

Sackbut Solutions

A practical guide to playing the sackbut

FOREWORD

In 1993, I went to London to learn how to 'become a trombone player' at the Royal Academy of Music. At this time, the early music scene was thriving with concerts and recordings all over the place. I knew nothing of this. Within the first week, I found myself playing a tenor sackbut in an ensemble with four of my fellow students. I can't say that I exactly understood the instrument straight away (I had a rough idea of the instrument's capabilities having spent a couple of evenings playing jazz on one in the Academy student halls!) and I knew very little of its origin and reasons for coming into being, not to mention the wealth of repertoire that was written for it. What I did manage to glean from these first few outings, was that the sackbut had a great potential for expressive, colourful playing and seemed perfect for exploiting some of the subtleties and simplicities which seemed easily lost on the modern orchestral trombone. I was very much into jazz at the time and although officially my studies seemed to want to keep me on a more conventional orchestral route, I kept practising, working on improvising over chord sequences, trying to copy my favourite jazz trombone players and spending hours listening to recordings. As I got to learn more about the sackbut and playing techniques, I realised that many of the musical approaches, as well as the physical playing techniques, were similar to that of jazz musicians: letting some notes almost be implied rather than played; phrasing and expression which is based on lyrics; and uneven articulations set within a hierarchy of strong and weak beats in the bar, to name a few. The freedom to embellish melodies, many of which are originally vocal pieces and making each and every note say something of its own in the phrase are also common qualities. Gradually, more and more of my time was spent listening to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century music and the concepts of both styles merged closer and closer together. I was lucky to receive some official sackbut tuition at the Academy, but also found that I was, as I still am, 'learning on the job' all the time, discovering new ways of doing things, striving for certain sounds and effects and, as with all performers, evolving in a world full of marvellous influences.

Since my Academy days, I've gone on to make my career predominantly through playing the sackbut and have been privileged enough to have played with the best groups and players in the world. All the way through, I've been conscious of the various playing styles and approaches that others choose, and, at the same time as learning to emulate and respect these, I've tried to develop a style and approach of my own. It is this experience, and the basis of my approach, which forms the structure of this book.



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Second Edition
 Edited by Adam Bregman. Published by Adam Woolf.
 ISBN 978-90-814833-1-5

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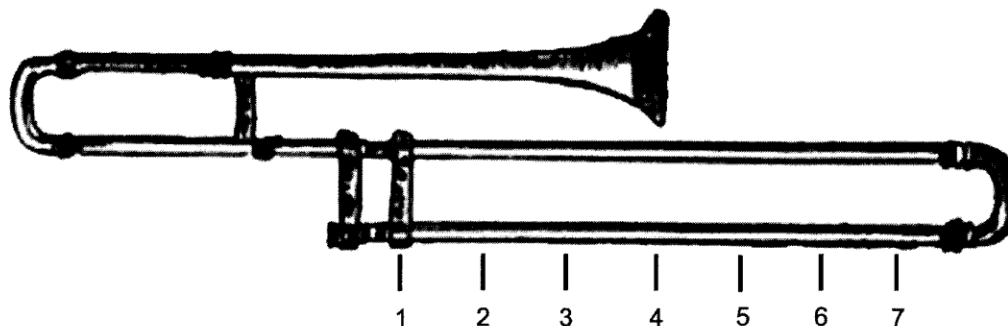
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THE 'HANDS-ON' SECTION

THE INSTRUMENT



Slide-Positions

There are seven slide-positions on a tenor sackbut.

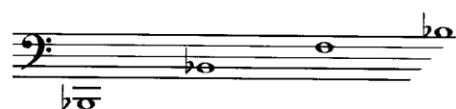
Below are the positions used when playing a B flat tenor sackbut in $a'=440$.

The numbers in brackets are useful alternative positions.

On most historical models, as shown above, the bell is approximately level with fourth position. This can be confusing at first for players of modern instruments where the bell usually lies at third position.



You can see here the notes which can be played in the *harmonic series*. Notice how they get closer changes of slide-position. NB. The A^b here is $\sharp$ is played in third position.



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Extending the slide by one

Interval & Articulation Studies

These studies, based on the opening of Dario Castello's Sonata Quarta à 2 and Giovanni Martino Cesare's Sonata 'La Augustana', will give you a chance to experiment with articulation and help you to recognise intervals. Check your tuning as you jump across intervals between low and high notes (see the section on tuning, page 46).



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Practise these exercises in Praetorius's *modern Italian* way. For the first one, I've shown where the tactus should line-up with the musical line. Of course, you will practise these changes every time you play a piece which has time changes.

After Giovanni Gabrieli

♩ = 42



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Francesco Rognoni, in his treatise *Selva de Varii Passaggi* (1620), refers to two main types of cadential ornament as the *Groppo Semplice* (Simple Grouping), and *Groppo Doppio* (Double Grouping). The *Groppo Doppio* is so-called as it doubles-up the speed of the notes towards the end of the ornament. These are very good starting points for ornamenting cadences and once you are comfortable with some of these, you will always be able to play something that fits.

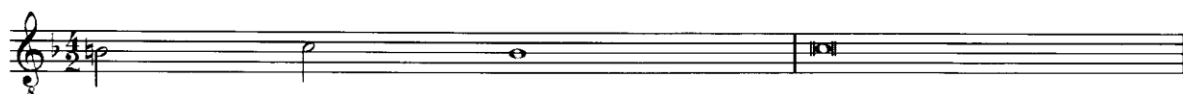
The *Groppo Semplice*



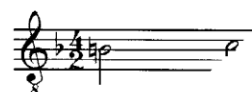
Groppo Doppio



Here is how to apply these ornaments to a cadence, starting in each case on the second half of the bar.



Here are a couple of other possibilities besides



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Anchor che col partire

divisions on the bass part by Giovanni Bassano (b 1560/61; d 1617)
(Venice 1591)

Cipriano de Rore (b 1515/16; d 1565)

5

An - chor che col par - ti - re lo mi sen -

8

- - to mo ri - - - - re,

11

Par - tir - - - vor - rei - - ogn' hor, o - gni mo - men - to,

13

Tant' - - - il pia - cer ch'io sen - - - to,

15

Tant' il pia - cer - - ch'io - - sen - to De la vi - - -

17

- - - ta ch'ac - qui - - - sto

20

tor - - - - no E

22

E co - si mill' - -

25

mill' - - e mil - le volt' - - il gio -

28

i Tan - to son dol

tor - -



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Duo XXIX

from *Duo Tessuti con diversi Solfeggiamenti Scherzi Perfidie et Oblighi*
(Rome 1657)

Giuseppe Giamberti (b c1600; d 1662-4)



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Auf dem Gebirge

SWV 396 from *Geistliche Chormusik*
(Dresden 1648)

Heinrich Schütz (b 1585; d 1672)

Alto 1

Alto 2

Instrument 1

Instrument 2

Instrument 3

Instrument 4

Instrument 5

This block contains the instrumental introduction of the piece. It features five staves: two for Alto voices (Alto 1 and Alto 2) and three for instruments (Instrument 1, Instrument 2, and Instrument 3, with Instrument 4 and Instrument 5 also present). The music is in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The introduction consists of several measures of music, with the instruments playing a melodic line and the voices providing a harmonic accompaniment.

8

Auf dem Gebirge

Auf dem Gebirge hat man ein Geschrei

This block contains the vocal entry of the piece. It features two staves for the vocal parts (Alto 1 and Alto 2) and five staves for the instruments (Instrument 1, Instrument 2, Instrument 3, Instrument 4, and Instrument 5). The music is in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The vocal parts enter with the lyrics "Auf dem Gebirge" and "Auf dem Gebirge hat man ein Geschrei". The instruments provide a harmonic accompaniment. The block is marked with a "8" at the beginning, indicating the start of the vocal entry.