Centuries passed before the trumpet began its evolutionary journey. The keyed trumpet, invented at the end of the 18th century by Anton Weidinger, a Viennese trumpeter, marked the beginning of what would become the modern day instrument. Until that point, the early instruments were pitched in one primary tone, which limited the instrument’s use. To change keys (C to E-flat, for example) the player had to select a completely different trumpet. Some truly gifted trumpeters could produce high pitches, and, using a variety of techniques, could play a wide range of pitches and perform melodies. This type of instrument, a “natural trumpet,” was used in the Baroque period, and compositions by Bach, Handel and Vivaldi represent the pinnacle of the Baroque sound. But Bach’s music for the Baroque trumpet was exceedingly demanding of even the best virtuosos. Bach’s well-known Brandenburg Concertos were not initially performed because the Brandenburg orchestra was not of a sufficiently high caliber to play the demanding trumpet parts. The works were shelved for over a decade until rediscovered by leading musicologists for a festival in 1850 honoring the 100th Anniversary of Bach’s death.

The latter part of the 18th century saw the arrival of a new ‘pitch-changing’ idea, whereby horns were outfitted with “crooks” or “shanks,” short sections of extra tubing that could be added to a trumpet to tune its primary note to a new pitch. But the player had to stop playing in order to physically change the crook. It is easy to understand how the introduction of keys was a welcome innovation that transformed the trumpet.
With a keyed trumpet, it became possible to play a full chromatic scale on one instrument. In 1818, a German musician named Heinrich David Stolzel, in partnership with Friedrich Bluhm, created the first working brass instrument valve, and the modern valve trumpet was born, becoming the instrument we know today.

Given the extraordinary difficulties involved in playing the early instrument, it is easy to understand why trumpeters were granted prestige in the European courts, which then brought certain rights and privileges. The artistry of playing the trumpet was considered “knightly” and “noble,” and to preserve the art form, trumpeters formed brotherhoods known as Kameradschaft in Germany. In 1623, Emperor Ferdinand II granted privileges to all members of the Kameradschaft in the German speaking sections of the Holy Roman Empire, creating the Roman Imperial Fellowship. Mandates issued as early as 1661 document and supported the rights of the Kameradschaft and forbade trumpet playing by anyone who was not a member of the Roman Imperial Fellowship, except for court musicians (Stadtpfeifer), who played on watchtowers. The presence of trumpet players at court created a great sensation, especially if a reigning sovereign had one or even two trumpet choirs. If a sovereign had an excellent orchestra and other musicians, but no trumpet players, his household was deemed to “lack perfection.”

A hierarchy developed in which certain trumpeters were accorded higher rights than others. For example, the chamber and concert players were exempt from other duties so as not to “spoil the delicate and subtle embouchure.” Trumpeters played at important assemblies and various celebrations, including jousting bouts and tournaments. The title of field trumpeter was more prestigious than court trumpeter, and the highest level of prestige was awarded to the field trumpeter who had been dispatched to enemy lines during the war. Only field trumpeters could take on apprentices, but they had to first complete seven years of training and serve in a military campaign. The field trumpeter had the highest salary and status, plus the added responsibility to maintain a horse and its equipment.

The rules that protected the privileges of the Kameradschaft forbade untrained trumpet playing, but the town musicians (Stadtpfeifer) could play in the tower, as the trumpet was loud enough to signal important messages. Eventually, the Imperial Trumpet Guild relaxed the regulations and allowed the Stadtpfeifer to play trumpet in church services, which accounts for some of the extraordinary trumpet parts included in Bach’s compositions. One of the most famous Stadtpfeifer was Gottfriede Reiche, who became one of Bach’s trumpet players in Leipzig, the city in which Bach composed some of the most significant music of his career.

The inventions of Thomas A. Edison in the early 20th century began the recording age and the trumpet was embraced for its clarity of sound in the early recordings. While many instruments did not translate well, given the limitations of early technology, the trumpet’s focused and bright sound was clear and unmuddied. Trumpet became a favorite with composers and arrangers of the day, and the trumpet quickly crossed into every corner of music, from classical, to jazz, to rock, to blues and more.

Join us!

Please join the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for Romeo and Juliet, Feb. 14 - 16, 2020, to enjoy a performance by HSO’s principal trumpet Scott McIntosh and delight in the glorious sound of the trumpet, as an orchestral family member and under the solo spotlight.
WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC WILL SOUND?
Try HSO’S Listening Guide, with links to the pieces you’ll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Performance of Kendall’s The Spark Catchers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbfW87tL9a8

Wynton Marsalis performs Tomasi's Trumpet Concerto: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSm79tMNsvw

Trumpeter Gábor Tarkövi, principal trumpet of the Berlin Philharmonic, performs Kreisler’s Liebeslied: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVdOJ0gODuc

The London Symphony Orchestra performs Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPdPrbT4J4k

And for an extra treat, enjoy the entire Romeo and Juliet ballet, choreographed by Rudolf Nureyev: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hM0B70F1YM

For extra fun, here are some trumpet solos for you to sample.

Try this famous jazz performance by Cat Anderson, performing a composition by Duke Ellington: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d70fii2Mn_A

And here's the living legend, Wynton Marsalis, in performance with his septet: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATajmT5BD6M

One of the most remarkable trumpeters of today, Alison Balsom, performs Haydn’s Trumpet Concerto in E-flat: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSIPXetbm6M

And finally, a famous piece for virtuoso trumpet, Arban’s Carnival of Venice, performed by soloist Sergei Narkariakov: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6e8JwVv8Y-8

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Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? Coleman Casey, HSO’s dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

Although there is no formal recording of Kendall’s *The Spark Catchers*, there is an interesting YouTube performance with the Chineke! Orchestra conducted by Kevin John Eudsel from the 2017 Proms Concerts in London.

Tomasi’s Trumpet Concerto is brilliantly performed by none other than Wynton Marsallis and Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Philharmonia Orchestra (SONY).

Prokofiev’s magnificent ballet score for *Romeo and Juliet* deserves to be heard in its entirety, and two of the greatest recordings are the bitingly incisive one with Lorin Maazel and the Cleveland Orchestra in fabulous sound (DECCA) and Andre Previn’s danceable version with the London Symphony Orchestra in atmospheric sound (WARNER).