

Performance Programme

Microtonal Cornett & Live Electronics

Expanding the Historical Performance Practice of the Cornett in *Glass Coloured*

Glass Coloured (2023) is a concert work for 3D-printed Renaissance cornett and live electronic processing. Composed by Benjamin Tassie in collaboration with the cornettist Jamie Savan, the piece explores the cornett's unique tuning possibilities in relation to the latest in live electronic, spectral processing techniques.

Historically, the cornett was highly valued for its intonation. Praised for its ability to play “in every sort of key [tuono], just as the voice”,¹ cornettists were judged “by their ability to play semitones and in transposition when necessary”.² This ability to navigate different keys in unequal temperaments (and at different pitches) affords the cornett a great many microtones. Tassie and Savan's research for *Glass Coloured* explored this facet of the instrument, asking: what new compositional and performance vocabularies might arise from creative engagement with the cornett's historical performance practice, and how might such new vocabularies relate to contemporary practices including live electronic processing and microtonal aesthetics.

Extending the cornett's historical practice of ‘forked fingerings’ (used to produce different pitches for enharmonic notes), research developed a microtonal musical language on the instrument. Each of *Glass Coloured's* three movements explores a different facet of this extended-tuning: spectral, Just Intonation, and – in ‘Part Three’ – an ambiguous tuning inhabiting the differences between the instrument's enharmonic pitches. In each movement, live electronic processing makes use of the latest spectral processing capabilities in Ableton Live 11 (using real-time Fast Fourier Transform processes). All sounds are produced live; no ‘tape part’ or synchronisation is required. The piece aims, in this way, at a hybridisation of the cornett and laptop in which the historical and contemporary are brought together, at times synthesised and at others in dialogue.

This lecture recital will share the practice-research that led to *Glass Coloured* – from Savan's work on the 3D-printed cornett for which the work is written, to the development of the work's extended enharmonic tuning system and Tassie's compositional and electronic processes – as well as a complete performance of the work.

¹ Girolamo Dalla Casa (1584) quoted in Savan, J. (2018) ‘Revoicing a ‘Choice Eunuch’: The Cornett and Historical Models of Vocality’ *Early Music* 46(4) p.565

² Luigi Zenobi (c.1600) quoted in Blackburn, B. and Lowinsky, E. (1993) ‘Luigi Zenobi and His Letter on the Perfect Musician’ *Studi Musicalli* 22(1) p.103

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Benjamin Tassie (b.1987) is a composer, sound-artist, and researcher. He is particularly interested in how historical musical instruments, tuning systems, and performance practices can be recontextualised to speak to our contemporary experiences. His music has been commissioned and performed by organisations and ensembles including The National Galley, Tate Britain, Historic Royal Palaces, Nordic Affect, Zubin Kanga, Liam Byrne, and the Ligeti Quartet. Awards include the prestigious PRS Foundation and Jerwood Arts Composers' Fund award and a shortlist for an Ivor Novello Award 2024 (to be announced 12 November 2024). He holds a PhD from Royal Birmingham Conservatoire where he is now Visiting Lecturer. He is also Resident Researcher at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Programme Manager at Music in the Round, and is presenter of the weekly radio show *Future Classical* on Resonance FM



Jamie Savan
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Jamie Savan is Professor of Performance-led Research in Music at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. He is a specialist on the Renaissance cornett, best known for his work as founder-director of The Gonzaga Band and as a member of His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts. He also worked for more than a decade as an orchestral principal with the English Baroque Soloists and has performed with many other of the world's leading period-instrument ensembles, including the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, Concerto Palatino and Bach Collegium Japan. His diverse interests range from historical improvisation techniques to performance with live electronics (sometimes involving a combination of the two), and the use of CAD and 3D-printing technologies for applied organological research. He is currently leading the AHRC-funded project, 'Aural Histories: Coventry 1451-1642', which brings historical performance into VR reconstructions of lost performing spaces.