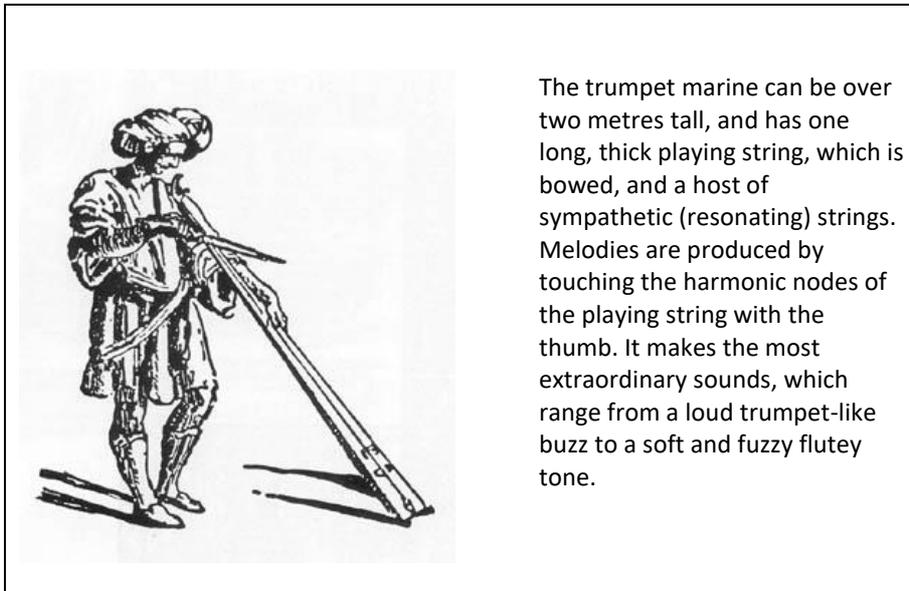




THE SOCIETY
OF
STRANGE AND ANCIENT INSTRUMENTS

The Trumpet Marine Project



The trumpet marine can be over two metres tall, and has one long, thick playing string, which is bowed, and a host of sympathetic (resonating) strings. Melodies are produced by touching the harmonic nodes of the playing string with the thumb. It makes the most extraordinary sounds, which range from a loud trumpet-like buzz to a soft and fuzzy flutey tone.

The trumpet marine also looks beautiful. So why did this majestic instrument become obsolete?

Iconographical evidence dates back to the 12th century when the trumpet marine was simpler. It was also smaller and was often held horizontally or vertically in front of the player, and it regularly appeared as a member of mixed instrumental ensembles.

By the 17th century the trumpet marine had grown in size and had acquired a buzzing foot-like bridge and sympathetic strings. Many surviving instruments were found in convents. It seems that trumpet marines were a staple of the Northern European nun's musical instrument box. Wind instruments would have been off-limits for women so it's possible that trumpet marines were used as substitutes for trumpets. As the 17th century progressed, the trumpet marine began to appear in secular public music-making. The 18th- century virtuoso, Jean- Baptiste Prin made a career of it, entertaining English audiences with his huge collection of trumpet marines and producing a treatise on how to play the instrument. His father also played the trumpet marine and famously amused Samuel Pepys on the 24th of October, 1667:

'... it doth so far out-do a Trumpet as nothing more, and he doth play anything very true and it is most remarkable; And [these instruments] would make an excellent consort, two or three of them, better than trumpets can ever do because of their want of compass.'

And sure enough, in 1674, the London Gazette advertised the following concert:

'A Rare Concert of four Trumpets Marine, never heard before in England! If any persons desire to come and hear it, they may repair to the Fleece Tavern, near St James's about two of the clock in the afternoon, every day in the week, except Sundays'

Like a trumpet, the trumpet marine has a limited number of 'good' harmonic notes. Unlike a trumpet the harmonics on a trumpet marine can't be adjusted. This leads to a scale at odds with the various tuning temperaments of the day. It is perhaps this feature that provides the answer to our question about the trumpet marine's obsolescence – the instrument simply didn't 'fit' with most other late - 18th century instruments. Perhaps it only survived as long as it did because of its magical sonic and visual qualities.

Reviving this spectacular instrument is an important step in the reconstruction and inclusion in current practice of the exotic instruments, which populated the musical landscape of past centuries. Its history reveals a general fascination for the obscure and curious, no different from that which is held by many people today, and it provides further proof that music in the 17th and 18th centuries included sounds that seem bizarre to modern ears – buzzes, strange resonances, jangles, and in the case of the trumpet marine, notes that don't conform to current expectations of harmonic structure in music. The resultant idiosyncratic tuning alongside the extraordinary sonic textures produced by this magical instrument provide a rich source of creative material, both for reconstructing old music and making new music.

The Society of Strange and Ancient Instruments own four trumpet marines, made by master luthier, Shem Mackey. They will present them, alongside other strange and ancient instrument, in a re-imagining of that 'rare concert' given in 1674 in the Fleece Tavern. This performance will tour venues throughout the UK from July 2020. A dedicated website which will include online educational resources, podcasts and videos, a programme for BBC Radio 3, four new works for trumpet marine ensemble, and a CD will also be produced.

Long live the trumpet marine!



See a short video about the project here: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/the-trumpet-marine-project>

Visit our website here: <https://www.strangeandancientinstruments.com/>

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