ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMA

From a historical to a modern trombone

Researching the historical sound of Ferdinand David's Concertino for trombone

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Abstract

This work researches how Ferdinand David's Concertino for trombone would have sounded on a historical Romantic trombone at the time it was written, as well as carrying over this way of playing to a modern instrument in order to achieve a more historically informed performance. Not only is this useful for interpreting David, knowing the way a Romantic trombone sounds and plays is very helpful for interpreting all German Romantic music, as this type of trombone was used throughout the whole Romantic period. Achieving this interpretation was done through practicing key passages on the historical instrument and also playing them together with a 19th-century Graf pianoforte to find the right sound and way of playing. After that a comparison was made between the key passages on the historical and modern trombone. Based on this comparison, a version as close as possible to how the historical trombone sounds was practiced on the modern instrument, reaching a more historically informed interpretation.

Keywords: romantic trombone, Leipzig trombone, Graf pianoforte, Ferdinand David, Concertino for trombone op. 4, Historically Informed Performance

Word of thanks

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The Concertino for trombone Op. 4 in E-flat major was written in 1837 by German composer Ferdinand David.[1] David was concertmaster in the Gewandhausorchester in Leipzig at that time, which was under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn back then [2], and he is also the violinist for whom Mendelssohn wrote his famous violin concerto. David composed the trombone concertino for his good friend and solo violist in the Gewandhausorchester, Carl Traugott Queisser.[3] Besides that, Queisser was a trombone virtuoso of international standing. The concertino was premiered with the Gewandhausorchester and Mendelssohn conducting.

This research revolves around practicing the concertino on a 19th-century German trombone. The goal was to gain insight into how this work would have sounded at the time it was written, to get a more interesting and also more historically informed interpretation on a modern instrument. In order to gain even better insight into this, there was also a component in which the piece was practiced together with a Graf pianoforte from that time. There were many good pianoforte builders back then, but Graf was widely known and was around at that time [4], making it a good option for this project. Another reason for choosing this instrument is that the academy has a Graf pianoforte at its disposal. This kind of instrument has a different timbre, attack and decay compared to modern pianos. This way there was researched what it feels like to practice with a piano from that time instead of a modern piano, and find a way of playing that matches the historical trombone. It is not the intention to make an exact copy of a performance on the historical trombone. The research was based on personal musical preferences as well as on trombone technical aspects and compared and weighed which aspects would be included in the interpretation on modern trombone.

1.2. Personal motivation

This concertino is by far the most requested solo work for trombone at orchestral auditions. In addition, it is also one of the few works for solo trombone from this era. These things make it one of the most important pieces in the trombone repertoire. My biggest personal motivation is that I have always found it very intriguing how music would have sounded at the time it was written. In addition, this is also very useful in general to know, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the music you are playing. When composers wrote music in this period, they had a certain trombone sound in their heads, so knowing what they imagined is

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[1] Dominik Rahmer, January 17, 2022, "A concerto for a “trombone god”—finally, Ferdinand David’s Concertino op. 4 in Henle Urtext.”, *G. Henle Verlag Blog*. https://www.henle.de/blog/en/2022/01/17/a-concerto-for-a-trombone-god/.

[2] Sofia Philharmonic. “Ferdinand David.” Accessed June 15, 2026. https://sofiaphilharmonic.com/en/authors/ferdinand-david-en/.

[3] Dominik Rahmer,"A concerto for a “trombone god”—finally, Ferdinand David’s Concertino op. 4 in Henle Urtext.”.

[4] Fortepiano. Edwin Beunk Early Pianos, January 1, 2020, “Conrad Graf, Vienna, ca. 1835.” https://www.fortepiano.nl/conrad-graf-1835/ .

very useful and interesting. This comes in handy for me not only for this concertino, but also for interpreting romantic German music in general. Both for solo and orchestral music.

Because this piece is asked so much at auditions, there is an almost standardized modern way of playing it on many aspects of this work because that is how it is expected at an audition. But just because this work for trombone is so unique in its time and we as trombonists rarely play solo music from that period, I found it very interesting to go deeper into it than the modern interpretation that is always played. I wanted to explore what a trombone from that period sounded like and how the work, and by extension other German music from that period, would be played on such a trombone. That way, I could then add an additional interesting layer to an interpretation on a modern trombone. Not to play like that at an audition, for that I keep the interpretation that is expected, but to obtain a more unique and historically informed concert version.

1.3. The 19th-century German trombone

1.3.1. The 19th-century German trombone

Figure 1: “Leipzig”-trombone (photo: Museum für Musikinstrumente der Universität Leipzig) https://www.europeana.eu/de/item/09102/_ULEI_M0003731 Accessed September 3, 2026.

At first glance, the modern trombone and the 19th-century German trombone seem very similar. But it is important for this study to clarify that the two do differ a lot and, more importantly, sound different. In the 19th century and first half of the 20th century in Germany, the so-called “Leipzig-model” trombones, also often referred to as “romantic trombones”, were mainly used. In fact, most of those trombones were based on a model made by Sattler in Leipzig.[5] That means composers such as Schumann, Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler and Richard Strauss wrote for this type of trombone.[6] This is also the type of trombone used for this research. The main physical differences are that these instruments have a wider bore and a larger bell than a modern trombone.[7] As a result, these German trombones are known for their warm, full, dark and more heavy sound. Compared to modern instruments, these qualities present themselves mostly in soft dynamics. Furthermore, these trombones characteristically have a very thin bell, which provides a resonant, open, singing sound.[8] These characteristics are very important to take into account when playing this type of instrument.

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[5] Hubertus Schmidt, November 13, 2022, “German trombones played in German orchestras?”, *Jay Friedman*. https://www.jayfriedman.net/german-trombones-played-in-german-orchestras/.

[6] Fresh Wind. “The Sound of Trombones.” Accessed June 15, 2026. https://fresh-wind.ch/en/instruments/trombone/.

[7] Fresh Wind. “The Sound of Trombones.”.

[8] Hubertus Schmidt, “German trombones played in German orchestras?”.

1.3.2. The modern trombone

Figure 2: Bach 42B-trombone, standard model of modern trombone, and the one used in this research (photo: Schmitt Music) https://www.schmittmusic.com/products/bach-42bo-large-bore-tenor-trombone?srsltid=AfmBOopHLJaEVEeeDIdnoGjbR8-4-5jDRjJWxH1mZBQOFvezp3e7Ibfe Accessed September 3, 2026.

The modern type of instrument used worldwide today is an American trombone. After World War II, American trombones were widely introduced throughout Europe. At first these were instruments with a small bore that were also used in jazz music, but they later grew into the type of instrument used today. These have a wider bore and a larger bell, but both characteristics are still smaller than those of the Romantic German trombone. Even today's instruments by German or French builders, for example, are based on this American model.[9] This is also the type of modern instrument that was used in the study.

1.3.3. Comparison of the instruments used in the research

In this section the physical differences of the instruments were compared, and how they affect the sound and playing. The modern instrument is a Bach 42B trombone with rotor valve, together with a Greg Black 5G mouthpiece. The historical instrument is an August Clemens Glier romantic German trombone (built around 1880) together with a August Clemens Glier mouthpiece (built around 1880).

Figure 3: The two instruments side by side (under: the modern one, upper: the historical instrument) (photo by the author)

Mouthpiece

The modern mouthpiece has more mass than the historical one. This makes the modern instrument sound heavier. The historical mouthpiece has a wider bore than the modern one, however the opening in the throat is much smaller. The cup of the modern mouthpiece is significantly deeper than the historical one, giving the modern one a much more full and resonant sound. These things mean the historical instrument itself has a larger bore than the modern trombone, giving it a dark warm sound. But the smaller cup and throat result in a less resonant and full sound. The diameter of the cup is slightly smaller on the old mouthpiece, making it easier to play high but harder to play low. The rim on the modern mouthpiece is wider and more rounded, that makes it more comfortable to play.[10]

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[9] Hubertus Schmidt, "German trombones played in German orchestras?".

[10] Matt Sanders, August 15, 2025, "Understanding Brass Mouthpieces: A Beginner's Guide." *Dawkes Music*. https://www.dawkes.co.uk/sound-room/understanding-brass-mouthpieces-a-beginners-guide/?srsltid=AfmBOoqQf7BtZNj6d0q8dhue0e9yi8VflmFaaxxQn5coVYYx309l_619.

Figure 4: Side view of the mouthpieces (left: modern mouthpiece, right: historical mouthpiece) (photo by the author)

Figure 5: Bore width (photo by the author)

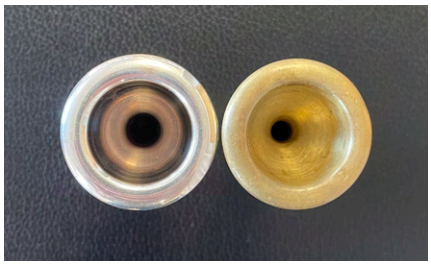


Figure 6: Throat width, cup diameter and rim size (photo by the author)

Figure 7: Cup depth (photo by the author)

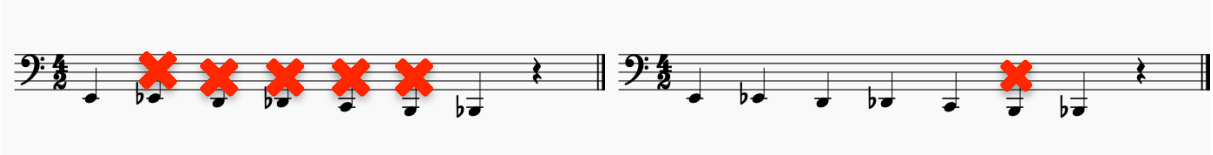
Slide

As described with the mouthpiece, the bore of the historical trombone is significantly wider. This gives the instrument a warmer, darker sound. The slide of the historical trombone is longer and has a screw to change the length in order to tune the instrument, instead of tuning slides on the bell section like on modern instruments. This longer slide and tuning mechanism makes the slide feel much heavier than a modern slide. The length of the slide does not change the pitch of the instrument, because the bell section is less long than a modern trombone. The positions to change the notes also stay the same, because the distance to change notes will always be the same. A smaller difference is that the historical instrument does not have water key. This means every once in a while, you have to empty out the water by taking off the outer slide and pouring it out. There is also no screw to hold together the bell section and the slide, so they are just pushed together, which is a little less rigid and secure.

Figure 8: Slides side by side (under: modern upper: historical) (photo by the author)

Figure 9: Bore width (left: modern, right: historical) (photo by the author)

Bell section

The biggest difference here is that the bell of the historical trombone is much larger. This makes that the sound is much darker and warmer. Another key difference is that the modern trombone has a valve that makes the instrument a fourth lower when pressed. This allows the instrument to play certain notes that are otherwise not possible, as well as enabling to play alternative positions that make the slide movements easier. As mentioned earlier, the modern trombone has a tuning slide on the bell section, but the historical instrument does not. The end of the historical trombone's bell section is shorter because the slide is longer.

Ex. 1: Notes not possible without valve

Ex. 2: Notes possible with valve (a B is also not playable on this instrument.)

Figure 12: Bell section side by side (under: modern, upper: historical) (photo by the author)

Figure 13: Side view of the bells (photo by the author)

Figure 14: Side view of the bells (photo by the author)

2. Research question and method

2.1. Research question

The research question of this study was “How can a performance of the concertino be influenced by practicing it on a historical trombone?” This question summarizes that the ultimate goal was an interpretation on a modern trombone that was influenced by researching what the concertino would have sounded like at the time it was written.

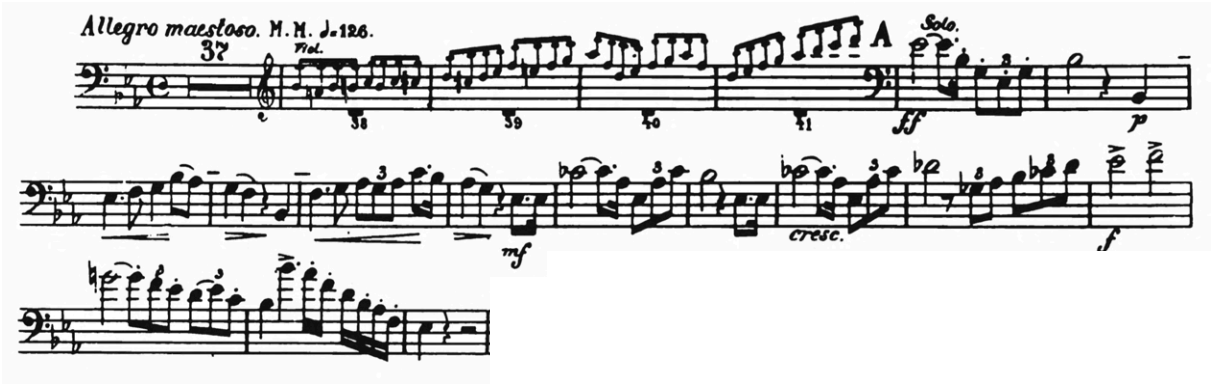
2.2. Selecting passages

To keep the research on a manageable scale, I chose to work only with the first movement and the cadenza that follows. From this, some key passages were selected in order to conduct the research in a structured manner. The passages were selected based on analysis so that the following aspects occur in the selected passages:

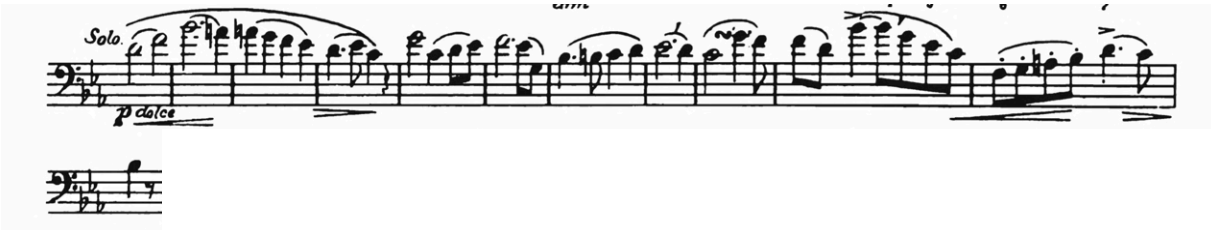
- The entire register occurring in this concertino
- All dynamics occurring in this concertino
- All articulations occurring in this concertino
- All rhythmic motives
- All musical motives

The method described in 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 was applied on each of these key passages.

2.2.1. Key passage 1, opening Concertino

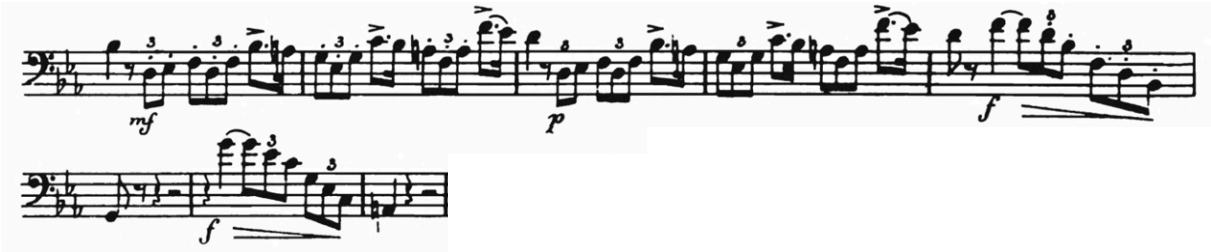
This passage is the most important one in the whole concerto. It is the opening and the one that you get judged on first in auditions or concert performances. It includes much of the rhythmical material that comes back in the rest of the concerto, such as the figure half note tied over to a dotted eight - sixteenth - triplet - half note. This comes back all the time. Secondly it contains a lyrical passage in the lower register in the piano dynamic. This is important to investigate the sound in this register and dynamic. After that it goes up to a high B-flat and goes down more than an octave in a very fast run. Through this the flexibility of the historical instrument can be investigated; the way you can switch registers quickly.

Ex. 3: Key passage 1, opening Concertino

2.2.2. Key passage 2, second theme

The second theme is also very important because it introduces a different side of the instrument; lyrical legato playing in the middle-high and high registers of the instrument, and in the piano dynamic. Through this, soft, lyrical playing can be investigated, as well as the expressive abilities of the historical trombone.

Ex. 4: Key passage 2, second theme

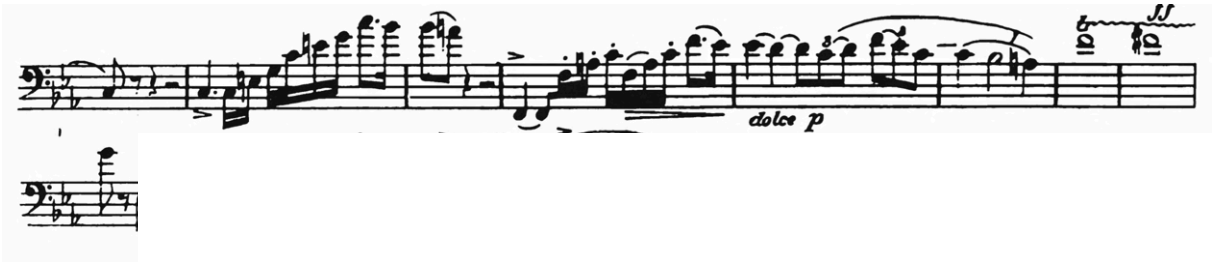
2.2.3. Key passage 3, quick rhythmical section

This passage is crucial as it introduces rhythmical and melodic material that has not appeared before. It also comes right after the lyrical passage which makes it hard because of the sudden switch of character. The decision to separate it from the lyrical passage was made to be able to play it at it is very best, taking away the difficulty of the switch of character. This way it can be played how it is supposed at its best, which makes the comparison easier and better. This passage contains multiple triplets and dotted eight note-sixteenth notes after each other, with relatively big jumps which makes it a very hard passage. It also contains rhythmical playing in the mezzoforte and piano dynamic, as the melody is repeated in piano after it is played in mezzoforte. After that it has two quick runs that make a big jump downwards, which are different from the one in Key passage 1, as they are in triplets and more importantly, in diminuendo. This is an even better way to test the flexibility of the historical trombone.

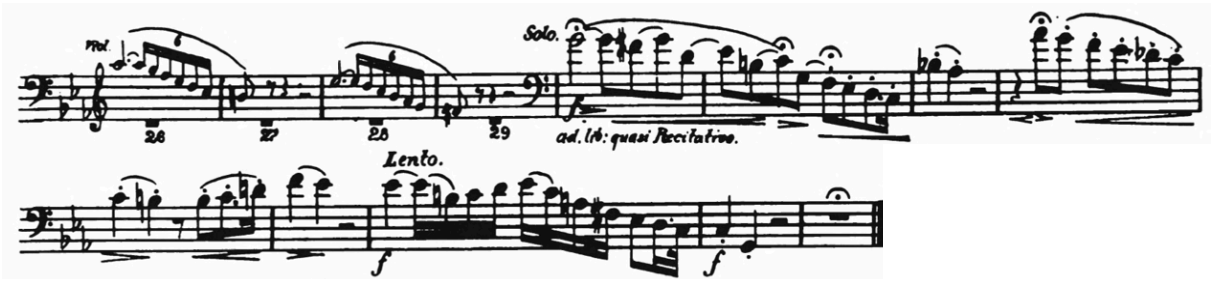


Ex. 5: Key passage 3

2.2.4. Key passage 4, loud low notes and trills

This passage was chosen for two reasons. Firstly it contains two loud, low notes. The runs after are traditionally played rather freely which makes it interesting. The first one also goes up two octaves very quickly, which makes testing the flexibility upwards very interesting. Making a nice sound on the long low notes is considered rather hard and can be played in many different ways, so it is interesting to research how they sound best on the historical instrument. Secondly it contains the only trills in this movement, so it was interesting how hard they were to play on the historical instrument and how they sound, as trills are considered very difficult in modern trombone practice.

Ex. 6: Key passage 4

2.2.5. Key passage 5, cadenza

The first movement ends with a cadenza. This is an interesting way to investigate the expressiveness and more rubato way of playing on the historical trombone. Aside from that it contains several high, loud notes so investigating the sound of these is very interesting.

Ex. 7: Key passage 5, cadenza

2.3. Practicing

2.3.1. Practicing on historical trombone

After selecting the passages, they were each practiced on the historical trombone. The aim was to achieve a good technical mastery of this instrument. Everything in the work should be played at a level of quality that is appropriate to the instrument in terms of sound and articulation. Furthermore, in this phase investigated the physical and technical difficulties compared to the modern trombone I am used to playing. Anything that differs instinctively was described in this phase of the research. This was documented by means of a logbook. In addition, recordings were also made to describe the things in the logbook. These were made throughout the practice process so that a process was documented, not just a result.

Some questions that were asked to document the differences between the instruments:

- What physical differences can be felt? (Holding, slide, embouchure & mouthpiece,…)
- What aspects of playing feel different? (Dynamic, different registers, putting on and articulating notes, trills,...)

Some questions that can be asked when rehearsing:

- How can all the notes be played well in the core in the different registers?
- Which dynamics work best?
- Which way of articulation works best with the different articulations?
- Does a different way of phrasing work better on this instrument?
- How can the physical challenges be solved?

2.3.2. Practicing with pianoforte

After a quality version was obtained on the historical trombone, an additional component was also added to the practicing, in which passages were played with the accompaniment of a 19th-century Graf pianoforte. The purpose of this was to gain additional insights into how the work could be played in a more stylistically appropriate manner. Different timbres and dynamics were experimented with, as well as different ways of articulation. In this way a version could be obtained which best matched the pianoforte and which was therefore closer to how a performance would have sounded at the time the work was composed. This process was also documented by means of a logbook and recordings during the rehearsal(s).

2.4. Comparison between instruments

In the next step, passages were recorded on both the historical and modern trombone. These recordings were then ecompared with each other. To maintain structure in this research, the differences were described per passage for the following chosen aspects:

- General sound (in different registers)
- Sound in different dynamics
- Legato
- Articulations

2.5. Obtaining interpretation on modern trombone

These described differences were carried over to a version on modern trombone. These were then practiced and recorded passage by passage. In addition, a log also described how it felt physically and technically to play that way. Based on this documentation, it was determined what adjustments were made based on technical aspects and personal musical preference.

That new version was then practiced and documented, and this process was repeated until a version was obtained that I, as a performer, was satisfied with. Throughout this process, I also practiced on the historical trombone in order to stay as close as possible to this way of playing on the modern trombone. By means of a logbook I wrote down which aspects to take into account in order to be able to play the complete first movement in the obtained style.

Finally, a version of the excerpts was practiced in the style obtained and a recording of this was made. After that, any necessary adjustments were made for the final recordings which served as the final result of this research.

2.6. Equipment used:

- iPhone 12 camera
- iPad Air Camera
- Zoom H1 Essential recording device
- Score: Edition Robert Müller, publisher: Zimmerman, edition from 1906. This is the most requested edition on auditions.
- Bach 42B trombone, gold brass bell and rotary valve
- Greg Black 5G mouthpiece
- August Clemens Glier romantic German trombone (built around 1880)
- August Clemens Glier mouthpiece (built around 1880)
- Conrad Graf, Vienna, pianoforte

3. Research

3.1. Pilot study

In the pilot study, the first part of researching and experimenting, as described in the method of this research, was tested. The first two of the five selected key passages were practiced on the historical instrument so that they could be played together with the Graf pianoforte. During the rehearsal a recording was made of the first run trough. After finding an ideal way of playing together with the pianist, a second recording was made as an end result.

When practicing the passages the goal was to find a resonant full sound that felt natural on the historical instrument, in all registers and dynamics. Another goal was to get as clear and direct articulations as possible, as well as making the legato as connected and clean as possible. The instrument felt like it held back a lot more, it did not go as loud and open as a modern instrument, the sound was very dark naturally. This gave me as a player the tendency to hold back myself, because it felt natural on this instrument. The articulations were very clean very easily.

In the rehearsal the goal was to find out which sound color, dynamics, and articulations worked best. When playing together, in terms of sound we noticed that it had to be played a little more with an open, brilliant color compared to the color practiced before, in order to match better with the pianoforte. The feeling that this trombone had to be played more held back became to be partially true. The dynamic had to be much quieter than on a modern trombone, but louder than what I had practiced and thought to be right. This means that in order to gain an ideal color and dynamic, I had to put in more effort to let the instrument open up more.

In terms of articulation, not much had to be changed. The instrument articulated very clearly and lightly much easier than a modern trombone. When playing with the pianoforte, this made even more sense, because this clarity of articulation matched the clarity and lightness of the pianoforte. When practicing it felt more like I had to articulate in a different way, but after practicing with pianoforte it made more sense because it supported the articulation of the historical trombone very well.

This way of practicing worked very well to achieve the wanted result, which was creating a way of playing that is as close as possible to how the concerto would have sounded during the time it was written.

3.2. Practicing

Link to watch the recordings: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEU8uJ6VT-4&list=PLvPjt2L8K-ZDVJjR1SNOMIVOsY8PY7zK0&pp=sAgC

3.2.1. Practicing on historical trombone

Passage 1, first practice

Video "Excerpt 1, first practice"

How it felt when practicing

I needed to put a lot of air and effort into playing this instrument to make it sound good, but once I found the right energy it sounded very full and warm throughout all the registers and dynamics.
Soft playing required enough air but did not require as much as on a modern trombone. The low register sounded full easily.
Loud playing required a lot of air and energy, but I was never able to get as loud as on a modern trombone. It felt as if there was a limit, which is not the case on a modern instrument. When I got very loud, the sound did not open up as much and stayed very dark.
Articulations were always automatically much clearer, this was an advantage for articulated passages, but made the cantabile parts more challenging.
The slide was very much in the way, it was very heavy and did not slide so smoothly. This made playing harder, as every movement gave a shock to the lips and broke up the air. I needed to be very careful and relaxed with every movement. Practicing glissando without interrupting the lips or the air was a good exercise to get a feeling for the slide and to find a way to play without disrupting too much.
Switching registers was tougher, for example: in the last bar of this excerpt, it was harder to keep the same sound quality and resonance going down so quickly.

When listening back to the recording

Loud dynamics needed to be louder, even though the instrument was a bit more limited in loudness, this did not mean I needed to play like that, I needed to think the other way around: louder and more effort than on a modern trombone. The soft dynamics should have been softer. In general the sound needed to sing a bit more. The articulation was super clear, there was no need to change that. There needed to be more sound on the articulated notes, so they needed to be played with more air and had to be a little broader.

Passage 1, final result

Video "Excerpt 1, final result"

How it felt when practicing

Because the instrument on itself held back the sound in the loud dynamics a lot, I had to play as if I was playing louder than I would have done on a modern trombone. This felt contradictive to do since it was not the character of the instrument, but only then I was able to get the proper sound out. I practiced this by playing long tones and finding the right balance between sound and dynamic. By trying to control the slide I was able to make the articulated notes sound less short, as well as making sure they were all in the center and not missed.
I tried to make the soft dynamics softer, but then it got very hard to connect the notes without making the sound collapse. The soft was already soft enough considering it is a solo piece and the instrument did not project as well, so I decided to keep this dynamic.
I managed to make the sound more singing in all dynamics and registers.
The run down at the end got better by thinking crescendo, and opening up the sound the more I got down. Also making sure the slide did not get too aggressive towards the last note helped me to get it to sound better

After this practicing process a recording was made, which counts as the final result for this part of the research and which was used to compare the historical to the modern trombone version.

Passage 2, first practice

Video "Excerpt 2, first practice"

How it felt when practicing

The slide stills felt very heavy, which made it difficult to make nice legatos. The instrument was hard to hold in the left hand because there was nowhere to put your thumb properly, that makes it harder to relax.
Making sound required much more effort in use of air. Piano playing was very easy, the sound stayed full very effortlessly and the instrument spoke very naturally. The sound stayed very singing, pure and warm. Playing in the high register required a lot of effort and control. Phrasing got more difficult because of the physical barriers of the instrument.

When listening back to the recording

The sound was nice throughout, but could have been softer be softer. The jump up to high Bb was very hard and had to be repeated many times before getting it right. There had to be more focus on having more tension in lips than usual. The intonation in the high register was low because I had to put in more energy than on a modern instrument. With same energy, the intonation was low.
When using tong, a softer tongue than usual needed to be used. Tonguing sounded harsher on this instrument, however this was useful for articulated passages. The phrasing could have been more exaggerated, there was not enough direction forward.

Passage 2, final result

Video "Excerpt 2, final result"

How it felt when practicing

The slide stayed a problem, practicing different slide speeds and focusing on giving more or less tension in the arm helped. I needed to find the right balance between keeping the arm relaxed to not disrupt the air and embouchure, but have more power to achieve the right speed of the slide.

To hold the instrument more stable, I found it was easier to move the thumb more backwards and put it on the bar as an extra support, since it did not have any place to put the thumb.

When playing legato jumps, I needed to adapt the embouchure and air more, to keep the same sound quality and intonation. A modern instrument helps much more with this. The first jump to the high Bb stayed hard, I needed to focus on immediately changing the embouchure and airspeed, much faster air than you would usually do.
When playing tongued legatos the tongue needed to be much softer, the instrument had a tendency to sound very clear when using tongue, so that needed to be taken back.
I tried to make the sound softer, but then it got risky sounding not legato enough in the high-middle and high registers. I took back the dynamics a bit but not so much that notes would not come out properly.
I still wasn't able to phrase as expressive as I want do to physical barriers, but I tried to do that as much as possible .

After this practicing process a recording was made, which counts as the final result for this part of the research and which was used to compare the historical to the modern trombone version.

Figure 15: The thumb is more pointed back in order to horizontally support the trombone better. (photo by the author)

Passage 3, first practice

Video "Excerpt 3, first practice"

How it feels when practicing

Articulating was very easy to do, it was much clearer and lighter and it took much less effort than on a modern instrument. This excerpt was especially hard to because of the heavy slide. The piano dynamic was easy to play, is sounded full much easier. The forte dynamic was hard to get loud, but at the same time it stayed very controlled. The runs down were hard, shifting registers was harder so the sound collapsed when going down.

When listening back to the recording

The articulation sounded very clear. The sound had to be more full, it required more air to achieve that. At this point, it was a bit too unsupported, but already quite good. The dynamic contrast between mezzoforte and piano was clearly audible. When starting, I needed to be in tempo immediately, the first notes should not have been slower. The two middle-high forte notes could have been be louder. The runs down needed to have the same sound quality throughout. That way the low notes had a fuller sound, right now they sounded very small and unstable. The last run slowed down because of the low position. On a modern trombone the valve helps avoid this long slide distance.

Passage 3, final result

Video "Excerpt 3, final result"

How it feels when practicing

It was much more consistent, and more full, articulated notes were achieved through practicing everything glissando. This way I practiced that the sound is not interrupted by the heavy slide, and by adding a bit of tongue I achieved clearly articulated full sounding notes, also in the piano dynamic. Starting in the right tempo and keeping it was still hard, but it had improved compared to the first time. The fortes were louder now, and the runs down stayed more consistent in sound. This was done by thinking a little bit crescendo downwards. It still sounded diminuendo because the register changes, and the lower register was still full. It was still hard to get perfect. With this excerpt I felt like I improved everything, but did not get it as good as the other ones. The big jumps in the fast tempo made it harder to get good than the other excerpts.

After this practicing process a recording was made, which counts as the final result for this part of the research and which was used to compare the historical to the modern trombone version.

Passage 4, first practice

Video "Excerpt 4, first practice"

How it feels when practicing

The long low notes were very tricky to get to have a singing and loud sound immediately. Articulating was once again very easy and going up to the high C was not a difficulty at all. Doing accelerando in the runs was harder because of the slide, and also the lack of flexibility I experience on this instrument. A bigger and more relaxed deep breath was needed before the low F, otherwise it was hard to make the whole phrase in one breath.
The trills were just a little bit easier (not much difference) which was surprising because the instrument does not feel so flexible. I thought trills would have made more sense on this instrument but it was relatively the same difficulty as on my modern trombone.

When listening back to the recording

The low C (first note) sounded much better than expected, nothing had to change. It was loud enough and the sound was very controlled, full and not too aggressive. The low F sounded quieter, but the sound was good. It should have had the same energy as the C, so it would require more effort.
In both runs the legato was not very good, it needed less tongue because the instrument articulated more clearly automatically. Now the sound was interrupted because the instrument reacted differently to the tonguing. The piano should have been softer and more singing. The legato needed less tongue and softer shifts on the natural slurs. It sounded too harsh and needed to be more singing. When the trills got faster it did not sound like a trill anymore, it should have been more relaxed and less forced, now it worked against myself and the instrument too much.

Passage 4, final result

Video "Excerpt 4, final result"

How it feels when practicing

After learning to control the slide better and not disrupting the lips or the air, all articulated and legato notes came out very clearly and are centered. The low notes were now equal to each other in sound quality and dynamic. In order to achieve this I had to blow more air on the low F, as well as tensing up the embouchure a little more than I would on my modern instrument.
The soft legato bars were much more legato after tonguing in a softer way and relaxing the slide more. This also helped the sound a lot. The only thing that stayed hard in the end, even though I got it better, was the timing of the slurs. The trills came out better now, this was achieved by thinking the sound more open and projected. This way the air moved faster allowing the lips to vibrate easier. Also trying to relax the rest of the body more helped with letting the trill come out clearer.

After this practicing process a recording was made, which counts as the final result for this part of the research and which was used to compare the historical to the modern trombone version.

Passage 5, first practice

Video "Excerpt 5, first practice"

How it feels when practicing

It was hard to get a loud and resonant sound, it felt like it sounded vocal and warm even though it does not resonated so much. Starting the notes was hard, the instrument did not react as well to the effortless way of playing you can have on a modern instrument. It needed more effort and air to start and have a good sound immediately. The legatos were difficult to get really legato, as the tongue came through too much. Again it was hard to go down to the lower register, it really needed more effort and air.

When listening back to the recording

The sound was very nice throughout, it just did not have a singing and resonant quality to it. The legato was good in the middle-higher register, when it went into the lower-middle register, all legatos and articulations were too clear and broke up the air too much, so it did not sound as singing anymore. The softer dynamics could have been a bit softer. The last two notes needed the same sound quality as the rest, they sounded too thin and unsupported.

Passage 5, final result

Video "Excerpt 5, final result"

How it feels when practicing

The main difficulty was the sound, it needed to be very singing but also quite loud without being aggressive. In this register the sound felt quite blocked, but by having air that is active enough and the right balance between relaxation and tension I managed to get the sound to resonate more throughout the registers.
Also, starting the notes immediately with the right sound was tough, but that was fixed through attacking the notes without tongue and then later to adding the tongue. This required more effort than on a modern instrument. The legato was way better, just as in the other excerpts it was a matter of having a softer tongue and a better slide coordination. The sound of the low notes collapsed often because the main register in this passage is middle-high, so going down was hard. By trying to get the sound more open and by having more active air, the sound of the low register got more equal to the quality of the higher register. Although the last G kept being tough, it got better.

After this practicing process a recording was made, which counts as the final result for this part of the research and which was used to compare the historical to the modern trombone version.

3.2.2. Pianoforte practice

Video: "Pianoforte practice, first try"
Video: "Excerpt 1, pianoforte practice"
Video: "Excerpt 2, pianoforte practice"

There was another session with pianist playing on a 19th-century Graf pianoforte, around 9 months after the session for the pilot study. The goal was to find a sound and way of playing that matched the pianoforte best, in order to come closer to how the piece would have sounded during the time that is was written.

The pianoforte had a much lighter and less projecting sound. The attacks of the notes were always very transparent compared to a modern piano. The first thing I noticed was that the very clear articulation of the historical trombone matched the pianoforte very well. There was no need to change anything in terms of articulation.

Sound wise, some changes had to be made. Although the pianoforte was not nearly as resonant as a modern piano, there was still need to open up the sound of the trombone more and also play louder. Because even if I did that, it would never have been as open and resonant as a modern trombone. The sound was still very dark and warm and did not project so well. The feeling was that because this historical trombone has this kind of warm and not so resonant, open sound, I would have to play on it that way. But it was the other way around, I had to put in more effort and it felt like I was playing louder than I normally do. Once that sound was achieved, the trombone blended very well with the pianoforte without overpowering it, or without the pianoforte overpowering the trombone. Now that the sound had opened up more, as far as that is possible, it blended but came through well as a solo instrument.

3.3. Comparison between modern and historical trombone

All the passages were recorded on a modern trombone, and were compared to the final versions on the historical trombone. The differences were described by terms of sound and articulation. The goal was to find a good basis for what to do differently when trying to play in the historical style on the modern instrument.

3.4. Obtaining interpretation on modern trombone

In general

After comparing the versions on historical trombone, it was clear that the main differences were firstly the sound and the dynamic. And secondly, the way the articulation had to be performed.
The sound needed to be much darker, warmer and thus less brilliant and resonant. Hand in hand with this goes that the dynamic had to be toned down. In order to achieve this, the embouchure and air needed to be shaped in a more “o” sound rather than an “a” sound. Secondly, the air had to be less active, meaning more letting go of the air rather than making the air move forward. The body and the lips needed to relax more too. This way the sound of the historical trombone was translated quite close into the modern trombone. This counted throughout all the registers, but especially the middle-high and high registers, as it is mostly there that the modern trombone has the most open and brilliant sound compared to the historical one.
The articulation needed to be clearer and lighter, but less direct and open than on the modern trombone. This was done by using less air and a more relaxed embouchure. This way the tongue could articulate lighter and the sound was les direct on the articulation. The articulations also got less heavy.
For the legato, the decision was made to not copy the historical trombone, as legato should always be as smooth and flowing as possible. The legatos on the historical trombone sounded more articulated and less smooth than on a modern one, so the modern version was still preferred.

	Modern trombone	Historical trombone
General sound (different registers)	Brilliant, open, resonant. In the lower register it felt more full, it did not have the same darkness, but it had more lower frequencies.	Warm, dark, round, vocal, pure. The high register sounded especially different, it was much less bright and is instead very warm. The lower register was also dark and warm, but did not have the same heaviness or deepness.
Sound in different dynamics	Whatever dynamic I played, it stayed very resonant. However, the color changed a lot. When playing loud, it fully opened up, while when playing soft it became much more dark and mellow	It kept its character through the whole dynamic range. It always stayed very dark. Of course there was a difference in sound when playing loud or soft, but not nearly as much as on a modern instrument. When going soft, it got extremely mellow and vocal. When playing loud it kept everything very well together, it opened up a bit but mostly the sound kept its dark and heavy character. In general though, the historical instrument would never sound as loud as a modern one, even if I played it at its loudest, the sound was not as bright and powerful.
Legato	Very soft, very easy to hide when tongue was used, it sounded very flowing.	Natural slurs sounded the same, but whenever there was a legato where tongue needed to be used it came out a lot. It sounded more articulated than on a modern trombone.
Articulations	Heavier and less clear than the historical trombone. Articulation sounded very different because a big part came from the start of the sound. The resonance of the instrument allowed for a different sound for articulation. On the historic instrument a bigger part came from the articulation itself. The start of the first note was able to be way more direct, because it reacted much more easy to have sound immediately.	Super light and clear, in all the registers and dynamics. It took almost no effort to play everything very clearly. The start of the notes was less direct, because the instrument did not react as quickly as a modern one when starting a note.

Passage 1

Video: “Excerpt 1, historical interpretation”

The main focus was on the sound of the longer notes, it was important to play in a lower dynamic and with a warmer, darker sound. The articulated notes were played with less air to make them sound lighter, as well as with a more open and relaxed embouchure to make them sound warmer and less direct.

Passsage 2

Video: “Excerpt 2, historical interpretation”

The legato was kept the same, as it sounded too articulated on the historical trombone. The main focus was once again on the sound, which was particularly hard because of the register. The goal was to play with a more round and warm sound, and the higher the register, the more focus there was to keep the embouchure and mouth more open and in an “o” shape, so that the sound did not brighten up too much in the higher register. The articulated notes in the last bar were played with less air and more relaxation in order to achieve a lighter and less direct articulation.

Passage 3

Video: “Excerpt 3, historical interpretation”

In order to mach the same lightness an clarity, especially in a passage like this that has a constant run of fast notes, it was even more important to have a very relaxed embouchure and less air than usual. The challenge was also to match the sound of the historical instrument. Keeping it warm and dark was a difficult combination with having a light articulation, but after practicing to find the right balance between the embouchure, tongue and air, the right way of playing was found.
The first high and loud notes had to be toned down in dynamic and were also played with a darker sound in order to sound more like the historical instrument. The downward runs after these notes were played with a lighter articulation and less air. However, there was more focus on keeping the sound warm than in the first bar of the excerpt, in order to facilitate playing the low notes at the end of the runs with a full sound.

Passage 4

Video: “Excerpt 4, historical interpretation”

The low long notes were challenging as they tended to be aggressive very easily on the modern trombone, which was not the case at all on the historical instrument. In order to match the sound, there had to be as less pushing the air as possible, and thinking a very deep “o” sound with the air and embouchure. The air needed to just be released like that rather than blown. These low notes had more of a loud mezzoforte dynamic which matched the historical trombone very well. On the first run upwards there had to be a lot of focus not brightening up the sound when going up to the high C.
On the lyrical measures after these two runs, the sound also had to stay less brilliant. The legato was played as smooth as possible instead of trying to copy what it sounded like on the historical instrument.

The trills on the instrument had clearer changes between the notes, as well as a darker, more full sound. By darkening the sound of the trilled notes, the trills itself became clearer as well as easier to play, as the embouchure is more open than usual.

Passage 5

Video: “Excerpt 5, historical interpretation”

The main focus in this excerpt was the sound. To match the sound of the historical instrument, the sound was played as dark and warm as possible in the way as described before. This passage contains three loud middle-high notes, that were usually very bright on a modern trombone. There was extra focus on playing with a big embouchure and relaxed, not pushing the air so that they would not be too bright or aggressive.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Summary of what I learned

The main goal of this research was to learn how the Concertino by Ferdinand David, and by extension trombone in German Romantic music in general, would have sounded like in the time it was written. As well as knowing how it would have felt like to play on these instruments. To research this, the research question “How can a performance of the concertino be influenced by practicing it on a historical trombone?” was asked.

First, I did some research about the instrument I was going to play on, where I learned that this instrument was created in Leipzig, where Ferdinand David was from and where he wrote this Concertino. Another interesting discovery was that this type of trombone was used throughout the whole German Romantic tradition, meaning that music from composers as Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler and Richard Strauss were also written for this type of trombone. This sparked even more interest in the research as it would not only be useful for this specific piece, but also for my orchestral playing and audition preparation on German Romantic music. Through researching the differences between these trombones and modern trombones, I was already able to already make a hypothesis of how the instrument would have worked and sounded like. In general, the historical trombone is built a little bit bigger; the wider bore and bigger bell are the main differences. These make that the trombone has a warmer and darker sound, and is not made for the brilliant playing that is often practiced today. The mouthpiece however makes that the trombone articulates very lightly and clearly, as well as not having an as resonant sound as modern trombones do.

After this initial research key passages were selected in order to have a more structured way of researching. The passages were selected so that all types of musical elements of the first movement appeared in these passages. After creating a method I was able to start the research process. The first step was to practice the passages on the historical trombone. By finding a way to play them as well as possible I could get a good image of how the music should sound on an instrument of that time. I learned that the instrument articulates very clearly and lightly, which made this concertino make a lot more sense on that instrument than on a modern one. Besides that I also discovered that the instrument sounded much more warm and dark and did not have the same brilliantness and resonance of a modern instrument. It also felt like it had more of a dynamic limit, however it did keep the sound very controlled in the loud dynamics. In order to play it well I had to put in more effort than on a modern instrument, as it did not help as much and definitely did not react as quickly. It was also harder to shape and phrase the way I wanted it. Another difficulty was the very heavy slide and the fact that it was hard to hold it in a stable way, which made this concertino even more virtuosic than it already is.

Besides practicing individually, I also practiced together with a Graf pianoforte from the 19th century. This way I was able to discover what it felt like to practice with a piano from that time instead of a modern piano, and find a way of playing that matched the historical trombone. By doing that I found out that it matched very well because the light articulation, less resonance and openness in the sound, and softer dynamic were characteristics that could be found in the pianoforte as well. This proved to me that the concertino really did not have to be played as loud as possible. But anyhow I still had to put in a lot of effort in playing to make the historical trombone sound soloist together with the pianoforte.

After the practicing phase I recorded all the passages on my modern trombone and compared the differences between the two instruments on selected criteria. Based on these differences I practiced the passages on my modern trombone in the way it sounded on the historical instrument. This way I learned how to interpret this music in a more historically informed way. The key findings were that the articulations had to be played much more effortlessly. Through using less air and a more relaxed embouchure, the articulations sounded much lighter and clearer as they did in the historical trombone. A second importing finding was how to shape the sound. This had to be much warmer and darker, which means that I had to open up the embouchure and mouth in a more “o” shape rather than playing with an “a” vowel. Besides that it was very important to relax the lips more and to push the air as little as possible. Lastly the dynamics needed to be a lot less than we are used to playing on a modern trombone. This way of making sound was most important in the loud dynamics and higher register, as it was there the modern trombone sounds its most brilliant and powerful.

4.2. What do I take with me in the future?

Everything I learned has been very valuable. From the start it had been a topic that I was interested in, but I learned more out of it than I had expected. In the beginning, the research was aimed only at playing the David Concertino, but I was pleasantly surprised to find out that this type of trombone had been used throughout all German Romantic music from that time on. This made this research many times more valuable as we as trombonists have to work a lot with German Romantic music. Mostly in orchestral playing or when playing excerpts from these works for auditions. This broadened the insights from “how would the David Concertino have sounded?” to “how did German music sound in its time?”. Of course composers like Brahms, Bruckner or Mahler all have to be played in drastically different ways, but this still gave a good general insight on the trombones of their time. Knowing more about these instruments and having had the experience to play on one was definitely valuable for the future. Aside from this, learning to play this way on my modern trombone also improved my way of making sound and articulating, as well as making music. I can definitely say I am happy with the project and the process, it has been a valuable thing to take with me in the future.

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