

Report on the 6th International Romantic Brass Symposium in Bern, Switzerland

By Stanley Curtis



I had the great fortune of attending the 6th International Romantic Brass Symposium in Bern, Switzerland, in April this year. As President of the Historic Brass Society, one of the sponsors of this event, I got the chance to deliver a short keynote address at the beginning of the conference. I mentioned our debt of gratitude to Jeff Nussbaum, our founding president, and I also announced that the HBS's Christopher Monk Award committee had chosen Jeremy West as the newest Monk Award recipient.

We continued right away with presentations by Trevor Herbert (on military brass music research misconceptions) and Bryan Proksch (on the robber baron industrial bands in America), both of whom are well-known to many in our membership for their thorough research. These presentations, like all at this conference, endeavored to put 19th-century brass playing into the context of the society of the time. The first day continued with a paper by Maciej Kierzkowski on the early use of the cornet in Poland—using references to correspondence by Frederic Chopin and iconographic sources depicting the instrument in military bands of the 1820s. Maximilien Brisson then discussed an early Italian method by Fermo Bellini for slide trombone, right before the valved trombone gained ubiquity in Italy. Chris Belluscio, American trumpet-scholar, shared two newly discovered fantasias for the low F valved trumpet by Luigi Laschi. Then Ann-Marie Nilsson of Sweden connected an 1837 program mentioning the chromatic bass tuba to evidence found at the military archives in Stockholm. The first day ended with an amazing concert by John Wallace's The Wallace Collection, with John Wallace and John Miller on trumpet, cornet, and bugle, Fergus Kerr on horn and saxotromba, Paul Stone on trombone, basse and baritone, and Anthony George on ophicleide and basse. They were joined by members of The Prince Regent's Band, with Richard

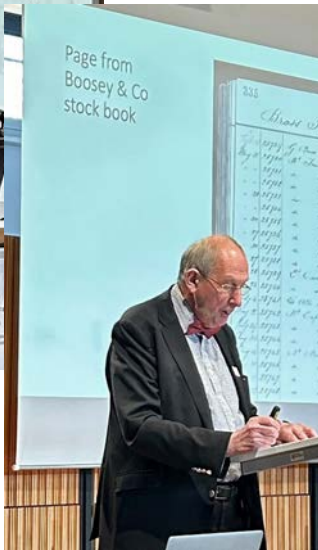
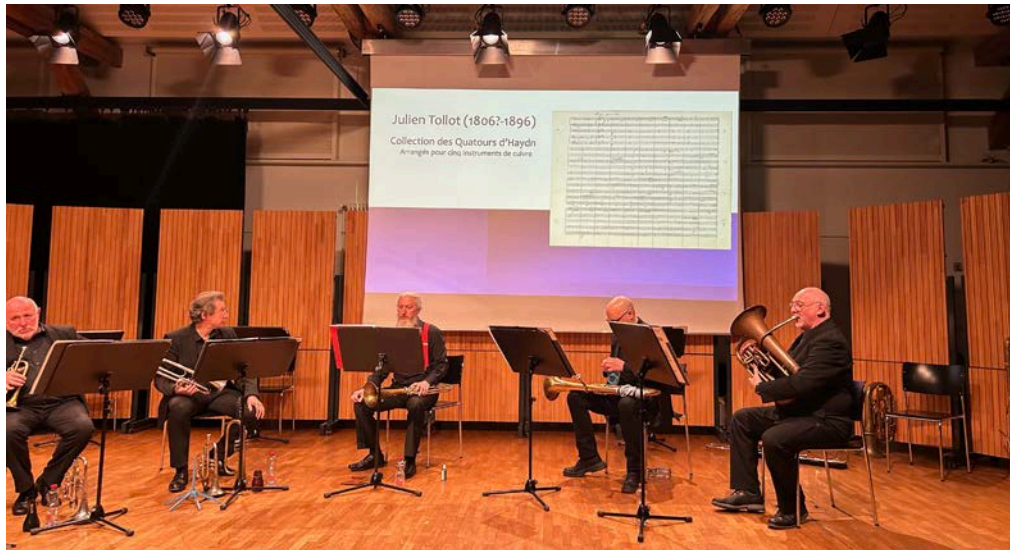
Thomas, petit bugle, Katie Hodges, cornet, Anneke Scott, tenor saxhorn, Martyn Sanderson, trombone, and Patrick Wibart, ophicleide/bass saxhorn. Notable were their presentations of two works for double quintet by Madame Sainton-Dolby, a contralto, and the St Louis Blues as arranged for the Harlem Hellfighters Band under James Reese Europe, who are widely attributed with bringing jazz to the continent when they served with the French army during World War I. HBS's own Sandy Coffin announced and put into historic context the pieces of this program.

The second day (Friday) started off with a fantastic presentation on often overlooked portamento and changes in tone quality of the natural horn by HBS Board Member, Anneke Scott, who wonderfully demonstrated these techniques. Jack Adler-McKean and Louis Jake Kline continued with a nuanced look into various developments of the so-called "Wiener" tuba across Europe in the early part of the 19th century. Then Christian Breternitz discussed the surprising but serious efforts in Berlin around 1900 to understand and reproduce Renaissance and Baroque trumpets. Recent HBS Board Member, the famous Arnold Meyers, discussed the interesting British bass trombone in G. Then HBS Secretary,

Joanna Hersey, presented a diverse and inclusive look into 19th-century brass music in America. She helped the audience understand how important women were to brass playing at this time. I got to collaborate with Robert Apple and Friedemann Immer on a discussion of recently discovered works for the keyed trumpet. Robert has made a name for himself by discovering hundreds of works written with the keyed trumpet in mind. Friedemann Immer made some insightful observations about how the so-called tonal imperfections of the keyed trumpet compliment some composers' (like Haydn's) musical concepts. I then got to play works by Trenkivitz and Höffner on both the keyed trumpet and the low F trumpet of the 19th century. I was lucky enough to find this low F trumpet a couple of weeks before when visiting the vast brass instrument collection of Friedemann Immer's friend, Günter Hett.

Brussel's horn professor, Jeroen Billiet, gave a presentation of changing focuses and requirements of horn studios throughout the 19th century and pointed





to the growing need to train horn players for orchestral positions. Sandy Coffin (HBS Events Committee Chair) presented a largely overlooked chamber brass repertoire by Auguste Mimart and Julien Tollot during mid-19th-century Paris. Members of the Wallace Collection demonstrated the works Coffin discussed. The Wallace Collection continued to play examples from John Miller's presentation on the amateur brass band brass quartet tradition in 1890s Britain. John Humphries, with his inimitable wit, presented the wide range of skills and accomplishments of the pioneer valve horn player, Joseph Pierre Meifred (1791-1867). Friday evening concluded with another incredible performance by the Brits—this time The Prince Regent's Band (Richard Thomas and Katie Hodges on cornet and trumpet, Anneke Scott on horn and saxhorn, Martyn Sanderson on trombone and tenor horn, and the incredible Patrick Wibart on ophicleide and tuba) played works by Meyerbeer, Fanny Mendelssohn, Offenbach, Ewald and Bellon. The highlight here, at least for me, was Richard Thomas playing his original saxhorn bugle with saxophone-like keys. It must be said that Friedemann Immer also really loved this instrument!

For me, one of the best presentations that completely changed my perspective was Sabine Klaus's presentation on Florentine Besson (née Ridoux) and the Birth of the Modern Trumpet. Her skills in instrument design and business acumen were shown to be significant (and particularly significant for a woman of this period). I also finally understood the phrase "F Besson," which, instead of referring to the "French" Besson (as I and nearly every trumpet player have understood), actually was a reference to "Florentine Besson."

The HBS's own *Journal* Executive Editor, Stewart Carter, helped us understand how an 1881 "Congresso dei musicisti italiani" influenced the development of low brass instruments in Italy. Carter's presentation was followed by the very popularly received presentation by Bruno Kampmann on brass mouthpieces of the 19th century. Attendees got to hold and examine up close some of the many mouthpiece examples Kampmann brought to Bern. Ignace De Keyser then discussed the development of 19th-century brass instruments in the intriguing context of a kind of instrument evolution. Ryoto Akiyama followed with a look into how Germany, through its *Posaunenchöre* tradition, was so important in the growing enthusiasm for more historic brass

instruments. John Manganaro then talked about how stopping technique, developed to make the horn chromatic, remained an important part of horn technique even after the invention of the valve. Polish musicology student Tomasz Grochalski then presented a paper on the distinct horn traditions of 19th-century Dresden. Humanities and social sciences post-doctoral fellow at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Carolin Müller, delivered an interesting paper on how the neocolonial German trumpet corps was used as a way to shape fascist propaganda in Namibia.

Brazilian trumpeter living now in Cologne, Pedro Henrique de Souza Rosa, presented a fantastic lecture recital on cornet music by 19th-century Brazilian composers, Mesquita, Melo, and the famous Gomez. And finally for me, Gloria A. Rodríguez-Lorenzo and Francisco J. Giménez-Rodríguez teamed up to share the development of brass instruments during 19th-century Spain.

Unfortunately, I had to miss the conference dinner on the evening of Saturday and the guided tour of the Klingendes Museum on Sunday by HBS Board member, Adrian von Steiger, where he talked about the little-explored brass band tradition of 19th-century Switzerland.

If you would like to read about these presentations in more detail, you can still explore here: https://www.hkb-interpretation.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Veranstaltungen/2304_RBIC.pdf

You can also see many of the presentations on this YouTube compilation video: <https://www.youtube.com/live/LZgDxy00QPE?si=UkQxEkWXFzgYauM>

There will eventually be a definitive book on the symposium, like previous symposia, under the collection of Musikforschung der Hochschule der Künste Bern, so be on the lookout for it when that appears.

This 6th Romantic Brass Symposium excelled in so many ways. It was well-planned and had presentations of the highest caliber. There were fantastic concerts and genial lunches shared by all every day. There was groundbreaking research, and we all enjoyed the proceedings with the backdrop of beautiful Bern, Switzerland—which couldn't resist snowing on us a few times! Hosts Martin Skamletz, Daniel Allenbach (always knowledgeable about technical things!), and Adrian von Steiger (among



many others), gave us all a wonderful bouquet of Romantic brass flowers. If you get a chance to go to the 7th Romantic Brass Symposium, you should definitely go! As I concluded in my opening keynote address, if you like the historic brass community, help build this community. Help build the HBS family! ■