

Orchestral trombone sections c.1780-c.1930

In modern times the constitution of the orchestral trombone section is most usually two tenor trombones and one bass trombone. There are historical and other variances to this pattern. Alto trombones have been used for the upper-most part in some countries, and in France during the nineteenth century and a large part of the twentieth century the bass trombone was not favoured. Some circumstances called for four trombones.

Scoring for trombones suggests what instruments were available at the time and in the place that works were originally performed, but evidence indicates that a standard set of three competent trombone players was not always available in the nineteenth century. Equally interesting is the number of trombones used as a proportion of an entire orchestra. The table below contains data about the numbers of trombones that were used at different times and in different places in the past. The data are snapshots and they hide more subtle details that should be addressed: whether instruments were valve rather than slide trombones, what sizes of instruments they were, and what their design was (many earlier instruments had narrow bores and produced very small, focused sounds). The information can only be used as part of a wider investigation, but it provides an interesting basis for questioning the idea that the standard orchestra really was standard at different points in the past.

Date	Country	Orchestra	Trombones	Orchestra size
1784	England	London, Handel Commemoration	6	259?
1787	Germany	Berlin, Orchestra of the King of Prussia	3	61
1790	France	Paris, Opéra	(3)	70
1807	Austria	Vienna, Imperial Orchestra	2	29+
1810	France	Paris, Opéra	3	77
1811	Germany	Berlin Court Opera	3	71/77?
1813-16	Czechoslovakia	Prague Opera	3	33-35
1814	Italy	Milan, La Scala	1	56/58
1815	England	London, Oratorio Concerts, Covent Garden	3	57
1817	Germany	Bremen Town Orchestra	1	28
1817	Germany?	Mayence Court Theatre	3	39
1817	England	London Ancient Concert	3	46
1817	France	Paris, Théâtre Italien	2	40?
1818	England	London, King's Theatre	1	46
1818	Italy	Naples, Teatro San Carlo	3	62
1818	England	London, Covent Garden Theatre	1	31
1819	England	London Vocal Concert	1	38
1820	France	Paris, Opéra	3	110
1821	Germany	Frankfort Opera	1	37

1821	Austria	Vienna Court Opera	3	45
1822	England	Manchester Philharmonic	3	31/33
1823	Germany	Orchestra of King of Prussia	2	89
1823	Germany	Nurnberg, Grand Duke of Hesse-Cassel	3	63?
1823	Germany	Darmstadt Court Opera	3	62
1825	Germany	Dresden Court Opera	3	35
1825	England	London, Covent Garden Theatre	1	34/37
1825	Germany	Berlin Opera (Spontini)	3	73/89(?)
1825	Germany	Dresden, Hoftheater	3	c.34(?)
1825	Germany	Darmstadt Court Opera	3	66+
1825	England	Manchester, Liszt's Concert	3	40
1825	Italy	Milan, La Scala	3	67
1826	France	Paris, Opéra	3	c.74
1826	England	London, Royal Academy of Music concerts	3	68
1827	France	Paris, Opéra	3	75
1827	France	Paris, Opéra Comique	2	56
1828	France	Paris, Conservatoire Orchestra	3	86
1828	France	Paris, Société des Concerts	3	85
1828	France	Paris, Société des Concerts	3	84
1830	Bohemia	Warnsdorf, first complete performance of Beethoven's Mass in D	3	46
1830	Germany	Leipzig Gewandhausorchester	3	38
1830	Germany	Berlin Court Opera	3	c.70(/100)
1830	France	Paris, Royal Music	1	45
1830	Germany	Dortmund Concert Orchestra	3 (1)	39
1831	England	London, King's Theatre	3	48
1832	England	London, King's Theatre	3	56
1832	England	London Ancient Concert	3	52
1832	Germany	Hamburg Opera	3	36
1833	Germany	Leipzig Gewandhausorchester	3	34
1833	England	London, Philharmonic Society	3	c.70
1835	Germany	Dresden Church Music	3	58
1836	England	London, an orchestra	3	72
1837	Germany	Darmstadt Court Opera	3	70+
1837	Germany	Stuttgart Court Opera	3	57
1837	England	London, Philharmonic	3	70
1838	Germany	Rudolstadt Court Orchestra	3	38
1839	France	Paris, Opéra	3	79
1839	France	Paris, Opéra Comique	4	62
1839	England	London, Her Majesty's Theatre	3	74

1839	England	London, Philharmonic	3	75
1840	France	Paris, Conservatoire Orchestra	3	81
1840	England	London, Cipriani Potter's Concert	3	59
1840	Netherlands	The Hague Royal Orchestra	3	37
1841	France	Paris, Société des Concerts	3	86
1841	France	Paris, Conservatoire Orchestra	3	90
1841	France	Paris, Padeloup Concerts	3	85+
1841	Germany	Koburg Court Orchestra	3	42
1842	Germany	Dresden Court Opera	3	57
1842	England	London, Philharmonic	3	76
1842	England	London, Subscription Concerts, Hanover Square Rooms	3	72
1842	Austria	Vienna, Philharmonic Orchestra	4	67
1842	Austria	Vienna Court Opera	4	60
1843	Germany	Hechingen Court Orchestra	1	29
1843	Germany	Berlin Opera	4	87
1843	Germany	Frankfort Opera	3	47
1844	Germany	Darmstadt Court Opera	3	48
1844	Austria	Vienna Concert Spirituel	3	60
1844	Austria	Vienna Court Opera	3	48
1844	Austria	Vienna, Imperial Orchestra	2	35?
1844	Germany	Berlin Court Opera	3	55/65
1844	Germany	Cassel Court Opera	3	50
1844	Germany	Munich Odeon Concerts	3	99
1844	Germany	Munich Court Opera	3	53
1844	Germany	Dresden Court Opera	3	58
c.1844	France	Paris, Opéra	3	77/79
c.1844	Germany	Leipzig Gewandhausorchester	3	c.40/41
1845	Italy	Turin, Teatro Regio	3	55
c.1845	France	Paris, Opera	3	82
1846	Germany	Chemnitz Town Orchestra	3	41
1846	England	London, Philharmonic	3	77
1847	Germany	Frankfort Opera	3	45
1847	England	London, St James's Theatre, <i>Antigone</i>	3	43
1847	England	London, Royal Italian Opera House, Covent Garden	3	78
1848	England	London, Exeter Hall, Henry Wylde's Concert	3	61
1848	England	London, R. I. O., Covent Garden	3	83
1848	England	London Ancient Concert	3	54
1849	Germany	Berlin Court Opera	3	89/91
1849	Germany	Hanover Court Opera	3	44

1849	England	London, Her Majesty's Theatre	3	74
1850	Germany	Brunswick Court Orchestra	1 (2)	52
1850	Germany	Darmstadt Court Opera	3	51
1850	Germany	Dresden Court Opera	3	63
1850	Germany	Dresden, Hofoper	3	67+
1851	Germany	Weimar Court Opera (Liszt)	1	37
1855	France	Paris, Opéra	3/4	81
1858	England	London, Philharmonic	3	71
1859	France	Paris, Conservatoire Orchestra	3	85
1859	France	Paris, Société des Concerts	3	85
1860	England	London, Philharmonic Society	3	66
1865	Germany	Leipzig, Gewandhausorchester	3	70
1867	Germany	Karlsruhe Court Orchestra (Brahms 1)	3	49
1876	Germany	Bayreuth, Festspielhaus (<i>The Ring</i>)	5	102?
1881	Germany	Leipzig Gewandhausorchester	3	72
1890	Germany	Leipzig Gewandhausorchester	3	98
1890	France	Paris, Opéra	3	77
1890	Italy	Milan, La Scala	3	95
1890	Germany	Berlin Opera	2	65
1896	Germany	Leipzig Gewandhausorchester	3	86
1900	Austria	Vienna Philharmonic	5	104
1905	Italy	Turin, Teatro Regio	3	75
1929	Germany	Dresden State Opera	6	119

Sources

Carse, A., *The Orchestra from Beethoven to Berlioz* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons Limited, 1948).

Koury, D.J., *Orchestral Performance Practices in the Nineteenth Century: Size, Proportions, and Seating* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986).

Lawson, C., *The Cambridge Companion to the Orchestra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Sadie, S. (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), s.v. 'Orchestra'.

Zaslaw, N., *Mozart's Symphonies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).