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to play on the alto trombone, and although the instrument is smaller, the high notes are not significantly easier to play than on the tenor trombone.The alto trombone is therefore not primarily used to simply play high notes, and is rather used for its brighter, nimbler tone. Some alto trombones have a rotary valve that transposes the instrument down into Bb (like the tenor trombone).This allows the instrument to play lower and avoids the long positions. Alto trombones are sometimes used in the orchestra, playing the first trombone part in the trombone section.This was a common practice in the classical era, so we often use the alto trombone for composers like Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert.Some later composers use the alto trombone because they prefer the tone of the instrument, for example, there is an additional alto trombone in Alban Berg's Three Pieces for Orchestra.The alto trombone can also be used as a solo instrument. have a listen to this album of alto trombone concerti: Albrechtsberger, Wagenseil, L. Mozart & M. Haydn - Trombone ConcertiThe Soprano Trombone is in the key of Bb, but an octave higher than the tenor trombone.It is at the same pitch as the trumpet, hence why it is normally played by trumpet players.Often the soprano is used as a humorous novelty, or by trumpeters who want to employ glissando (sliding between pitches).Very occasionally, the instrument will be used as the top voice in a trombone choir (a group of trombones playing together).It is debatable whether this instrument was ever used historically. The soprano trombone is notoriously difficult to play in tune, as the slide positions are so small.Skip to 2:50 in this video to see Wycliffe Gordon (a jazz trombonist) play the soprano trombone to great effect:Wycliffe Gordon - 'Swing That Music'These trombones are even smaller than the soprano trombone, pitched at Eb and Bb respectively (like the alto and soprano trombones up an octave). The Sopranino Trombone is very rarely used, featuring only occasionally in trombone choirs.The Piccolo Trombone is essentially a gimmick, and very limited as an instrument.It is very shrill (the bell is uncomfortably close to your ears), and the slide is so small that playing in tune is virtually impossible. Due to the ratio of the slide, many notes are simply impossible to play.The history of the trombone will be explored in its own article, but for now it is important to note that some historical variants of the trombone are still used today in performance. Historical instruments are often called period instruments, and there are trombones dating from both the Romantic and Classical periods.These instruments are often described as Romantic trombones and Classical trombones, and they are subtly different to modern instruments in their construction. These instruments are rarely played and used by ensembles with an interest in historical authenticity.A Contra-Bass Sackbut (CC BY-SA 4.0)Another, earlier musical period called the Renaissance was particularly active for the trombone.When dealing with trombone music from this period, we call the instrument used a sackbut.The historical sackbut is significantly different to the modern trombone and is commonly used in contemporary performances of Renaissance repertoire.Here performers will typically use replicas of historical sackbuts. The sackbut is best described as having a more vocal sound than the modern trombone due to its smaller bore size which therefore makes a brighter sound.The bell is less flared than the modern trombone, making it quieter. Sometimes the bell section is not fixed by a brace and does not have a tuning slide, allowing the bell to resonate more freely.The metal is often not lacquered which also may aid resonance.The mouthpiece usually has a flat rim, which can make playing a little bit uncomfortable at first.Modern sackbut replicas often include user-friendly features that were not historically available, such as water keys, bumpers, and braces.Sackbuts can have crooks which can be swapped out to change the length of the tubing, and therefore the pitch of the instrument.This feature is useful to contemporary Renaissance performers, who often must play in different pitches (for example A = 415Hz is often used as opposed to the standard A = 440Hz). Sackbuts are available in different sizes - bass, tenor and alto sackbuts are all common and frequently used.The slide trumpet was the predecessor of the sackbut, however, this name can also refer to the modern soprano trombone (see above).We will now consider some instruments that are either variants of the trombone, or similar enough to the trombone that trombonists may be expected to play or 'double' on them. View this post on InstagramA post shared by Michał Jaworski (@jaworskyyy) The Cimbasso is like the contrabass trombone, but it has valves instead of a slide.It is similar to a tuba, although it has a cylindrical, rather than conical bore shape. The cimbasso was used primarily by the Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi, who wanted an alternative to the tuba (some say that Verdi disliked the tuba because it reminded him of his rival Richard Wagner).The cimbasso sounds similar to a trombone and is, therefore, more integrated into the trombone section.As its name would suggest, the Valve Trombone is a trombone with piston or rotary valves (like a trumpet) rather than a slide.Like the slide trombone, valve trombones come in various different sizes.This instrument can play faster passages than the slide trombone due to the efficiency of the valve system.Verdi had the valve trombone in mind for some of his operas, and some trumpet virtuosos (especially Jazz players) use the instrument.The Superbone is a hybrid instrument, having both valves and a slide.This instrument was famously used by the jazz musician Maynard Ferguson. The Euphonium is not a type of trombone.However, it has been included in this list because it is sometimes played by trombonists in the orchestra. Euphoniums have piston valves and a conical bore and are best described as a member of the tuba family and are used extensively in brass band music.In the orchestra, the euphonium is often referred to as a Tenor Tuba, and it has the same pitch as the tenor trombone. The euphonium has a warmer and less direct sound than the trombone.Examples of orchestral pieces that use the euphonium include Gustav Holst's The Planets.In this article, we gave an overview of the different sizes of the trombone, its historical ancestors, and some other instruments that trombonists should be aware of.Hopefully, this has been of use to those curious about the different types of trombones out there! Lots of different variants of the trombone have existed throughout history and knowing a little about these can help inform your performance.Some of the less common trombone sizes are also becoming increasingly relevant; many modern film scores call for the contrabass trombone and the alto trombone is becoming increasingly popular within the orchestra.Approach these different sizes with caution, each size requires learning a whole new set of slide positions for the muscle memory.This takes time and you can expect to play very out of tune at first!