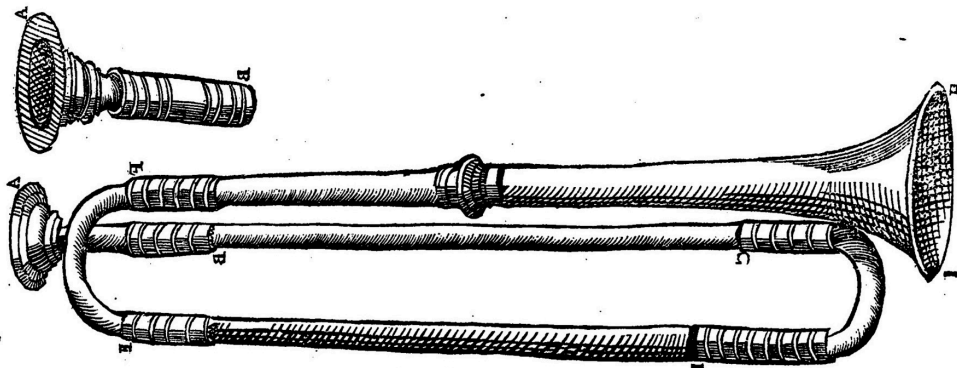


Natural Trumpet for the Court and Battlefield

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Natural Trumpet for the Court and Battlefield

Mistress Ysabel da Costa, OL
Barony of Carolingia, East Kingdom

0. Introduction

Imagine the scene at a medieval or Renaissance royal court. Your mental image is likely to include heralds in tabards, playing fanfares on long, straight trumpets draped with banners. Iconography and historic research show that this picture is mostly accurate (the heralds wore livery, and the trumpets probably had a few bends in them). Yet trumpet fanfares in the historic style are vanishingly rare in SCA court ceremonies.

This goal of this project is to document the late SCA-period natural trumpet and its repertoire. My paper begins with a discussion of the natural trumpet and how it differs musically and socially from other European instruments of the period. Next comes a discussion of the trumpet in its military and ceremonial contexts. Finally, I offer some suggestions for bringing historically-informed trumpet performance to the courts and battlefields of the SCA. A selection of period trumpet ensemble music, solo fanfares, and military signals, transcribed from original sources and fully realized in modern notation, is attached in an appendix.

This project is humbly dedicated to Mistress Nicolette Bonhomme and Mistress Raziya bin Rusa, two former landed Baronesses of Carolingia. My research was originally inspired by their requests for fanfares and processions for baronial court ceremonies.

1. About the natural trumpet

The natural trumpet has no keys, slide, or finger-holes. It produces only a fundamental tone and the notes of its harmonic overtone series. The word "trumpet" in this article will mean the natural trumpet, unless otherwise specified.

The heraldic trumpet of artwork and imagination is a straight with a flared end, about 3 or 4 feet long. Trumpets of this kind were in fact used from ancient Rome (the *tuba*) through the medieval period in Western Europe [G1].

The oldest extant metal trumpets are the bronze and silver trumpets found in the tomb of the Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamun. Each is about 2 feet long, with a straight tube and a conical bell; there is no separate mouthpiece, only a rolled edge of tubing for the player to blow on. They could probably have produced just one or two tones.

Silver *hatzotzeroth* trumpets, similar to the Egyptian ones, were used in Solomon's Temple. Rams-horn shofars were also used in ancient Israel; the silver trumpets may have been reserved for priests.

The Roman Republic used several kinds of trumpets as military signaling devices, probably continuing a practice of the Etruscans before them. The *tuba*, ancestor of the European trumpet, was a straight trumpet used to sound the advance and retreat; the person who played it was called a *tubicen*. Contemporary writers called the tone of the *tuba* "horrible", "terrible", "raucous", and

“shrieking”. (The modern tuba is a recent invention.)

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the metal trumpet nearly vanished from Europe for several hundred years [Wa]. However, the straight *tuba* continued in use among the peoples of the Islamic world in both long and short versions (*būq al-nafīr*). During the Crusades, Christian armies were greatly impressed by the trumpets, shawms, kettledrums, and other war instruments of the Saracens. They re-introduced the long straight metal trumpet to Europe, where it was called *tuba*, *trumpe*, or *busine*.

Around 1300 CE, Johannes de Grocheo wrote that the trumpet had command of the three perfect consonances, the octave, fifth, and fourth, corresponding to the 1st through 4th partials.

Around 1400 CE, metalworking technology for bending a tube without flattening it was discovered [D3]. This allowed much longer trumpets to be made and bent for easier handling, usually into either a long zig-zag "S" shape (earlier) or oval (later). More sophisticated mouthpieces also began to be developed around this time, enabling trumpets to play up to the 8th partial and beyond. Natural trumpets were made of brass and/or silver; they were usually decorated with banners and wrapped with cords ending in tassels.

The court and military trumpet, or *trompette de guerre*, of the sixteenth century was typically made from a seamed tube about eight feet long, ending in a conical flared bell, and fashioned with two bends into a long oval shape. If the tubing of a modern Bb valve trumpet were fully extended, it would be only about four feet long, so the fundamental of the Renaissance trumpet sounds an octave lower than that of the modern one.

With the right mouthpiece, and in the hands of a good player, a natural trumpet can play harmonics in its high "clarion" register (8th to 16th partials). Since higher harmonics are closer together, the clarion register includes the notes of a C major scale, in "just" temperament rather than equal temperament.

The so-called "Baroque trumpet" first appeared in the late 18th century; it has finger-holes which serve to correct its intonation for ensembles that include instruments in other temperaments [Ko]. Most modern Baroque trumpets can be fitted with an unvented yard for use as true natural trumpets.

Mutes (*sourdines*) made of wood were used during the SCA period. A mute softened the sound of a trumpet (important for some military functions), and also served to raise its pitch [Ben], [Mer].

2. About trumpeters

In Renaissance Europe, natural trumpets had noble associations and high symbolic significance for court, church, and military use. Trumpeters served in royal or noble households of at least knightly rank; they wore spurs and swords, and often performed on horseback. To earn the status of field trumpeter, and to be able to accept apprentices, a trumpeter had to have served with the cavalry in time of war.

The trumpeters of Ercole I d'Este's court in 1503 averaged higher salaries than his other instrumentalists and singers, and his highest-paid trumpeter earned more than any singer in the chapel except Josquin [Be]. In 1528, Emperor Karl V decreed the following privileges for the

Guild of Court and Field Trumpeters and Court and Army Kettledrummers [G2]:

1. Only the Reichstände, princes and dignitaries of clerical and secular territories, were allowed to keep trumpeters and kettledrummers.
2. Prisoner trumpeters were to be exchanged for officers only.
3. Trumpeters, like officers, wore ostrich feathers on their hats.
4. Like officers with the flag of truce, they were granted the right of free passage.
5. The secrets of the guild which were transmitted by word of mouth were not to get into the hands of civil musicians.

While trumpeters enjoyed a high status in the service of noble houses, they were still servants; the nobles themselves were more likely to play the lute or viol.

3. Differences between the natural trumpet and other instruments

The sackbut (trombone) and slide trumpet or *trompette des menestrels* were instruments of the town musicians known as "waites" and of other less exalted groups, such as mercenary "Landsknecht" soldiers. These instruments were socially and musically separate from the natural trumpets or *trompettes de guerre* used by court and field trumpeters. Guild rules prohibited court trumpeters from consorting with minstrels and town musicians, and trumpeters and kettledrummers were forbidden to play at middle-class or peasant weddings and festivals. Trumpet guilds even issued "mandates against the unauthorized playing of trumpets", in resistance to civil musicians (*Stadtpfeifers*) taking business away from military and court trumpeters (*Hoftrumpeters*) during peacetime by performing ceremonial music [G2, Ko pp. 38-9].

Hunting horns, ancestors of the orchestral French Horn, were also separate from both trumpets and sackbuts. A trumpet is cylindrical for 2/3 to 5/6 of its length, and mostly straight (perhaps with a few folds), whereas horns are conical and curved. Hunting horns generally produced one main pitch and a leading tone, which were used in a repertoire of specialized hunting signals. Some of these same signals are still used for traditional fox hunts in England and Virginia.

4. Surviving repertoire for the natural trumpet

Trumpets had their own dedicated repertoire, discussed below, which included three categories of pieces: military signals, toccatas for solo trumpet, and sonatas and other court pieces for trumpet ensemble. For most of our period, this material was handed down within guilds and not written down. Fortunately for us, around the end of the sixteenth century, some trumpeters did write notebooks recording their repertoire.

- Magnus Thomsen, "En nodebog for trompet", about 1596-1609. Thomsen was a German field trumpeter for the King of Denmark; he was killed on the battlefield in 1612.
- Hendrich Lübeck, "En nodebog for trompet", 1598. Lübeck was also a German trumpeter in the service of Denmark.
- Cesare Bendinelli, *Tutta l'arte della Tromba*, presented to the academy of Verona 1614 with

his trumpet upon his retirement in his 70's. It contains some instruction for players, along with material from his service as a court and field trumpeter in Munich in the 1580's.

- Marin Mersenne's *Harmonie Unverselle* gives a list of French battle calls. Mersenne was a scholar, not a trumpeter. His encyclopedic work was published in 1636, but the survey of musical instruments it contains is regarded as retrospective by music historians.
- Girolamo Fantini, *Modo per imparare a sonare di tromba*, was published in 1638. Fantini was Trumpet-Major for the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Although the pieces in this book are post-period in both date and style, it is still a valuable source of information.

Trumpeters memorized their repertoire, and most field trumpeters did not learn how to read music [G2]. In his notebook, the field trumpeter Magnus Thomsen [Tho] used the lines of the staff to represent harmonics. Although a tenor clef appears on each staff, his assignment of harmonics to particular lines is not consistent. Trumpeters Cesare Bendinelli and Girolamo Fantini did know and use standard musical notation.

Sonatas for trumpet ensemble are not fully written out in these sources. Only the Principal part (very occasionally, also the Clarion) was written, and the rest was improvised according to traditional rules.

Although the surviving trumpet manuals were written in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, scholars feel that the material contained in most of them represents earlier practice, particularly the military calls [D1, Wa pp. 89 - 90, G2]. For instance, the material in Bendinelli's *Tutta l'arte della trombetta* dates to his time as head court trumpeter in Munich in the 1580's, and much of it was already traditional at that time.

5. Solo trumpet: military signals and battlefield toccatas

Almost all extant 16th-century and early 17th-century trumpet manuals include military signals for trumpet. Allowing for language differences, the manuals contain similar lists of signal names; calls with corresponding names are similar, but not identical.

Calls with many of these titles are still included in the modern military bugle repertoire. However, modern bugle calls have a different character; period trumpet signals rely on rhythmic patterns (think Morse code) more than melody to convey information.

Horns and trumpets have been used for battle signals since ancient times [Wu]. The standardization of calls for particular functions is documented by the early 16th century [G2]. These calls were traditionally not written down. The earliest written versions date to the late 16th century, but the calls are thought to be much older, particularly the lower-pitched French versions.

The names of these calls imply that they were intended for cavalry units. By the late 15th century, trumpets and kettledrums were associated with cavalry; military signals for infantry were given on bagpipes, fifes, and side drums [G1] [Fa]. After all, trumpeters were in the service of the royalty and nobility, who went to war on horseback.

Several military signals emphasize the second and third partials (c and g below middle c' on a natural trumpet in C). This is evidence that these calls date back to a time when trumpets were

shorter and less capable of playing in their middle Principal register (4th through 8th partials). In the second half of the 16th century, military calls "in the Italian style" became popular; they were played one harmonic higher than the older French versions [D1]. The high Clarion register is not used in military signals.

Military calls are rhythmically irregular and don't fit into consistent time signatures or barring schemes. Cesare Bendinelli's *Tutta l'arte della trombetta* (1614) says: "the military calls ... are to be performed gaily, lightly and without a definite beat, but well articulated." The examples I have transcribed have bar lines added, which are intended as visual aides only.

Military signals were performed by one trumpet, perhaps with a kettledrummer. The extant sources include toccatas to precede or follow the calls, or to be played for purposes such as the arrival of an important person or the celebration of a victory in battle. These toccatas are also intended to be played by a solo trumpet [Ta].

List of the most common military calls:

- *Boute-selle (Butasella)*: "boots and saddles", saddle your horse; assembly call, sounded some time before riding out of camp.
- *A Cheval (Montecavallo, L'accavallo)*: to horse, mount your horse.
- *Le Cavalquet (the Cavalche, Tutti a cavalcare)*: draw swords and ride off.
- *A l'estendart (Allo Stendardo)*: to the colors, rally to the flag.
- *La Charge (Battaglia, Carga)*: the signal to attack.
- *La Retraite (Ritirata)*: retreat, played in the evening after the sun has gone down.
- *Batta la Tenda (Butta la Tenda)*: pitch the tents, make camp.
- *Le Guet (Augetto, Ughetto)*: Set the watch; changing of the guard.

The appendix to this paper contains transcriptions of period military calls from several sources, along with a selection of toccatas for solo trumpet and some short trumpet flourishes taken from period sources.

5. Trumpet ensemble: ceremonial and court music

Ensembles of natural trumpets were used for heraldic, ceremonial, and religious performances. A trumpet ensemble of the mid- to late-16th century consisted of 5 (sometimes 6) equal trumpets, all of the same size and pitch. Larger ensembles would double or triple all 5 parts. The trumpets were often accompanied by a pair of kettledrums.

The parts of a trumpet ensemble in the 16th century were [D1]:

1. the Clarino, who improvised a descant in the diatonic Clarion range c" ~ a"
2. the Principal, who played from the sole notated part on the natural harmonics c', e', g', and c" (the Principal range)
3. the Alterbass, who played one harmonic lower than the Principal as a rule

4. the Volgant, who played the note g (3rd partial)
5. the Grob, who played the note c (2nd partial)
6. the Fladdergrob, who played the fundamental, C (first partial). This part is optional.

Part names vary: the Principal may be called the Quinto or Sonata, the Grob is also called Gross or Basso, the Volgant is Folgano, etc.

Only the Principal part was notated; the other parts were derived or improvised from the Principal according to formulas [Ben]. A few extant pieces have matching Clarino or Alterbass parts supplied as examples [Ben, Tho].

In performance, the trumpet parts entered one at a time, from the lowest to the highest [Be]. They were typically accompanied by a pair of timpani, tuned to G and c.

Earlier trumpet ensembles apparently had only four parts, consisting of three low drones and one Clarino playing in the middle register [So]. The statutes of 1432 for the University of Bologna allow doctoral students to be escorted from their graduation ceremonies by four trumpeters, who were paid more if they played on horseback [Ca]. Trumpeters continued to be hired by universities to celebrate doctoral ceremonies through the sixteenth century. Trumpet ensembles are also mentioned playing at court festivities in Denmark (1449) and France (1467) [So].

Surviving trumpet manuals contain hundreds of Sonatas and Intradass, intended for performance by 5-part trumpet ensemble. Trumpet sonatas were played in the field, at princely courts, and in church; they were used as "Tafelmusik" or "tischblasen" for court dinners, and even played for dancing [Pra, Le, Ta]. A few are noted as having been played for some special occasion, such as a wedding or the arrival of a particular noble guest.

Sonatas are comprised of multiple short sections called "posts", and they end with, or are followed by, a Rotta. The Clarino is tacet during the Rotta, which is described in [Ben] as something played between other pieces to give the Clarino player a rest. Rottas may be repeated as desired between or at the end of Sonatas. Musically, all Rottas are pretty much the same, consisting of patterns on a descending C-major chord [Ta].

The opening Toccata of Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo* (1607) features a 5-part trumpet ensemble, with all the voices written out, including a fancy clarino descant. To my knowledge, this late example is the only piece of fully-realized 16th-century trumpet ensemble music in the regular music literature.

A selection of trumpet Sonatas from the extant sources are included in the appendix. They are presented in modern musical notation and clefs, with all parts fully realized according to Bordinelli's rules. These pieces are suitable for fanfares, processions, court dinners, and other formal or ceremonial occasions. Ideally, the performing ensemble would include a pair of kettledrums. Not being a drummer myself, I have not attempted to write out drum parts.

6. The natural trumpet in the SCA context

Having discussed the role and repertoire of the natural trumpet in late SCA-period Europe, we now return to our current Middle Ages. How can we bring historically-informed trumpet

performance to the courts and battlefields of the SCA?

SCA-period trumpet music is not very hard to learn; anyone who can blow a brass instrument can learn military calls or the lower voices of a natural trumpet ensemble. (Playing Clarino is admittedly more demanding.) So what are the reasons we don't hear more historic trumpet music at SCA events? The only things lacking are ... instruments, music, and players. In other words, everything.

To be specific, we need: (1) affordable natural trumpets or viable substitutes, (2) a freely-available selection of suitable pieces in modern musical notation, with performance notes, and (3) enough capable players to perform the desired pieces. Fortunately, inexpensive natural trumpets are now available, solving the most difficult problem.

Suggestions for bringing historic trumpet performance to SCA events:

1. Obtain a natural trumpet or plausible substitute.
 - a. Brass for Beginners (www.brassforbeginners.com) offers a black polycarbonate natural trumpet in C (A=440) which is musically appropriate for SCA applications. As of this writing, it costs just \$175, complete with soft case and plastic mouthpiece. BfB natural trumpets have only recently become available; this is a great development!
 - b. Brass for Beginners also offers the brass BfB Baroque, a 4-hole vented trumpet. With its unvented yard and the right crooks, it functions as a natural trumpet in C. The BfB Baroque lists for \$1000; extra options include a historic bell and tuning crooks for various keys. Baroque-style mouthpieces are also available, either 3-D printed or silver-plated brass.
 - c. Beautiful reproductions of historic natural trumpets are available from several makers. Their cost is comparable to that of modern trumpets of intermediate to professional quality. When playing SCA-period pieces on a Baroque trumpet, use its unvented yard.
 - d. A sackbut or trombone may be used in natural trumpet ensembles for the lower parts. (Don't tell the Trumpeters' Guild.) Put the slide in a fixed position to produce the desired drone note.
 - e. Modern trumpets have possibilities. The intonation of a modern valve trumpet may not match the harmonic overtones of natural trumpets, but it could be used as a solo instrument, or for playing Clarino parts.
 - f. Keyless modern bugles are pitched in Bb or G rather than C. They may be used solo to play historic battle calls and toccatas.
 - g. Any musician playing court or battlefield trumpet repertoire on a reed instrument will be referred to the Trumpeters' Guild for disciplinary action. However, feel free to write art or dance music for your instrument that imitates our noble sound.
2. Find some period trumpet music (it's right here!)
 - a. The music appendix contains my transcriptions and arrangements of a selection of period trumpet sonatas, toccatas, military signals, and short flourishes, in modern staff notation with familiar clefs.

- b. See the References section for facsimiles and modern editions of period sources ~ there is lots more material there.
3. Assemble an ensemble, or play solo.
 - a. Only one trumpet is needed to play battlefield signals and toccatas.
 - (i) Most battle calls use only the 2nd through 5th partials (c, g, c', and e' on a natural trumpet in C). The essence of these calls can be conveyed with just two notes, which can be played even on an animal horn.
 - (ii) If your trumpet, like the Brass for Beginners plastic trumpets, can't securely play the 2nd partial (c, one octave below middle c'), try the late-16th-century "Italian" versions of some calls, which use higher harmonics.
 - (iii) I have provided some brief flourishes for a solo trumpet, drawn from various period sources. A Toccata may be used where a longer solo piece is needed, as for a processional.
 - b. For a full court trumpet ensemble, five trumpeters plus a drummer are needed. Of the five trumpet parts, two are very easy, two are fairly easy, and one part is harder.
 - (i) The two lowest parts play just one note each: the Volgant plays g and the Grob plays c. These parts may be played on sackbut, trombone, or other low modern brass. You may include a Fladdergrub if you have a player and instrument that can produce a low C (two octaves below middle c').
 - (ii) The two middle parts are each responsible for 4 notes. The Altebass plays the notes g, c', e', and g', and the Principal plays c', e', g', and c". These notes lie in the easy principal register of the natural trumpet. The Principal and Altebass really should be played on natural trumpets.
 - (iii) The highest part is the Clarino, which plays the upper-register notes c", d", e", f", and g" (rarely a"). This part is harder and will require some practice. Fortunately, 16th century trumpet pieces stay in the lower end of the clarion range; they are not nearly as demanding as Baroque trumpet music. (You could try a modern valve trumpet for this.)
 - (iv) Ideally, the drums are a pair of smallish timpani tuned to G and c. If you don't have kettledrums, substitute a large drum without a snare.
 - c. If you want to play ensemble music but don't have five players, omit some parts. (You can claim to be performing in an earlier style.) The Principal is the main part of a trumpet ensemble piece and should always be retained.

The availability of affordable natural trumpets is a great development that puts the Renaissance trumpet repertoire within reach for amateur musicians and reenactors. May your courts be enlivened and your fighters inspired by the historic sounds of the noble trumpet!

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Makers and resellers of natural trumpets

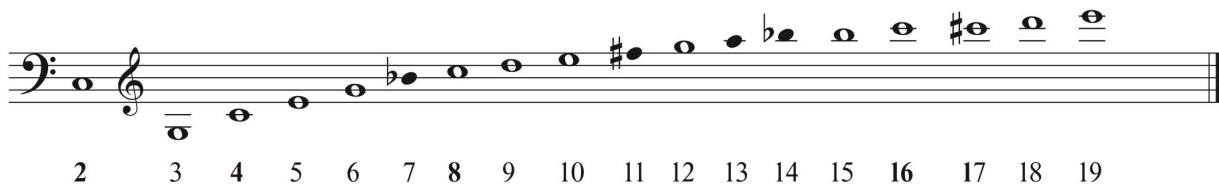
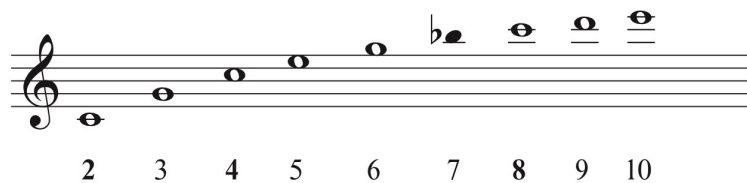
Brass for Beginners (www.brassforbeginners.com) makes and sells the inexpensive BfB Natural Trumpet (black polycarbonate) and the modestly-priced BfB Baroque (brass). They also sell reproduction Baroque mouthpieces with modern shanks, both metal and 3-D printed.

The Baroque Trumpet Shop (www.baroquetrumpet.com) sells reproductions of historic brass instruments by several makers. Prices are comparable to those of professional modern trumpets and trombones.

Kanstul (www.kanstul.com) makes straight trumpets ("coach horns") in several keys, including a four-foot model in C; they also offer keyless military bugles.

The Historic Brass Society maintains a directory of instrument makers at historicbrass.org/features/additional-content/instrument-makers

Harmonic Overtone Series of Modern and Natural Trumpets in C



Historic European Trumpets



Silver trumpet from the tomb of Tutankhamun, with its wooden protective insert. 1323 BCE



The Third Trumpet
Getty Museum, 1255 CE



Roman tuba and bucinia from Trajan's Column.
113 CE



Straight and folded trumpets.
Mois de May, Très Riches Heures du
duc de Berry, c1415



Fantasy trumpeter: the White Rabbit from Alice in Wonderland. Illustration by John Tenniel, 1865



Quelle: Deutsche Fotothek

Field trumpeter. Jost Amman, 1568



Trio of dance musicians playing shawm, slide trumpet and cornett. This is **not** the kind of trumpet that was played by court and field trumpeters. Mid-1500's CE

Early 16th Century Court Trumpeters



Trumpeters of Henry VIII, Westminster Tournament Roll, 1511



Triumph of the Emperor Maximilian c. 1515

