slide trumpet never caught on and was never widely used.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the natural trumpet gained popularity. The natural trumpet was a valveless tube, coiled up like a garden hose, with a bell on one end. Famous composers like Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Handel wrote for this instrument. A whole new style of playing called “clarion” developed. “Clarino” playing was done in the high range of the instrument. It was high enough in the natural scale of harmonics that the notes formed a complete scale. Trumpeters were trained specifically for this type of playing, which started at the third octave of the instrument. Because of the technical difficulty, good pay, and recognition associated with “clarion” playing, the process of becoming a professional trumpeter was highly selective. In fact, it was usually a skill that was passed on from father to son.

Musicians of the 1700s were reluctant to let trumpeters join their string-based ensembles because trumpeters had a tendency to drown the other instruments out or often would play out of tune. The manufacturers of instruments made trumpets in different keys, usually D or E flat and began to use a shallower mouthpiece. These new ideas helped the trumpet be more in tune, and helped the players by making the high notes easier to hit.

The nineteenth century saw a major revolution of the trumpet as an instrument. Valves were added in 1813. The trumpet now was able to play a full scale in a comfortable and practical range. It is important to understand how these valves work. " With none of the valves pressed down, the air travels the shortest possible route through the instrument. If a valve is pressed down, the air is rerouted through the valve to an extra piece of tubing, and then sent back to the valve and out the other end of the valve. The whole process lowers the pitch. If more than one valve is pressed down, the air goes through the valve and tube farthest from the player first, and works its way through the other valves and finally out through the final piece of tubing connected to the bell." (Olsen, *The History of the Trumpet*, p 5)

Now that the trumpet had become a fully functional instrument, composers wrote trumpet parts into their works. Their parts could contain anything from a gentle, soothing sound, to a mean, brash tone.

One of the instruments invented after the development of the valved trumpet was the cornet in B-flat. The B-flat cornet pushed most trumpets, which were still being made in the keys of F and G, into the key of B-flat. This still remains the most common key for trumpets and cornets. The person who helped most to define the art of cornet playing was Jean Baptiste Arban. Arban wrote the famous and still widely used " Arban's Complete Celebrated Method for the Cornet". It is now known as the cornet player's Bible.

From the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century, many new forms of music began to appear. The trumpet, being a melody instrument, became a major part of many of these new art forms. Around the beginning

of World War II, the trumpet began to be used extensively in jazz. It became the lead instrument mainly because of its versatility in playing both mellow sounding parts, brassy parts, and just about everything in between. Many jazz parts for the trumpet pushed the artist to hit double high C's and beyond. From Louis Armstrong to Miles Davis a succession of trumpeters showed what the instrument could do in that context, while classical soloists were still few in number. One recent player to straddle both worlds is Wynton Marsalis, a highly gifted American trumpeter, who manages to play baroque music on one night and jazz the next. The long history of the trumpet started almost at the beginning of time. When ancient man wanted to amplify his own voice, he talked or sang into hollow objects. But the history of the trumpet is by no means finished. It will continue to last through the twenty-first century and beyond.