

The Status of Brass Musicians as Dance Musicians in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries

Walter Salmen

Translated by Howard Weiner

Before 1800 music-making at court, in towns, and in the country frequently took place without recourse to notation, rooted as it was in traditions or norms specific to the respective venues. Ceremonial music, hunting music, processional music, and dances were performed *alla mente*. This is shown by the picture of a wedding procession against the background of the Hanseatic town of Bremen in 1618 (Figure 1). Four elegantly dressed town musicians (*Ratsmusiker*) with wind instruments (alto, tenor, bass trombones, and cornett) walk at the head of a party of wealthy citizens. In view of this and similar documents, we ask: What music did these musicians play? What social status were they accorded? What were their



Figure 1

Wedding procession in Bremen accompanied by four wind players, 1618. Anonymous, oil (Bremer Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte).

instruments? Until now, these questions have largely remained unanswered; even in articles published in the *Historic Brass Society Journal*, the participation of “brass musicians” in dance music, for example, has scarcely been addressed.

In considering music-making prior to the eighteenth century, one is at times confronted with extraordinary difficulties when trying to answer these questions. These extend to the impossibility of finding an answer to a specific question, due to a lack of sources. The level of difficulty is greater for brass instruments, kettledrums, and idiophones, in comparison to stringed or plucked instruments, above all because only in exceptional cases did one compose *expressis verbis* for them. That is to say, their use—in particular that of trumpets and horns—remained possible essentially on the basis of tradition until well into the eighteenth century.¹ Functional dance music—excluded here are stylized “chamber dances” (Johann Mattheson)—was for the most part very rarely written down, yet in certain social situations brass players regularly took part in it as early as the fourteenth century. Thus one might consider the chances of finding answers to these questions to be even more remote. Even as late as 1750, many dancing masters notated only the “aria” or melodic line of a dance for their own instrument, the violin or the lute, leaving the other parts to be improvised. Because of this deficiency, if we want to reconstruct the roles that trumpeters, trombonists, or hornists may have played at dances and balls, it is necessary to consult as wide a range of source material as possible. These include:

- Illustrations
- Treatises and dance methods
- Chronicles, travelogues, epic poems
- Documents concerning appointments and payments
- Written music
- Surviving instruments

By way of example, let us attempt to explore a few of these source types as a means of solving our problem, and thereby open up avenues for further research.

Illustrations

As a rule, only those pictorial images lacking allegorical significance have relevance for socio-historical and performance practice questions. From these one can obtain a good deal of information concerning the participation of brass players in dance music, relating to such matters as social stratum, type of occasion, make-up of the ensemble, and location (outdoors or indoors; against a wall or on a gallery or platform).

Where were dance ensembles positioned? In feudal times, at court as well as at functions of the urban upper classes, they were on balconies, set off from the guests. The illustrations that follow demonstrate this practice:

- Figure 2 at a royal dance,
 Figure 3 in a noble garden,

- Figures 4 & 5 and in the banqueting halls of German town halls and dance houses, here in Nuremberg and Augsburg,
- Figures 6 & 7 elevated places in which the musicians could stand, but not sit, were built. These were referred to as both “pipers’ seat” and “trumpeters’ seat.”
- Ensembles, standing along the walls, supplied musical background, as it were. This practice was continued well into the eighteenth century. In many castles and so-called Emperor’s Halls in Austrian monasteries, the winds were pushed so far out of the way, banished to galleries just under the high ceilings, that one almost could not see them from below.
- Figure 8 Occasionally one can also find two balconies opposite one another, as, for example, around 1500 in the Residence in Munich. Thus it was possible to separate the pipers from the trumpeters and trombonists, and to have them play the various dances in alternation.
- Figure 9 A practice that earlier served not only for acoustical enhancement, but also for social discrimination, lost its tabus and privileges in the mass culture of the nineteenth century. Trumpeters also played at annual fairs, standing on elevated platforms, in order to observe, and audibly guide, the enlarged dance area.

Works of art also document the participation of brass players in the late Middle Ages:

- Figure 10 at court as well as in the town, here in Nuremberg playing for a privileged guild of craftsmen, or at genteel gatherings in the open air.

The use of brass instruments in the “private chambers” of “judicious gentlemen,” on the other hand, was to be avoided. Vincenzo Galilei says, “One never hears wind instruments in the private chambers of gentlemen, noblemen and princes, where people with judgement, taste, and finely tuned ears gather.”²



Figure 2

Engagement dance at the court of King Yon de Gascogne, with *alta capella*, ca. 1470.
Loyset Liédet, miniature (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms.fr. 5073, fol. 117^v).



Figure 3
Wind trio on a platform in the open air, ca. 1435. Miniature to the “Tristan”
saga of Gottfried from Strasbourg (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique,
Ms.14697, fol. 26).

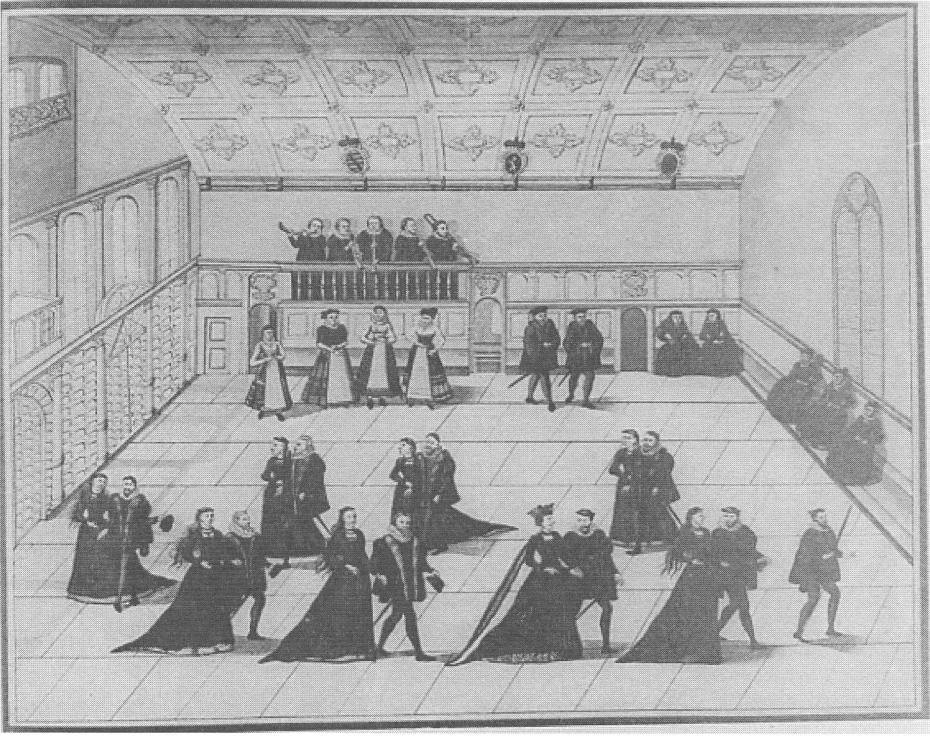


Figure 4

Grand hall in the Nuremberg city hall with patricians' dance, sixteenth century.
Aquarelle pen-and-ink drawing (Nuremberg, Stadtbibliothek, Inv. Nr. Nor. K. 6147).



Figure 6

Pipers' seat in the Grand Hall of the old city hall in Leipzig, built ca. 1560. Photo.

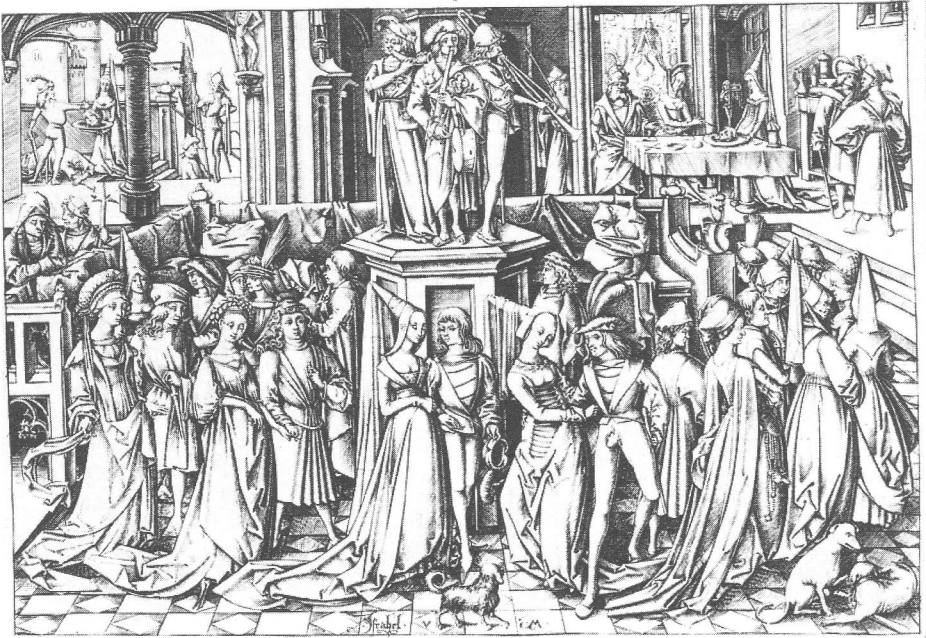


Figure 7

Town musicians on a platform in front of the scene of Salome
and the beheading of John the Baptist, before 1500.

Israel van Meckenem, copperplate engraving
(Basel, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Kupferstichkabinett).



Figure 8

Alternation between two ensembles on two balconies at a courtly dance in Munich, 1500, Matthäus Zasinger, copperplate engraving (Copenhagen, Koneglige Kobberstik Samling).



Figure 9

Dance under the linden-tree in a village near Hamburg, 1828.
Christoph Suhe, colored lithograph (Hamburg, Altonar Museum).



Figure 10

Carnival dance of the Nuremberg butchers, 1561.

Colored pen-and-ink drawing (Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, former privileges lost value so that now—realistically depicted—trumpeters, for example,

Figure 11 could play for dancing students in taverns. Or after 1750, horn players

Figure 12 could increasingly accompany the dances of all classes. Brass instruments were no longer exclusive symbols of power, feudal authority, and the privileges of the nobility.³



Figure 11

Middle-class dance ensemble, early nineteenth century.
Table-sign from Neuburg in Styria (Austria), oil on tin plate.



Figure 12

Village musicians in Upper Bavaria, 1849. Lorenz Quaglio, pencil drawing (Munich, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Inv. Nr. 22859).

Treatises and dance methods

A source relevant to our theme is the treatise *Yconomica* by Konrad of Megenberg. Konrad, who was born in 1309 and died in 1374 at Regensburg, taught at the University in Paris. He wrote this work around 1350 with the intention “filiis principum in yconomicis instruuntur doctrinis,” that is to say, to provide young princes with advice concerning the courtly household and the employment of servants, also including musicians as *servi delectabiles* (servants who provide entertainment). Konrad not only instructs his readers in practical matters, but also provides them with general guidance. This includes classification and characterization of the instrumentarium commonly used at court: “Tubicen est, qui in tuba masculina canit ... Tubicen autem est, qui in tibia feminea canit.” Shawm (*tibia*) and trumpet (*tuba*) are thus marked by their differing tonal characteristics as being feminine or masculine. In spite of or perhaps because of this difference, these instruments “sound well together according to due proportions in fourths, fifths, and octaves,” for “The trumpet and shawm do not differ save by the largeness and smallness of their respective sounds, just as

the masculine voice—as with many things—is greater by nature than the female voice. These two instruments sound well together according to due proportions in fourths, fifths, and octaves, just as the character of the melody requires.”⁴ In the extemporized music of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it was obviously normal for wind players to play at these intervals for table music, festive processions, or dancing.

Concerning music-making on the dance floor, Konrad of Megenberg offers a noteworthy remark that provides us with information about the beginnings of the ensemble that has been known as the *alta* formation since Heinrich Bessler suggested this name in 1949.⁵ Konrad writes, “In modern times the shawms and loud trumpets generally banish the sober fiddles from the feasts, and the young girls dance eagerly to the loud noise, like hinds, shaking their buttocks womanishly and rudely.”⁶ The sphere of usage for the trumpet, which as a sign of sovereign authority was introduced to Europe from the Near East, was thus extended beyond the use in wars, at tournaments and princely processions to include courtly festivities and dances. The dating of this development to the middle of the fourteenth century (*modernis temporibus*) corresponds to iconographical findings. *Servi* (servants) at court, with brass instruments, have officiated ever since as dance musicians.

Dance methods seldom provide information about the performance of the music that accompanies the choreographies. From documents contemporary with the oldest of these, from the middle of the fifteenth century in north and central Italy, one can infer that *pifferi e trombone*, which “venire per lo stecchato alto sife” (i.e., were located on high platforms), always participated at courtly balls. At the entrance of a ballet in 1459 in Florence, it was accompanied by *i trombetti* from the side (*dall’ un lato*). The famous dancing master Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro related, “Et andaro Incontra / Allo Imperadore con pifare & trombecte / E la signoria fece dançare una sera” (“I went to meet the Emperor with *pifare* and *trombette*, and the government had dancing one evening”).⁷

Also in the well-known *Orchésographie* by Thoinot Arbeau, there is little information concerning the use of instruments other than the *flutte longue* and *tambourin* for dance music. One must bear in mind, however, that this treatise reflects specific situations in France, namely those of a university town, Poitiers, as well as of the small town of Langres, and was thus conceived far removed from the life at court. The author complains that in his time in 1588, the playing of pipe and tabor as “du temps de noz peres” (“in our fathers’ times”) no longer suffices, for “maintenant il n’est pas si petit manouvrier qui ne veuille a ses nopces auvir les haulbois & saqueboutes,” that even ordinary workmen wish to have shawms and trombones at their weddings. Arbeau, however, does not want to leave the instrumentation of dances to chance, therefore he specifies that in ordinary circumstances the pavans, which are reserved for the nobility, “sont iouees par haulbois & saquebouttes.” One calls this “le grand bal.”⁸ Trombones thus accentuate the special, the festive, the dignified with their sound.

If we take a look in the dance book *Characteristische Englische Tänze* (“Characteristic English Dances”), published by Friederich Wilhelm Weis and Johann Christian Bleßmann in 1777 at Lübeck, we find parts for the dance musicians, in addition to the choreographies. In the preface, the authors comment,

The wind instruments have been so chosen that they above all have the effect of giving life to the dance, and of heightening the expression of the melody's character. However, it has been so arranged, for the sake of convenience, that, in the absence of a larger group of people, one can use, for example, just the first part, such as the first oboe or flute, [and] one or both of the horns, and then add the specially prepared [part for] double bass. If one wants to add bassoons to strengthen the music, they should play from the violoncello part.

It is quite reasonable that the wind instruments occasionally pause during a dance and then play again in alternation. Yet, even if the same [players] constantly have to play, there are already substantial resting places provided for each wind instrument in the melodies, so that the people [players?] do not become fatigued by it.⁹

The second English dance in this collection, shown in facsimile in Figures 13a and 13b, offers an example of this economical use of two horns.

The image shows a facsimile of a musical score for two horns. The title at the top is "Corni 1° in B". The score is written on two staves, each with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. The first staff is marked "1. m. q." and the second staff is marked "2. m. q.". The music consists of a series of rhythmic patterns and melodic lines, with various dynamics and articulations indicated by slurs and accents.

Handwritten musical score for horn parts, labeled "CORNO 2º m. B.". The score consists of four staves of music, each with a dynamic marking: "mp" for the first two staves and "mq." for the last two. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks.

Figures 13a and 13b

Horn parts from 6 *contratänze für 2 Violini, 2 Claronetti, 2 Corni, Flauto piccolo e Contra Basso* by Mathias Kretschmarik, 1811 (Bolzano, Sammlung Toggenburg).

This set of parts from 1777 should make it obvious that in many European countries one or two horns belonged to the standard formation at dances in the open air as well as in ballrooms around 1800, and after 1800 increasingly also in the villages. One can confirm this assertion with a glance at other fully orchestrated scores or partbooks of dance music, for example, by Mozart, Christoph Gottlob Breitkopf, or Eduard Friedrich David Helmke. So-called “small ensembles of wind instruments” (*kleine Musiken von blasenden Instrumenten*) always met with Mozart’s approval, as for example, in 1777 in Munich, where he heard the ensemble of the town musicians, consisting of two clarinets, two horns, and one bassoon, play an intrada and a dance. His earliest dances were intended for just three strings. After 1770, however, he typically demanded oboes with horns, and occasionally also trumpets; in the trio sections, these are replaced by flutes to provide contrast. Examples of this include the Six Minuets K. 105, the Minuet in E-flat Major K. 122, the Contredanse in B-flat Major K. 123, and the Gavotte in F Major K. 101.

In 1789 the Leipzig publisher and composer Christoph Gottlob Breitkopf (1750-1800) published *40 Blatt Musik* (“40 sheets of music”) to thirty stanzas from the dramatic poem *Oberon* by Christoph Martin Wieland as a musical supplement to the periodical *Pandora*. It was his intention to use an important work by this highly esteemed poet “also for social dancing.” Breitkopf wrote contredanses for an ensemble of horns, oboes, violins, and bass, which were to be realized as pantomimes to the text. Since a “magic horn” is of great significance in Wieland’s heroic epic—the horn represents Oberon and the magical power of music—the horns in the ensemble also play a symbolic-semantic role beyond that of mere dance accompaniment.

In Leipzig in 1829 the dance teacher Eduard Helmke published his *Neue Tanz- und Bildungsschule* (“New Dance and Deportment Method”), including “musical accompaniment in several parts for the dances.” “In several parts” still indicates here the use of flute, clarinet, two violins, two horns, and bass. It should be noted that the horns never play the melody, but rather accentuate the rhythm. In this way, their use fulfills an ordering, choreography-related function, in addition to the enhancement of the festive brilliance of the fashionable, conventional ball.

The inclusion of horns in Mozart’s dance music starting in 1770 is, of course, also to be seen against the background of the occasionally intense struggles conducted by town and church musicians for the preservation of brass players’ privileges. Thus in some areas of Bohemia, ensembles of two violins, two horns, and dulcimer, or two violins, two horns, clarinet, and bass were able to establish themselves only around 1830.

Status and defense of privileges

A glance at Johann Ernst Altenburg’s *Versuch einer Anleitung zur heroisch-musikalischen Trompeter- und Paukerkunst* from 1795¹⁰ shows that even before the eighteenth century considerable differences in terms of function, payment, and reputation existed between field trumpeters, court trumpeters, and chamber trumpeters. There was no standard social status for trumpeters, trombonists, or hornists. The question as to “sound and social order” demands an answer that is differentiated both regionally and temporally. This can be shown by means of documents from several centuries, as described below.

In 1458 Count Ulrich of Württemberg indiscriminately brought together all “trumpeters, pipers, lute players, and minstrels” (*trompeter, Pffifer, Lutenschlaher und Spillut*) who lived in his domains into a fellowship.¹¹ Only *vnser Knecht*, that is to say, his court musicians, were exempt from this command. This administrative unification is remarkable because at the time the diocese of Constance belonged to Württemberg, and in Constance municipal *trumetter* had been employed since 1419. To maintain their dignity of position, these trumpeters were forbidden “to play trumpet or strike the kettledrums together with the town musicians in the church. They are, however, at liberty to play other instruments together with them at any time.”¹² Trumpets and woodwind instruments were thus not allowed side by side in the church.

This separation remained in effect at a number of residences until the French Revolution of 1789, and was confirmed by decrees. The privileges specified that trumpeters

were to stay away from dances. According to Altenburg, apprentices of the “court and field trumpeters’ art” had to swear, “No apprentice shall presume to associate with city pipers or horn players, much less teach them the field pieces; nor use his trumpet at the beer-bench or other peasants’ revels, but rather for emperors, kings, princes, counts, and sovereigns, as well as all distinguished military officials.”¹³ The Prince-Bishop of Würzburg decreed on 1 September 1754 that “private persons may not make use of trumpets and kettledrums at public festivities.”¹⁴ On the contrary, all subjects should, “subject to severe punishment, be seriously admonished to restrict themselves to their usual stringed and musical instruments, horns, and trombones.” In this way the privilege of employing trumpets at all sorts of events was reserved exclusively for the prince. Trombones and horns, on the other hand, could be used freely. Correspondingly, a two-class system also came about in the manner of making music. This dichotomy was variously expressed as “string dances” (*Streichtänze*) as opposed to “wind dances” (*Blastänze*), “refined” (*fürnehme*) as opposed to “inferior music” (*geringe Musik*; in a decree by Emperor Charles VI from 1718), or “dances in several parts” (*Tänze mit vollstimmiger Musik*).

I would like to call attention to an unusual example of urban music-making. In Brunswick prior to the end of the sixteenth century there developed a subdivision of the municipal musicians into several classes, which were assigned to the five independent urban districts.¹⁵ Well into the eighteenth century there existed a differentiation between the so-called *Großes Spiel* and the *Kleines Spiel*. These competed with each other, but in terms of the instruments allowed, were clearly independent of one another. By decree, the first of which was issued in 1608, they were correspondingly assigned to the four classes into which the town’s population had been divided. The population was thus forced to accept a class-specific type of dancing. Dance ensembles therefore mirrored a social structure ordered vertically according to class. The *Großes Spiel*, that is to say, the wind ensemble (in 1549: *trummitten*, *bassunen*, *krumpipen*, *floithen*), was allowed only for people of rank. As an acoustical symbol the *Großes Spiel* was thus an expression of the power, wealth, and sovereign authority of the first, later also of the second and third estates. The fourth estate had to content itself with drums (*trumen*), cross flutes (*dverpipen*), and strings (*seidenspele*). The elevated position of the *Großes Spiel* also had an effect on the economic situation and social status of the musicians who belonged to it. This higher status of the wind instruments gradually started to decline shortly before 1700.

Conclusion

From these few illustrative glances into differentiated historical situations, we can conclude that well into the eighteenth century, the type of music performed in a given situation was not arbitrary, but subject to normative regulation. In terms of size and constitution, ensembles were dependent on what was socially permissible. This can be seen and heard very clearly in the area of dance. In dealing today with the dances and dance pieces of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, these limitations, which were at one time socially imperative, even though they varied from one locale to another, should be observed. For modern arrangements of a four-part dance movement from the sixteenth century, for example, one should not

proceed exclusively according to current, freely available aesthetic criteria. Rather, one must also address the problem of how the interpretation can reflect social connotations of the past. Not all early dances were “courtly” dances.

Walter Salmen, born in 1926, was Professor of Musicology at the Universities of Saarbrücken, Kiel, and Innsbruck. Now retired and living near Freiburg im Breisgau, he is Honorary Professor at the University of Freiburg. He has served as Visiting Professor at various American universities. He is the author of Musikleben im 16. Jahrhundert and Beruf Musiker. His latest publication, Tanz und Tanzen vom Mittelalter bis zur Renaissance (Hildesheim: Olms, 1999), appeared in 1999.

NOTES

¹ In 1564 a trumpet player stated that he played dance music with his ensemble, which “is not written, and is just made up on the spur of the moment” (“ist nit geschrieben, und machen’s nur aus dem Synn”).

² Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna* (Venice, 1581; reprint, New York: Broude Brothers, 1967). “Non si odono mai questi tali strumenti nelle private camere de giuditiosi Gentilhuomini, Signori, & Principi, dov’intervengano quelli che veramente hanno il giuditio, il gusto, & l’udito purgato.”

³ See also Walter Salmen, *Tanz und Tanzen vom Mittelalter bis zur Renaissance* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1999), ill. 22ff.; idem, *Tanz im 17./18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1988), ill. 86, 122ff.; and idem, *Tanz im 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1989), ill. 33, 57, 59, 117.

⁴ “Unde non differunt tuba et tibia nisi per vocis grossiciem et tenuitatem, sicut vox masculi grossior est naturaliter ut in pluribus feminea voce. Simul eciam bene concinunt secundum dibitas proporcionis in quartis, in quintis aut octavis, sicut qualitas exigit melodie.” Translation by Christopher Page, in “German Musicians and their Instruments: A 14th Century Account by Konrad of Megenberg,” *Early Music* 10/2 (1982): 192-200, here 193.

⁵ Heinrich Bessler, “Katalanische Cobla und Alta-Tanzkapelle,” in *Kongressbericht Basel* (1949), pp. 59ff.; Walter Salmen, *Tanz und Tanzen vom Mittelalter bis zur Renaissance* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1999), p. 106ff.; Patrick Tröster, “Ikonographische Belege zum Alta-Ensemble um 1500,” in *Musik und Tanz zur Zeit Kaiser Maximilian I.*, ed. Walter Salmen (Innsbruck: Helbling, 1992), pp. 107ff.; and Keith Polk, “Patronage and Innovation in Instrumental Music in the 15th Century,” *Historic Brass Society Journal* 3 (1991): 156-78.

⁶ “Modernis etenim temporibus tibiae ac tubae altitone fidulas morigeras a conviviis communiter fugant, et altisono strepitu certatim iuvenule saliant ut cervae clunes illepide ac effeminaliter agitando ... Flatilae autem fistulae amicos animos excitant seu irritant et ad dulcorem devocionis quodammodo movent.” Translation by Christopher Page, “German Musicians,” pp. 194-95.

⁷ A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century Dance and Music*, vol. 1: *Treatises and Music* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1995), pp. xv, xvii, xviii, 179.

⁸ Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie* (Langres, 1588; rpt. Hildesheim, Zurich, New York: Olms, 1980), pp. 24, 30. In 1667 at the court of the Landgrave of Hessen-Darmstadt *only* the dances of honor were

accompanied by trumpets and kettledrums, “afterwards one danced to the music” (“hierauf wurde nach der musique getantzet”), that is to say, to a quieter and smaller ensemble.

⁹ “Die Blase=Instrumente sind so gewählt, daß sie vorzüglich die Würkung haben, dem Tanze Leben zu geben, und den Ausdruck des Characters der Melodie zu erhöhen. Es ist aber doch, der Bequemlichkeit wegen, die Einrichtung so gemacht, daß man, in Ermangelung mehrerer Leute, nur etwa die erste Stimme, als die erste Hoboe oder Flöte, eins, oder beyde Waldhörner besetzt, und sodann den besonders ausgesetzten Violon beyfügt. Will man zur Verstärkung der Musik Fagotte zum Baß nehmen, so blasen sie nach der Violoncellstimme.

Es können füglich die Blase=Instrumente zuweilen einen Tanz durch pausieren, und abwechselnd wieder mit geblasen werden. Doch wenn auch stets dieselben mit einstimmen sollen, so sind schon so beträchtliche Ruhestellen in den Melodien für jedes Blase=Instrumente angebracht, daß die Leute dadurch nicht ermüdet werden.”

¹⁰ Johann Ernst Altenburg, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur heroisch-musikalischen Trompeter- und Paukerkunst* (Halle, 1795; facs. edn. Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1972), for example, pp. 37, 46, or 51.

¹¹ Josef Sittard, “Den Trompetern, Pfeiffern und Lautenschlägern wird vom Grafen Ulrich v. Württemberg ‘ihre gemachte Gesellschaft bestetigt’,” *Monatshefte für Musikgeschichte* 19 (1887): 4-7.

¹² Altenburg, *Versuch*, p. 23. “...in der Kirche mit den Stadtpfeiffern, weder die Trompete blasen, noch die Pauken schlagen dürfen. Andere Instrumente aber mit ihnen gemeinschaftlich zu blasen und zu spielen, steht ihnen jederzeit frey.”

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 36.

¹⁴ Klaus H. Stahmer, *Musik in der Residenz: Würzburger Hofmusik* (Würzburg: Stürtz, 1983), p. 101.

¹⁵ Werner Greve, *Braunschweiger Stadtmusikanten* (Braunschweig: Stadtarchiv, 1991), p. 60ff.