

The Cabinet

Transforming Early Music's Sound Library into Live Electronics

In the fourth book of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1552), Rabelais describes how Pantagruel perceives echoes of a past battle in the guise of 'thawed' sounds. Possibly inspired by Clément Janequin's famous chanson *La Guerre* (c. 1528), which evokes historical warfare through sung onomatopoeia, Rabelais's tale embodies a persistent desire to make a past appear or *re-sound* in the present so that historical experiences can be relived... and frozen again. This desire, though generally disregarded, if not disavowed by those cherishing it, underlies various modes of musical cryo(ge)nic and defrosting: tribute bands, 'early music' and HIP, retro styles, hauntology, 'vintage' instruments, all the way to AI apps for voice cloning.

The Cabinet, the artistic research project central to this paper, seeks to transpose the above ideas into a live electronics setup that explores the interplay between recorded sound, time, memory, and curatorship. Sourcing materials from two recently acquired collections of early music recordings at Orpheus Instituut, *The Cabinet* constitutes a growing digital repository of sound clips—temporal slices from a century of early music on record—that are recomposed live using samplers and digital sound processors. Inspired by the intricate art cabinets of Rabelais's time and beyond, as well as by the mnemonic and (proto-)museological principles governing such furniture, *The Cabinet* problematizes the exchange of auditory memories across different historical and temporal dimensions.

Questions addressed by this paper are:

- To what extent does the retrieval of sonic relics within a digital performance framework mark a meaningful curatorial act on the performer-composer's behalf?
- How can a live electronics setup be de-modernized and re-inscribed into a historical tradition of mnemonic or museal devices, with knobs and faders metaphorizing doors and drawers?
- How can the experiences afforded by digital music technologies provide ways for artist-researchers to reconnect with a lost sublime in times of accelerating consumerism?

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Pursuing interests in opera, stage design, early and electronic music, Bruno Forment is the PI of the 'Resounding Libraries' research cluster at Orpheus Instituut. He has formerly taught at universities and conservatoires in Brussels, Ghent, Leuven, and Los Angeles. He has programmed and directed the Baroque orchestra Il Fondamento, coordinated the classical music department at the Royal Conservatoire of Ghent, and led research projects at the Conservatoire of Antwerp and CEMPER. He is the author and editor of six volumes, the last of which, *Performing by the Book? Musical Negotiations between Text and Act* (2024), was published by Leuven University Press in October 2024. His work, which includes several professional music (theatre) productions, has been awarded by the Schweizerische Musikforschende Gesellschaft and the Province of Western Flanders. Bruno Forment has recently led the 'Performances' Working Group in the European COST Action *EarlyMuse* and serves on the editorial board of *Eighteenth-Century Music*.