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Trombone Glissando: A Case Study in Continuity and Change in Brass Instrument Performance Idioms

Trevor Herbert

Dedicated to the memory of my teacher Arthur Wilson (1927-2010), principal trombone of the Philharmonia Orchestra and Professor of Trombone at the Royal College of Music.

The demand for trombone-players, for what are called 'jazz' bands, has not only made it difficult to keep them in symphony orchestras, but it is destroying their artistic efficiency. The principal characteristic of 'jazz' music is the vulgar sliding from tone to tone.... This plays havoc with the embouchure of the musician, and, if persisted in, inevitably unfits him for artistic music.... It is enough to point out that the need of a correct and sensitive embouchure is ... essential.

Literary Digest, 12 June 1920.¹

This article traces the origin of trombone glissando and its assimilation into the common idiom of the instrument. In so doing, it describes and examines a range of cultural and other historical factors that accompanied this assimilation, offering a view about performance orthodoxies on brass instruments and the patterns of continuity and change to which they have been subject. Trombone glissando is a mere technical device, but it can also be seen as an especially interesting example of a historical and cultural "moment," because its emergence and assimilation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coincided with many other important cultural convergences. It seems to have been first used extemporarily by players working in the various new forms of popular entertainment that emerged at that time. Its notation in art music came later, and, for reasons that are suggested below, the absorption of glissando into orchestral music was often accompanied by comment and even controversy. The story is interesting in its own right, but it might also stand as something of an exemplar of processes that have occupied the thoughts and endeavors of brass players in other eras and those who have influenced them. However, my emphasis is on the way that glissando should be seen as an ingredient in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century reconstruction of understandings of the role and character of brass instruments. Indeed, towards the end of this article I go so far as to suggest that the history of brass instruments has qualities that endow such issues with an importance that is at the very least special and possibly even unique among all families of musical instruments.

Identifying patterns of change and continuity

Detecting the date when trombone glissando was first used is both impossible and unimportant: much less important than identifying the trend that led to its assimilation as a technique that most players understood and used. Such trends are among the most significant things that music historians can identify, especially when they reveal apparently sustained alterations to the *idiom* of an instrument: by idiom, I mean the shared understanding of an instrument's character and purpose. The task then is to explain why such changes have occurred and to measure their impact. For example, one of the most interesting trends to have come about in the history of all brass instruments occurred in the seventeenth century when trumpets began to be used in what must have been recognized at the time as a new way: as instruments carrying expressive, sometimes even poetic narrative, rather than being confined to the more declamatory function that was imbedded in their tradition. This phenomenon should be treated as a matter of fascination because it generates a number of important questions. Did this new idiom prevail before it was evidenced in written music in the seventeenth century? Why did it occur? Was the change stimulated by the way some players played, or by a composer-led desire to understand the instrument in a new role: as a different character with a different tone of voice and expressive function? How did the old style and the new coexist and coalesce? How quickly and instinctively did players grasp and understand the new meanings they were meant to convey? Did they absorb this new role willingly or reluctantly, and were audiences of the time (in their various guises) shocked, charmed, or confused by what must have appeared to be a new dialect from an instrumental voice that they thought they knew well?

These types of question are interesting because they prompt us to consider whether we really understand musical practices in the way they were understood in the past, and because they force us to be curious not just about narrow and sometimes isolated facts, but about the substance and dynamic of the musical cultures in which brass players worked. Put somewhat differently, they compel us to be historians rather than merely harvesters and exhibitors of data. The emergence of the glissando as one of the defining aspects of the idiom of the modern slide trombone gives rise to all these questions, and here too the important point is less about the exact place and time of the origin of trombone glissando than about the process that led to its assimilation into shared ideas about music making in both popular and high culture. Trombone glissando emerged in one of the most fascinating periods in music history: when the barriers between popular and classical styles were, somewhat paradoxically, becoming both more rigid and more fluid. Indeed glissando became one of the emblems of the changes taking place in musical styles at that time: as the quotation that opens this article illustrates, it was referred to as one of the features that exemplified a general clash of high and low tastes.

Early examples in art music

Despite the obvious ease with which glissando can be performed on the trombone and indeed the compulsion that new players may feel to experiment with it on their first encounter with the instrument, it appears not to have been used until the nineteenth century. The instruction “glissando” appears against violin passages in Carlo Farina’s descriptive *Capriccio stravagante* (1627),² but this is no more than a good example of an isolated occurrence, as it is doubtful that the term was widely understood in the modern sense at that time; indeed, directions for glissando in violin writing by Jean-Philippe Rameau in 1754 were seen at that time as entirely innovative.³ “Glissando” has been understood in two related ways in musical terminology: as a continuous descending or ascending slide of the type that can be produced on the trombone or an unfretted string instrument such as the violin, and as the type played by drawing one or more fingers or fingernails over directly adjacent notes of a keyboard instrument or harp—this latter meaning was utilized from the eighteenth century. One of the features that distinguishes the two types is that the latter requires an abrupt movement, whereas the former doesn’t: a trombone glissando can be played very slowly, but a keyboard or harp glissando stops being a glissando when played so slowly that the individual notes become clearly and individually discernable—in essence, the glissando effect is then indistinguishable from any other figuration based on the sounding of adjacent notes. Not so in the former meaning, because here the glissando sounds all intermediate pitches between the points at which it starts and finishes.

Trombone glissando seems to have originated in Europe and America in the nineteenth century. It crept into regular use in classical orchestral music from around the turn of the twentieth century. An early example can be found in Aleksandr Glazunov’s *The Sea* (1889) (Figure 1).⁴ Edward Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* (1899) has glissando marked for unison celli and trombones (Figure 2), and it is also deployed in Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pelleas und Melisande* (1902/03) (Figure 3).



Figure 1: Detail from Aleksandr Glazunov’s *The Sea* (1889), showing glissando markings for trombones.



Figure 2: Edward Elgar, *Dream of Gerontius* (1899), trombone phrase played in unison with cellos and horns. The cello parts carry an identical marking.

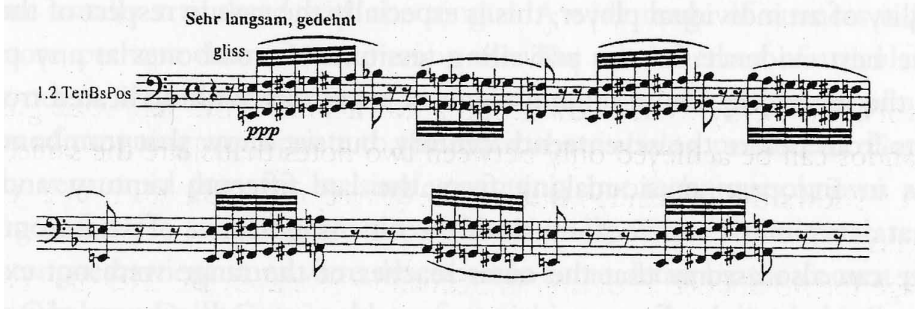


Figure 3: Trombone glissandos in Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande* (1902/3).

The score carries the note “Das glissando’ wird auf der Posaune folgendermaßen ausgeführt: der Ton [shows an octave in notation] wird als Grundton (beziehungsweise Oktave) des 6. Zuges mit den Lippen fixiert und dann Rohr durch alle Züge zusammengeschoben, doch so, daß die chromatischen, sowie die dazwischenliegenden $\frac{1}{4}$ -, $\frac{1}{8}$ - und kleinsten Intervalle, deutlich hörbar sind, wie beim glissando der Streich-Instrumente.’

[The “glissando” is executed on the trombone in the following manner: the note—the fundamental note (or the octave) in sixth position—is held by the lips and then the slide is pulled inward through all the positions in such a way that the chromatic [intervals], as well as the $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{8}$ and smallest intervals between them, are clearly heard, as in the glissando on string instruments.]

Glazunov marks the relevant passage “gliss” and indicates the slide positions from which each glissando should commence. Elgar, who was a trombonist of sorts himself and a one-time brass band conductor, somewhat surprisingly marks “glissando” over two notes between which a true glissando is not possible, but the “faking” of which is camouflaged by unisons with cellos and horns. Schoenberg, however, leaves nothing to chance and supplements the notated marking with a carefully worded explanation in the score about how glissando is to be executed. Whether this extra precaution was aimed at the conductor or the players is difficult to determine—it could have been either—but this is of no consequence. The important point is that the composer felt it necessary to provide such an instruction, and this can only be because he did not regard it as a technique that was routinely understood by conductors or orchestral trombonists of the

time. A hundred or more years later, it is difficult to imagine that such a simple device needed explanation, but its advent in European classical music can be thought of in terms similar to the introduction of the various “advanced techniques” that proliferated in the second half of the twentieth century (multiphonics, singing through the instrument and so on). The ease with which such techniques can be executed by professional players says nothing about their novelty at the point of their introduction, or about the uncertainty that players may have experienced about their execution in the concert hall. European orchestral players at the start of the twentieth century understood the idiom of the trombone in terms of an orthodoxy that was defined by two key factors: the way they had learned and been taught, and (related to that process) the demands of the prevailing canonical repertoire. New techniques such as glissando challenged established understandings of taste and tradition; this was recognized in critical opinion at the time. Schoenberg’s use of glissando in *Pelleas und Melisande*, for example, was described as being among “his farthest-sought effects.”⁵

The inspiration for the use of trombone glissando by Stravinsky in his ballet music probably came from his tutelage by Rimsky-Korsakov, whose knowledge of the techniques of brass and wind instruments was greatly enhanced by his familiarity with Russian naval bands,⁶ but its adoption by other composers active in Paris in the early twentieth century—Ravel and Milhaud, for example—can more probably be traced to jazz or other forms of American popular music such as minstrelsy and ragtime. Ragtime was famously introduced into Europe in 1900 by J.P. Sousa’s band at the Paris Exposition—the ragtime pieces, as I explain below, were essentially novelty numbers, often built around trombone glissando features.

The idea of glissando caught on very quickly, but it was not always applied in the same way. By the 1920s it is possible to detect a number of reasons why it was written in orchestral music. Among these, it was used as a purely abstract device intended to add color to orchestral timbre—Schoenberg’s *Five Orchestral Pieces* (1909) provides a good example of this;⁷ as an intensification of dramatic effect in a programmatic theme—for instance, in Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* (1913); and as a deliberate extra-musical reference. Two such references soon became standard: the summoning of comic or slapstick allusions, and direct references to popular music, especially various species of American popular music, including jazz.

References intended to summon extra-musical allusions depend for their effect on their easy and immediate recognition by the listener. Put somewhat differently, it is not sufficient for a composer to *intend* to convey an allusion through music—it is necessary for a reasonable consensus to be shared between composer, performer, and listeners for the communication to be successful. For example, the pastoral allusion stimulated by the sound of the hunting horn has meaning in art music because of the literal existence of the hunting horn in pastoral settings and because of the persistent use of the horn as a code for this purpose in the conventions of classical music. Trombone glissando in this manifestation quickly became a powerful code for the threatening and “dirty” music that jazz represented, especially to European audiences. Also, by inference, it carried an

association with the spectre of its known principal proponents—most of them (so it was perceived) black. Indeed many nuances contained in the reception of glissando reveal racial associations, and while they were strongest in the USA they were also present in Europe. This might account in part for the sometimes precarious entry of the device into the conventions of art music, but it also explains something of its attraction as traces of exotic music cultures merged with European modernism.

Origins and derivations

It is in popular music idioms that the origins of trombone glissando are undoubtedly to be found. Purely musical evidence for this assertion is understandably slight because the performance of glissando was not just extemporaneous, but neither notated nor the subject of published description. It was, in fact, not a musical device at all, but quite literally a quasi-musical effect used to accompany the endeavors of acrobats, clowns, and just about any other vaudeville, circus, or light entertainer who might benefit from its strategic application. When glissando started to be used in orchestral music, it became more visible, but it seems to have already existed in public consciousness: for example, an intemperate correspondent to the *Musical Times*, after being exposed to “that favourite novelty effect of *glissando*” in a classical concert, dismissed it as something he had “heard ... in a London music-hall twenty years ago. (I thought it funny the first time, but after a few repetitions it seemed a poor sort of joke).”⁸

In the United States, the use of glissando in show bands in the second decade of the century also yielded what became known as the “smear solo”: a light novelty solo accompanied by band or piano. These solos were entirely exploitative of the slide glissando feature. They proliferated rapidly and became favorites with popular audiences and amateur players on both sides of the Atlantic. Solos with titles such as *The Joker* and *The Acrobat* (titles that provide more than a hint of the trombone glissando’s origins) sold in large quantities.⁹ The US smear solo repertoire owes much to Henry Fillmore, who had himself been a trombone player with touring burlesque and circus troupes. He published a series of such pieces through his family firm, Fillmore’s Music House of Cincinnati, Ohio. The advertising and presentational imagery that accompanied the pieces was outrageously racist. Each piece characterized a different member of a fictional, comic, slapstick, black minstrel trombone-playing family (see Figure 4). *Teddy Trombone* (1911), *Lassus Trombone* (1915), *Sally Trombone* (1917), and *Slim Trombone* (ca. 1919) are just some of the set. The title *Slim Trombone* may in fact point to the origin of the idea that Fillmore exploited. “Slim Jim Austin” was a feature trombone player and dancer with Harvey’s Greater Minstrels, a troupe of “tented minstrels” (the term refers to musicians who played in temporary marquees) who toured extensively in the second decade of the twentieth century (Figure 5). Austin’s own advertising images match those used by Fillmore very closely. It is hard to imagine that Slim Jim’s colorful act did not feature, or even depend on, the comic effect of the smear.¹⁰

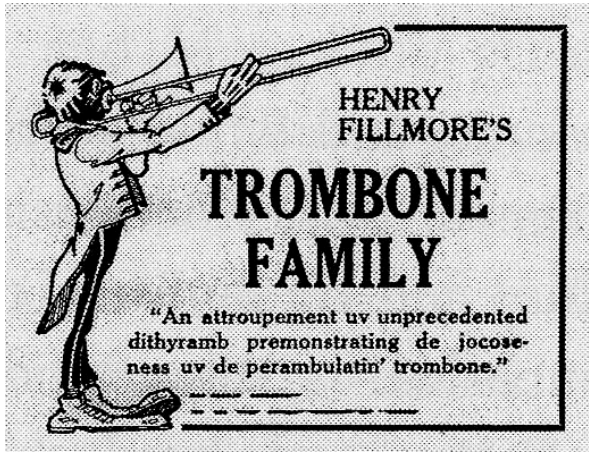


Figure 4: A detail from the advertising pamphlet made and distributed by Henry Fillmore in support of his “smear” trombone solos.

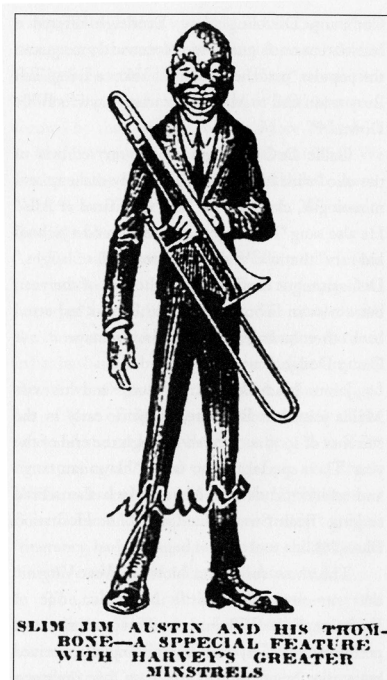


Figure 5: Slim Jim Austin, featured trombonist with Harvey’s Greater Minstrels. (The image is reproduced in Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Ragged but Right* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. 325).

Sousa's band included ensemble smear pieces in its programs from the 1890s. They are usually built around ragtime structures and carry references to black minstrel entertainment in their titles—for example, *Trombone Sneeze: A Humoresque Cake Walk*, which was recorded by Arthur Pryor with the Sousa Band in New York City in January 1902, with Sousa himself conducting, and *A Coon Band Contest*, recorded with Pryor's own band, again in New York City, in April 1906.

Sousa was no fan of jazz. "Jazz," he declared in his autobiography, "permits people of no talent whatever to write stuff and call it music," and he anticipated that it would disappear "when the dancer tires of it."¹¹ But he plundered African American music unstintingly, characterizing it on his foreign tours as "native American music," and it was here that the glissando features appeared. The association between the glissando and black minstrel music was easily made. "There are reminiscences of Dixie's Land, [and] nigger frolics on the brasses," wrote one newspaper critic, commenting on a concert in the Sousa 1903 UK tour;¹² and a London newspaper referred to Sousa's "inexhaustible 'bundles of mischief' and cake-walks."¹³ It is easy to imagine that these references led to the notion in European minds that the trombone smear was as direct a reference to African American music as were the visual references that black-face acts peddled so remorselessly. This too was not new. From the 1870s "black faced" minstrel acts thrived in England, often with a greater level of respectability than many other mainstream music hall acts,¹⁴ a phenomenon aided by the fact that the music was seen as exotic because the UK at that time had such a small black population.

New Orleans, glissando, and tailgate

It is important to see the reception of orchestral glissando alongside the reception of various forms of syncopated music in Europe, particularly jazz. Glissando was not just an ingredient in early jazz, but one of the devices that made jazz recognizable—so much so, that it gave rise to the only genre in music (if one disregards the trivial "smear solo") that is defined by the way the trombone plays: "tailgate jazz." The tailgate moniker emerged because of the positioning of New Orleans slide trombonists at the rear of advertising wagons (near the tailgate) where they could have uninterrupted freedom to move the slide.¹⁵ The glissando in this context was not just an effect: it defined and emphasized harmonic and other ensemble structures by—for example—anticipating and lending exciting emphasis to the resolution of cadences. It was originally a relatively brief performance tradition outside New Orleans, but it is perhaps notable that the very first recording by a non-white jazz band—that made by Kid Ory's Sunshine Orchestra in Los Angeles in 1922¹⁶—was built around a trombone glissando feature, *Ory's Creole Trombone*, a piece which owes more to an imitation of a general style of playing by New Orleans slide trombonists at that time than to an attribute unique to Ory himself.¹⁷

Ory and most New Orleans trombonists of his generation deployed glissando profusely, but the reason why they did so sheds light on both the more general performance style of this generation of jazz trombonists, and why the generation that followed it regarded

that style somewhat contemptuously. The available evidence suggests that slide trombones were not used in New Orleans at the very start of the twentieth century. It is possible that slide instruments were not easily available in the town through the normal retail trade even though they could be purchased by mail-order.¹⁸ As was the case in so many places in the nineteenth century, many, perhaps most, trombone players played the valve instrument. Musicologists have overlooked the extent to which the tradition of slide trombone playing became almost obsolete in many parts of the world in the nineteenth century. The valve trombone quickly became the instrument of choice among the military players who made up the largest sector of the professional market and were in most cases the most influential and versatile players in civilian music making too. Where the slide trombone survived (which it did hardly at all in Italy, Spain, and Latin America), it often did so alongside the valve instrument, and was revived ultimately because composers regarded its sound and intonational accuracy as superior to that of the valve trombone. The sentiment was captured neatly by Rimsky-Korsakov in his idiosyncratic *Principles of Orchestration*, where he describes the valve instrument as being more mobile than the slide trombone, but the slide trombone as superior because of the “nobility and equality of [its] sound.”¹⁹ Somewhat paradoxically, the emergence of glissando as an improvised effect probably also contributed in no small measure to the gradual re-ascendancy of the slide instrument. From the 1860s, advertisements for trombone players in show bands specify that slide trombone players are required. This is the case almost without exception in *The Era*, the British newspaper that routinely advertised employment opportunities for musicians. For example, in October 1873, Betty’s London Circus searched for “A First

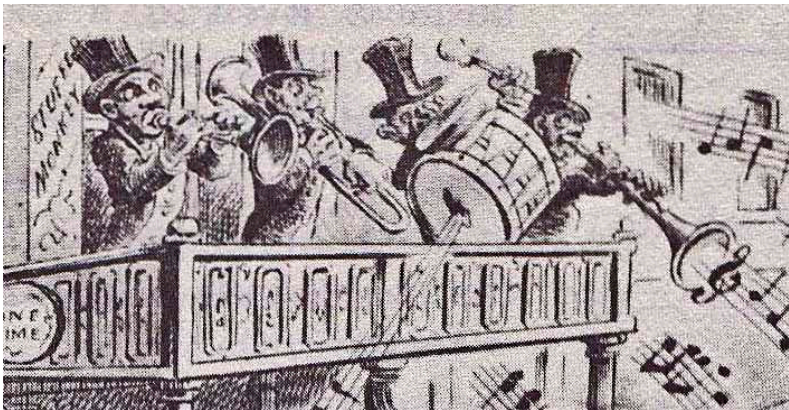


Figure 6: A detail from a caricature on the cover of *The Mascot* (15 November 1890), a newspaper published in New Orleans. The image depicts Robinson’s Band.

The second instrument from the left is taken to be a trombone. If this is so, it is a valve trombone with a backward-pointing bell. However, it may be a baritone horn, an instrument which the valve trombonist Willie Cornish played before he acquired the short-model valve trombone with which he is seen in the Buddy Bolden Band photograph.

Class Trick-Act Rider” and for a “trombone (slide),”²⁰ and in May 1877, Keith’s Grand Circus looked for a “trombone (slide).”²¹ The formulation “trombone (slide)” became a standard descriptor for such positions for the remainder of the century.

Photographs of very early New Orleans bands invariably show players with valve trombones, and this includes the caricature of Robinson’s Band published on the cover of the New Orleans newspaper *The Mascot* in an edition from 1890,²² the famous picture of Willie Cornish with the Buddy Bolden Band, and the first known photograph of Kid Ory himself, taken at the Woodland Plantation, La Place, Louisiana, at the turn of the century (see Figure 6).²³ Valve trombones are much more evident than slide instruments in photographs of bands of all sorts in America in the nineteenth century,²⁴ and the oral histories of early jazz players show that many were initially valve trombone players. Several of those early players lay claim to witnessing the advent of the slide trombone in New Orleans. The evidence is generally inconsistent, except in one respect: they all claim that the slide trombone was not known in New Orleans until it was introduced at some time in the first decade of the twentieth century—probably around 1907/8. Kid Ory said he bought his first “good horn” from Warlein’s music store when he was fourteen (in 1900), and it was a valve trombone to replace his first valve trombone that had holes “plugged with soap.”²⁵ According to him, Willie Cornish played a baritone horn as a trombone before he got the short-model valve trombone with which he is seen in the famous photograph of the Buddy Bolden Band. Manuel Manetta claimed that one of his uncles, Deuce Manetta, was a trombone player who “came to New Orleans from a conservatory in France,” and that he was the first to be seen in New Orleans with a slide trombone, as all the others played valve trombone at that time.²⁶ William “Baba” Ridgley claimed that “the first sliding trombone player in town ... was ... a bright fellow who left here for Chicago and there joined the detective force. His name was Tucker.”²⁷ What is also clear is that when the slide trombone made its entrance, the players did not dispense with valve instruments; rather, they often used both—as different types of instruments with different expressive potentials and utilities. The new and exciting feature of the slide trombone was, indeed, the slide: it would have made little sense to players at that time to have played a slide trombone in the same way that they would have played a valve instrument: the fundamental design feature of the slide trombone was exemplified most obviously by its fundamental idiomatic feature, the glissando, and this is why it was exploited profusely. But it was a style that quickly slipped from fashion. As the slide instrument became ubiquitous there was a further redefining of trombone virtuosity which reached its most advanced manifestation in the playing of bebop players such as J.J. Johnson. It was a transformation that the clarinetist George Probert, interviewed in 1990 and reflecting on his days with Ory’s Creole Jazz Band, lamented: “I used to stand there in wonderment. I’d listen to something you don’t hear nowadays—a four bar trombone gliss. It’s like trombone players don’t even know they have a slide anymore.”²⁸

Portamento, glissando, and the conservatoire tradition

Probert's words reflect an important reality that had its seed in the late 1920s: glissando was rejected by the new generation of jazz trombonists who were to be so prominent in the dance band era, and it never returned except in those revivalist groups that emerged from the 1940s, that were overtly retrospective and imitative of the tailgate style. Lawrence Brown, the most virtuosic of Ellington's trombonists, rejected "that tailgate business"²⁹ as an affront to the lyrical sophistication that he sought to develop. In fact, this precise point—the abrasive conflict between concepts of sophistication and the perceived crudity of glissando—was at the heart of a dilemma that players in classical music as well as jazz wrestled with in the opening decades of the twentieth century. The problem was intense, because glissando was perceived as having no place in the understanding of the instrument's idiom that had developed in the conservatoires since the nineteenth century. This was not just because of its "vulgar" effect and its association with lower forms of popular entertainment, but also because it was perceived as a gross corruption of one of the most tasteful of musical ornaments—portamento.

The collapse of the aristocratic patronage system in the late-eighteenth century, together with the establishment of new types of civic and national government, led to the greatest change to have occurred in the way brass players learned their art. It caused the creation of specialist training schools for music—most importantly the Paris Conservatoire—that established new types of performance orthodoxies. The origin of many of these institutions (the Paris Conservatoire included) lay in a need to advance the improvement of military music; in most countries the military, then as now, was the largest employer of professional musicians. There are two key points about the importance of the military connection: first, it established a need for a standardization of playing styles, and this included concepts of taste (this was an explicit intention at the foundation of the Paris Conservatoire); and second, the military music system ensured that the values espoused by the leaders of taste were cascaded swiftly and effectively to a mass of musicians through its hierarchical structures. The difference between military and civilian (brass-playing) music professionals was, at this time, barely discernable because most players either belonged to military bands or had been influenced by them. Consequently, these performance orthodoxies were standard within countries, and some of their elements gained universal status through the publication and distribution of ideas contained in didactic literature.

The succession of professors of trombone at the Paris Conservatoire and elsewhere sought to standardize by reference to traditions of playing that seemed to be authenticated by repertoires to which canonical composers—ancient and modern—had contributed. This is why the conservatoire instruction books of the nineteenth century place so much emphasis on ornamentation (mainly the conventions of eighteenth-century ornamentation), even though many of these ornaments are hardly idiomatic for the slide trombone. For example, most semitone trills cannot be played naturally on the trombone. However, one ornament for which the slide trombone is sublimely suited is the one that was held in the highest regard in vocal music: portamento.

Portamento has attracted careful scholarly scrutiny in recent years, largely because of its evidence in early vocal recordings and its abrupt fall from fashion in the middle of the twentieth century.³⁰ Daniel Leech-Wilkinson has drawn attention to two realities concerning portamento: first, that for more than two centuries it was seen as a “significant expressive device ... [that listeners] found ... beautiful and moving”; and second, that its demise (from about 1940) came about because it was regarded as “sentimental and self-indulgent in art music performance, objectionable except as an occasional special effect.”³¹

It is all but impossible to differentiate portamento from glissando in purely theoretical terms: *New Grove 2* describes (vocal) portamento as a “carriage of the voice,” the “connection of two notes by passing audibly through the intervening pitches.” It goes on to cite evidence of portamento being applied to intervals of up to a fourth. Portamento cannot be confused with keyboard glissando, but it is obvious that its relationship with slide glissando is very close. Indeed, the only distinction that can be made between portamento and glissando is the purely semantic one that portamento was an *ornament* whereas glissando was an *effect*. As such, the two can only be distinguished by the manner and context of their execution.

When trombone glissando was introduced into the art music idiom, portamento was still being deployed by performers of the highest taste. Many of the method books of the conservatoires include instructions on the application of portamento. Few mention glissando, except to caution against it. André Lafosse regarded it as “of questionable taste,” and Widor in his book on orchestration thought it fit only “for a nigger dance.”³² Walter Piston cautioned readers that glissando is “easily...abused.”³³ The pre-eminence of portamento over glissando also permeated the jazz world, where glissando was rejected but portamento became one of the hallmarks of the balladeer style practiced by players such as Tommy Dorsey.

I have elsewhere drawn attention to a discrepancy between notation and practice in a recording of a work by Stravinsky, and for the sake of completeness it should be



Figure 7: The opening phrase of the trombone part of the “Vivo” movement in Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* (1919/20). The first illustration shows the notation in the score, the second shows the way it was performed in the first recording (Paris, 1928) conducted by the composer.

mentioned here.³⁴ In 1928 Stravinsky conducted the first recording of the first part of the suite from his ballet *Pulcinella* in Paris.³⁵ Among the extracts recorded at that session was the famous duet for trombone and double bass (the movement marked *Vivo*). It is based on a simple four-bar theme in which two articulated notes are followed by two glissandos. This recording uniquely omits the glissandos, and throughout the recording notes over which a glissando is marked in the score are articulated staccato (Figure 7).

There could be several reasons for this, some of which seem unlikely: the clarity of the recording benefited from such an approach; the composer was experimenting with a new type of articulation; one or both of the players could not play the piece convincingly with glissando. The latter explanation should not be dismissed too quickly, because the standard of trombone playing in Paris in the 1920s was the subject of frequent criticism.³⁶ A yet further possibility—though a distant one—is that the trombonist was playing a valve instrument. The truth will remain a mystery, but a possibility—speculative, but worth exercising—is that the application of glissando was deemed tasteless by the players, especially in the context of a neo-classical work where they may have been struck by the balanced and carefully measured proportions reminiscent of the classical style.

But why did Stravinsky allow a departure from his notated intentions? The work had been performed to considerable acclaim several times in the US under the direction of Pierre Monteux during 1924. Indeed, it was the success of Monteux's performances that led Stravinsky to fashion the various segments into a single suite, which the composer recorded many times subsequently with the glissandos in place. An exchange between Stravinsky and the Spanish composer Manuel da Falla at least settles one point: that Stravinsky was relaxed about the omission of the glissandos. In January 1924, da Falla wrote to Stravinsky, at that time living in Paris,

All my best wishes, dear friend, for a magnificent year. Would you please tell me whether a slide trombone is essential for your *Pulcinella*? I ask you because only valve trombones are available in Seville, unfortunately.³⁷

The reply was prompt:

Just a word to tell you that you can perform *Pulcinella* with a valve trombone. I will be doing *Pulcinella* myself when I conduct in Barcelona in March, after which time the parts will be at your disposal.³⁸

Stravinsky was famously self-promoting and would have let few things stand in the way of the dissemination of his work. The *Pulcinella* excerpts were not the only work that was recorded at those sessions. The two trombone players were Raphaël Delbos (1882–1962), a member of the Société des Concerts, and André Lafosse (1890–1975), who was to be Professor at the Conservatoire. We do not know which of them performed *Pulcinella*, but both played slide trombones and this was the Lafosse who was to describe glissando as vulgar.

Glissando—a detail of technique or a symptom of a changing idiom?

Is the introduction of glissando a mere detail in the history of the trombone, or, as I suggested earlier in this article, can it be seen as representing a somewhat wider phenomenon of the way that modern idioms of brass instruments have been formed? This is a complex question, but certain features of the glissando story are especially compelling and in some ways revealing. Trombone glissando emerged in different parts of the world almost simultaneously. This can be attributed to the somewhat eerie idea of it being a series of coincidences, or it could be the result of a cultural trend in those parts of the world where commercial and other factors were active on popular and more elite cultural practices. It is not enough merely to dismiss the phenomenon as the result of improved communication, because while efficient communication would aid the process of cultural dissemination, it would not cause a change of this type, and in any case, the issues that are discussed here occurred among apparently unrelated and hugely distant groups. Another shared international feature was that the status of glissando as a legitimate instrumental technique was the subject of controversy. This was not simply a clash between high and low cultural opinions, because condemnation and rejection of it was nowhere stronger than among the generation of virtuoso jazz trombonists who emerged in the later 1920s. A more realistic demarcation of the principal polemicists might be the untutored tradition (tailgate, theater band players, minstrelsy-type groups and so on) on the one hand, and on the other, those who identified themselves as part of an emerging, aspirational professional elite (the conservatoire tradition, the military, progressive jazz players, and so on).

A further question then beckons about the weight of all this and its importance in the study of brass instrument history. Is there something special about the history of brass instruments that should compel us to think about it in somewhat different terms than may be applied in other fields of historical musicology and especially in instrument history? Is there a particular feature or series of features relevant to the history of brass instruments that makes a micro-examination of the devices and styles (such as glissando) that contribute to the modern idiom of brass instruments desirable or even essential? I suspect that there is, and summon three thematic factors in support of this idea.

First, the longevity of brass instruments, their shared acoustical and other properties, and even the names by which they are identified, give rise to confident assertions about historical continuity that are almost wholly unjustified in musical terms. Technological developments that occurred in the early nineteenth century, and the influence of the social and cultural contexts within which they took place, were so profound that the powers of change all but eclipsed those of continuity. It was not just the invention of valves—though this was the most important factor; even the slide trombone had fallen so profoundly into obsolescence in many parts of the world that when it re-emerged late in the eighteenth century, many writers struggled to identify the name by which it should be called.³⁹

Second, before the late eighteenth century the way that brass players learned and the musical values to which they were taught to subscribe were based on an apprenticeship system that was primarily dynastic. The payment books of some musical centers show

the same surnames for players of some instruments over many, many generations and sometimes over centuries. When newer social structures emerged in the nineteenth century, this system collapsed and most of the new players came from family backgrounds that had little or no association with professional music. It was as if the slate had been wiped clean. This point is evidenced by various documentary collections that reveal the personal records of nineteenth-century professional players.⁴⁰ The baton for musical education was passed to a wide array of formal and informal systems, including institutions such as conservatoires, but the major mediating force throughout was not national governments or educational theorists, but the military music profession, privately sponsored in many countries, intimately linked to civilian music making, and constituting by far the largest, most professional and influential network of music makers in the world. If the military music establishments of different countries shared any common feature in the nineteenth century, it was an urge to standardize styles, pitch, and (to an extent) instrumentation, and above all to elevate quality. At the core of these institutions (the military and the conservatoires) were brass players, and their terms of reference were articulated globally through the instruction books that often carried the names of the conservatoires with which their authors were associated.

The third and final factor concerns the disproportionate extent to which brass players were engaged in new forms of popular music, and the extraordinary extent to which brass playing was advanced and changed through the contributions of amateurs and those among them who made the faltering but historic steps from amateurism to the musical profession. The widespread availability of brass instruments and the engagement of new types of practitioners with them led to a reconfiguration of the idioms of all brass instruments. I would argue that the extent to which this phenomenon occurred can not be matched in the story of any other group of instruments. The closest similarity was the case of the piano which, just after the middle of the nineteenth century, was the subject of what the great economic historian Cyril Ehrlich characterized as “the flood” of production and consumption that was to lead to so many different performance styles. The outstanding factors that add particularity to the case of brass instruments is that they were almost always performed in ensembles, they were much cheaper than many other instruments, and the means through which sound is generated and manipulated on them is of a much more personal and idiosyncratic order. The new generations of brass players could quite literally change the musical meanings their instruments conveyed, and this was caused by the core reality that modern idioms of brass instruments are the result of a mass of social and cultural interactions and not merely of a musical continuity.

One of the corollaries of all this was the emergence of musical and quasi-social tensions caused partly by what some felt to be a genuine need to rationalize brass playing so that shared orthodoxies could be established—to lay down (in the spirit of the time) “correct” ways of playing—and within this story too was a manifestation of the need to establish not just what was “correct” but also what was “superior.” It was a tension between what the cultural theorist Raymond Williams has described as a *dominant* ideology, and what was perceived in some quarters as a somewhat troublesome *emergent* ideology.⁴¹

Trombone glissando can be described simply as the sound that emerges when a player blows a note and moves the slide without articulating the intervening pitches. But for a couple of decades at the start of the twentieth century it seemed to be a symptom of something more.

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NOTES

¹ Quoted in Karl Koenig, *Jazz in Print* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), 141.

² *New Grove 2*, s.v. “Glissando,” by David D. Boyden / Robin Stowell.

³ *New Grove 2*, s.v. “Rameau, Jean-Phillipe,” by Graham Sadler and Thomas Christensen.

⁴ I am most grateful to my friend Douglas Yeo of the Boston Symphony Orchestra for bringing this piece to my attention.

⁵ *The Musical Times* (1 March 1911): 182.

⁶ In his *Principles of Orchestration*, ed. Maximilian Steinberg (New York: Dover, 1964, p. 29), Rimsky says, “The technical operation known as glissando is peculiar to the harp alone,” but the only edition of the book that was edited by Maximilian Steinberg, and initially published in 1912, four years after Rimsky’s death, is based on manuscripts originating in 1873/4. However, few composers were as well acquainted with orchestration effects as he by the time Stravinsky studied with him from 1902 through 1905.

⁷ Movement 5, measure 2.

⁸ *The Musical Times* (1 September 1924): 797.

⁹ *The Jester* was written by the trombonist Harold Moss, who was also the author of one of the standard instruction books for brass band trombonists. *The Acrobat* was written by the prolific brass band composer J. A. Greenwood.

¹⁰ Lynn Abbott and Doug Serroff, *Ragged But Right: Black Traveling Shows, “Coon Songs,” and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 325.

¹¹ John Philip Sousa, *Marching Along*, ed. Paul E. Bierley, rev. edn. (Westerville, OH: Integrity Press, 1994), 358.

¹² U.S. Marine Band Archive, Washington DC. The article, entitled “Here and there,” occurs in the press clippings book for January 1903, p. 231. The exact source is not given, but its proximity to a review in the *Burton Mail* for January 4 suggests that it is a West Midlands newspaper.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁴ For a discussion of this topic, see Michael Pickering, “White Skin, Black Masks: ‘Nigger’ Minstrelsy in Victorian England,” in J. S. Bratton (ed.), *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), 49–70.

¹⁵ A much earlier example of “tailgate” trombone playing, totally unrelated to the New Orleans usage, is found in a set of drawings of London life dating from ca. 1840 by the artist George Scharf (1788–1860), in the possession of the British Museum—see item 1862,0614.783.

¹⁶ The band was called “Spike’s Seven Pods of Pepper” on this recording. The other piece recorded

at this time was *Society Blues*.

¹⁷ This is not entirely speculative. More than one player is on record as saying that the piece is a reflection of tailgate playing generally, without suggesting that it was not written by Ory. See, for example, the interview with William Russell recorded 4 September 1962 (Reel II—transcript, p. 20), William Ransom Hogan Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans. Russell believes that the piece is indebted to the playing of Zue Robertson.

¹⁸ Some pictures of slide trombonists in published secondary sources seem to be wrongly dated. For example, I am grateful to Bruce Boyd Raeburn of the Hogan Archive at Tulane University, who agrees that the dating of a picture of the Mathews and Lockport Brass Band to 1904 may not be based on reliable evidence. The photograph is in the possession of the Hogan Archive and is reproduced with this dating in Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *Jazz: A History of America's Music* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 12–13.

¹⁹ N. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Principles of Orchestration*, 24.

²⁰ *The Era*, 9 October 1873.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 20 May 1877.

²² The image is actually of a valve trombone (or a baritone horn) with a backwards-facing bell. It has been called the first representation of an African American jazz band.

²³ Reproductions of both these images are by kind permission of the Hogan Archive, in T. Herbert, *The Trombone* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 190 and 268, respectively.

²⁴ See, for example, Margaret Hindle Hazen and Robert M. Hazen, *The Music Men: An Illustrated History of Brass Bands in America, 1800–1920* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), *passim*.

²⁵ Hogan Archive, Kid Ory interview transcript, p. 28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Manuel Manetta interview transcript, p. 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, “Baba” Ridgley interview transcript, p. 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, George Probert interview, p. 36.

²⁹ Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ, transcript of interview with Patricia Willard, Los Angeles, July 1976, p. 6.

³⁰ See, for example, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, “Portamento and Musical Meaning,” *Journal of Musicological Research*, 25 (2006): 233–61, and John Potter, “Beggar at the Door: the rise and fall of portamento singing,” *Music and Letters*, 87 (2006): 523–50.

³¹ Leech-Wilkinson, “Portamento and Musical Meaning,” 233–34.

³² Herbert, *The Trombone*, 142 and 219–20.

³³ Walter Piston, *Orchestration* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978), 274–75.

³⁴ Herbert, *The Trombone*, 248.

³⁵ Biddulph WHL 037.

³⁶ Roger Nichols, *The Harlequin Years: Music in Paris 1917–1929* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 183.

³⁷ Manuel De Falla to Stravinsky, 2 January 1924, quoted in Robert Craft, ed., *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 163.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁹ For example, when the Handel Commemorations were being organized in London in 1784, Charles Burney wrote of the problems encountered in obtaining “the SACBUT, or DOUBLE TRUMPET ... so many years had elapsed since it had been used.”

⁴⁰ A case in point is the records of the Royal Society of Musicians in London. Formed in the eighteenth century as a benevolent society, it required members to register certificates of birth. This allows identification of whether the fathers of these musicians were also musicians.

⁴¹ Raymond Williams, "Culture," in David McLellan (ed.), *Marx: The First 100 Years* (London, Fontana, 1983), 49–54.