

## CORNO DA TIRARSI and TROMBA DA TIRARSI in J. S. BACH'S VOCAL COMPOSITIONS

(Corno da tirarsi en Tromba da tirarsi in de vokale muziek van Johann Sebastian Bach)

In the accompaniments of Bach's vocal compositions three kinds of brass-instruments are to be found: the horn (corno), the trumpet (tromba) and the trombone; next to it the wooden instrument cornetto or zink, acting as a discant-instrument for the trombone-group. The soprano-trombone also occurs. In Bach's times horn and trumpet are always intended as 'natural instruments', that is to say without valves. These instruments can (hardly) only produce tones occurring in the natural gamut, but very capable players also could produce by embouchure some tones, normally not occurring in the gamut.

The natural gamut of a trumpet or horn in C looks as follows:

C	–	c	–	g	–	c'	–	e'	–	g'	–	b-flat'	–	c''	–	d''	–	e''	–	f''	–	g''	–	a''	–	b-flat''	–	b''	–	c'''
1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10		11		12		13		14		15		16

in addition to which should be noted that the natural tones 7 (b-flat'), 13 (a'') and 14 (b-flat'') are out of tune (too low), but can be corrected by embouchure; the natural tone 11 (f'') is too high, for which counts the same. In the low register the tones d', f', a' and b' are missing, in the mid-register the tones c'', d'', f'' and g''. In case a composer want these tones he has to take an instrument in another fundamental tone, for instance in D, E-flat or F.

In Bach's music the mostly occurring fundamental tones are C and F for horns and C, D or E-flat for trumpets. By means of an intermediate tube the total length could be changed, so that the instrument got another fundamental tone which originated a different set of tones. Bach has not known valves. They were only invented many years after his death.

On modern horns with valves Bach's music often is very difficult to play because of the prescribed high notes, for instance the notorious high c''' – jot down as f'' – in the first 'Brandenburg Concerto'. For modern trumpets it is the same but here high notes appear more often and in general a greater virtuosity is to be expected. In a number of cases Bach uses other instruments, the corno da tirarsi and the tromba da tirarsi (which are definitely not the same as horns or trumpets). On these instruments tones from the lower register could be played including the chromatic tones, not available in the natural gamut.

Until recently the question 'what exactly is a corno- or tromba da tirarsi' was 'rather unanswerable. The term 'tirarsi' makes one think of telescoping or pulling a tube like the trombone. The first editor of Bach-cantatas in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Moritz Hauptmann, unjustly thought of a discant-trombone. The difference between a corno- and a tromba da tirarsi is not quite clear until now. Both terms are used by Bach, the term 'tromba da tirarsi' was known already by his predecessor in function Johann Kuhnau [01].

Under the term 'corno' Bach understood a horn but the terms 'corno da caccia', 'cor du chasse', 'corne par force' and 'Waldhorn' are used too, mostly instruments in F and G, sometimes also in C, D, low E-flat and high D. The parts move between the 3<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> natural tone. The influencing of the pitch by inserting the hand into the bell is not occurring in Bach's practice. He doesn't make use of the horn before his arrival in Leipzig [02] in 1723. The horns are – except soloistic – also used as reinforcements of the cantus firmus. This is one of the essential tasks of corno- and tromba da tirarsi: the cantus firmus was in Bach's days a still wellknown choral-melody. In the four-part harmonisations, often placed at the end of the cantatas the position of the notes can be quite low, so

that certain tones are not playable on a natural instrument. In such cases a corno- or tromba da tirarsi had to take over. In those days the switch from a corno- to a tromba da tirarsi or from a horn or trumpet to a corno- or tromba da tirarsi might be expected from any professional musician like those in service of a court or a town. Bach's first trumpeter Gottfried Reiche (1667-1743) had this proficiency. After the death of this first-class musician apparently nobody was able to take over and with that the corno- and tromba da tirarsi disappeared from daily practise.

The parts for corno da tirarsi or tromba da tirarsi appear mostly in cantatas where only one brass-instrument is prescribed, like BWV 140. Bach seldom writes a solo-part (in BWV 46, 67 and 162 [03]) but the use is much more frequently than written in the scores and parts. Most cantatas in which appear parts for corno- or tromba da tirarsi came into being in the years 1723-1725, so in the first 'Leipzig years. Bach's natural trumpet-parts keep as far as possible within the limits of the natural gamut and seldom go higher than the 16<sup>th</sup> natural tone.

A corno- or tromba da tirarsi can play notes, not appearing in the natural gamut, that is: between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> natural tone (on an instrument in C between c' and c'') and all chromatic tones in the high octave between c#'' and c'''. Besides the false tones in the series, 7<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> can be played in tune. This is possible as at the tube a second tube is added, provided with a slide (like at the trombone). The modern instruments are copies of originals. Gottfried Reiche played all trumpet- and horn-instruments, thus the corno- and tromba da tirarsi too. These instruments appear in A, B-flat, C and D.

Sometimes in the parts Bach supplies the superscriptions (written by himself or his copyists) with the term 'da tirarsi'. Many parts for horns or trumpets are possibly originally written for corno- or tromba da tirarsi because on these instruments hardly everything could be played. A complication, however, is that Bach is not consistent or even careless in his nomenclature. There are about 50 parts in his whole cantata-output better playable at a corno- or tromba da tirarsi than at a natural horn or a natural trumpet.

Any restrictions refer to the instrument, not to the player. The 7<sup>th</sup> natural tone (b-flat') as a rule is avoided, the 14<sup>th</sup> (b-flat'') appears more often; the 13<sup>th</sup> (between g#'' and a'') mostly is treated as a''. If these tones could appear more often within one certain part Bach prescribes some other instrument, for instance an instrument in D instead of C. With the slide, already mentioned, the fundamental tone can be changed. At modern instruments this all is not necessary because at these all chromatic tones are available but the character of sound is quite different than in Bach's times.

In Bach's times there were four kinds of trumpet-instruments (setting aside the different pitches):

1. The long bended tube; mouthpipe, middle tube and bell were straight sections, connected by the i-shaped upper and lower bends or bows. The corno da tirarsi has a straight cylindrical mouthpipe.
2. The German slidetrumpet ('Zug-trompete') by which the mouthpiece can be lengthened (an extendable tube) to which a mouthpiece is connected (= tromba da tirarsi).
3. The tube has been twisted several times like at the horn. This is the instrument shown at Gottfried Reiches portrait.
4. Like no.1 but with fingerholes in the tube (= tromba or clarino) [04].

Here is a list of cantatas containing parts for corno- or tromba da tirarsi:

BWV	Title	Part	Remarks
003	Corno	Cdt	last choral only
005	Tromba	Tromba da tirarsi	also solo in bas-aria

008	[Corno]	Corno da tirarsi	only in 1 <sup>st</sup> version 1724; part omitted after death Reiche
010	Tromba	Tromba da tirarsi	in later performances rewritten for 2 oboes
012	[Tromba]	Tromba da tirarsi?	possible also a natural trumpet in b-flat
014	[Corno]	Corne par force	corno da tirarsi?
016	Corno da caccia	idem	high c-horn or natural trumpet in C, chorals corno da tirarsi
020	Tromba da tirarsi	idem	1 <sup>st</sup> chorus and final choral; aria however natural trumpet in C
024	Clarino	Clarino	corno da tirarsi in C of B-flat
026	-----	Corno	corno da tirarsi
027	Corno	Corno	corno da tirarsi
046	Corno da t	Tr o Corno da tirarsi	slidetrumpet; aria for clarino
048	-----	Clarino	in choral tromba da tirarsi [05]
051	Tromba	Tromba	natural trumpet in C [or tromba da tirarsi?]
060	[Corno]	Corno	corno da tirarsi
062	[Corno]	Corno	corno da tirarsi? Not in score, only part survives
067	Corno	Corno da tirarsi	'corno'in ms. copiüst; autograph: 'da tirarsi'
068	[Corne]	Corno da tirarsi	[06]
69a	Tromba	Tromba [da tirarsi]	final choral only; cf. BWV 012
070	Tromba	Tromba da tirarsi	in chorals; in aria natural trumpet
073	Corno	Corno (da tirarsi?)	in later performance replaced by solo-organ
074	Tromba	Tromba in C	tromba da tirarsi in final choral
075	Tromba	Tromba (da tirarsi)	natural trumpet in D
076	Tromba	Tromba	natural trumpet in C; tromba da tirarsi in both chorals
077	Tromba da tirarsi	Tromba	aria: natural trumpet
078	Corno	Corno (da tirarsi?)	in later performance?
089	Corno da caccia	Corno	corno (da tirarsi) [not mentioned in final choral]
090	Tromba	Tromba [in B-flat]	final choral possibly tromba da tirarsi
095	Corno	Corno	corno da tirarsi
096	Corno	Corno [da tirarsi]	in 2 <sup>nd</sup> performance ( $\pm$ 1746) replaced by a trombone
099	Corne	Corno [da tirarsi]	originally 'cornetto'?
103	Tromba	Tromba	natural trumpet in D (aria 5), final choral in C
105	Corno	Corno da tirarsi	corno da tirarsi
107	Corne da caccia	idem	corno da tirarsi
109	Corne du chasse	idem	corno da tirarsi; ad libitum; part added later
110	Trombe	Trombe	part I in final choral tromba da tirarsi
114	Corno	Corno	corno [da tirarsi?]
115	Corno	Corno	corno da tirarsi?
116	Corno	Corno	corno [da tirarsi?]
124	Corno	Corno	tromba da tirarsi?
125	Corno	Corno	corno [da tirarsi?]
126	Tromba	Tromba	natural trumpet in D (solo in 1 <sup>st</sup> chorus) or corno da tirarsi
127	Tromba	Tromba da tirarsi?	tromba da tirarsi; original part lost
133	Cornetto	Zink	corno da tirarsi
135	Cornetto	Zink?	corno da tirarsi
136	Corno	Corno?	corno da tirarsi
140	Corno	Corno	corno da tirarsi of natural trumpet in E-flat
147	Tromba	Tromba	natural trumpet in C
162	Corno da tirarsi	Cdt	part added later for a 2 <sup>nd</sup> performance (1724)
167	Clarino	Clarino	tromba da tirarsi [07]
178	Corno	Corno	corno da tirarsi
185	Clarino	Clarino	tromba da tirarsi added in later performance, 1723

073	1723	3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany	Herr, wie du wilt, so schicks mit mir
147	1723	Visitatio Mariae	Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben
075	1723	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Die Elenden sollen essen
076	1723	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes
024	1723	4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Ein ungefärbt Gemüte
167	1723	Saint John [08]	Ihr Menschen, rühmet Gottes Liebe
185	1723	4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Barmherziges Herze der ewigen Liebe
136	1723	8 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Erforsche mich, Gott, und erfahre mein Herz
105	1723	9 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht
046	1723	10 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Schauet doch und sehet, ob irgend ein Schmerz sei
69a	1723	12 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele
077	1723	13 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Du sollt Gott, deinen Herren lieben
095	1723	16 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Christus, der ist mein Leben
048	1723	19 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Ich elender Mensch, wer wird mich erlösen
162	1723	20 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Ach! Ich sehe, itzt, da ich zur Hochzeit gehe
109	1723	21 <sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Ich glaube, lieber Herr, hilf meinem Unglauben
089	1723	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim
060	1723	24 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort
090	1723	25 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Es reisset euch ein schrecklich Ende
070	1723	26 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!
062	1724	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent	Nun komm der Heiden Heiland
133	1724	3 <sup>rd</sup> day of Christmas	Ich freue mich in dir
067	1724	Quasimodogeniti	Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ
012	1724	Jubilate	Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen
005	1724	19 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Wo soll ich fliehen hin?
008	1724	16 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben
010	1724	Visitatio	Meine Seele erhebt den Herrn
020	1724	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity	O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort
135	1724	3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder
107	1724	7 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Was willst du dich betrüben
178	1724	8 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei uns halt
078	1724	14 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Jesu, der du meine Seele
099	1724	15 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan
114	1724	17 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Ach lieben Christen, seid getrost
096	1724	18 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Herr Christ, der ein'ge Gottessohn
115	1724	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit
026	1724	24 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig
116	1724	25 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu Christ
110	1725	Christmas day	Unser Mund sei voll Lachens
124	1725	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany	Meinen Jesum lass ich nicht
003	1725	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany	Ach Gott, wie manches Herzeleid
126	1725	Sexagesima	Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort
127	1725	Quinquagesima	Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott
103	1725	Jubilate	Ihr werdet weinen und heulen [09]
068	1725	Whit monday	Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt
074	1725	Whit sunday	Wer mich liebet, der wird mein Wort halten
125	1725	Purification	Mit Fried' und Freud' ich fahr dahin
016	1726	New year's day	Herr Gott, dich loben wir
014	1735	4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany	Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit

051	1730	15 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen
027	1726	16 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende
140	1731	27 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity	Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme

#### Notes

01. Kuhnau: Cantata 'Gott, der Vater, Jesus Christus'; Staatsbibl. Berlin, sign. 12263/5.  
In this score the tromba da tirarsi can be replaced by an oboe.
02. With the exception of BWV 208 and 1071.
03. In BWV 162 a part is added to the score on the occasion of a later performance]
04. The Bohemian trumpets, prescribed by Bach in BWV 118, passing by the name of 'Litui' are trumpets, not horns, let alone 'Flügelhörner' (bugles).
05. 1<sup>st</sup> chorus: 2 oboes or tromba da tirarsi and 2 oboes unisono.
06. 1<sup>st</sup> chorus corno, 2<sup>nd</sup> chorus cornetto (da tirarsi); cdt and zink = same player.
07. Written in Weimar, 1715 without tromba da tirarsi, part added for 2<sup>nd</sup> performance in Leipzig, 1723.
08. = John the Baptist.
09. 3th Sunday after Easter.

In 1996 I gave a course about performance-practise on the music of Bach and his contemporaries. One of the subjects was Bach's orchestration, specially the brass instruments. At those times no trombe- or corni da tirarsi were at my disposal. In 2020 I was able to extend this subject with a lot of new information and the reference to 'da tirarsi'- parts in the cantatas. The 'Diplomarbeit' (2010) by Oliver Picon (Schola Cantorum Basiliens) about the corno- and tromba da tirarsi, was of great value to me. As a conductor of Bach-cantatas in the past I never had the opportunity to work wit a corno- or tromba da tirarsi player but after hearing Oliver's marvellous playing (and later the playing of that great musician Anna Freeman of Aix la Chapelle) I am convinced: this was the sound Bach must have had in his ears when performing his cantatas.

Hombourg, spring 2024  
Prof. dr. Hans van Dijk



Gottfried Reiche with his corno da tirarsi

Illustration in front of this article:

Oliver Picon, playing the tromba da tirarsi