

Recording Nostalgia

Exploring the interpretation of British vocal music from the 17th century through a poetic, experimental and “haptic” approach to Historically Informed Performance.

Recording Nostalgia is the first of three artistic research labs exploring Sean Bell's poetic, experimental and “haptic” approach to interpretation within the context of Historically Informed Performance (HIP) in Early Music. This experiment focuses on English lute songs from the 17th century and investigates what happens when this repertoire is placed in dialogue with the sound world of a four-track tape machine. The work is grounded in Sean's ongoing PhD in artistic research at the Norwegian Academy of Music, where he explores interrogating Early Music through new instrumentation, arrangement, and intuitive, hands-on experimentation.

17th century English lute-song repertoire is characterised by intimacy, melancholia, and a close relationship between voice and accompaniment. In this lab, the material is approached through baroque guitar and voice — a choice of instrumentation that connects to the repertoire's historical context while allowing flexibility in shaping and re-shaping the songs. Alongside these instruments, the tape machine introduces an intimate and melancholic sound world that connects to the original lute-song genre but through a contemporary sound expression: a recording technology with a fragile and fleeting sonic character evoking nostalgia. Its hiss, instability, and layering possibilities opens new connections within the songs. Connecting HIP as method to record history and tape machines as retro recording device, what will the interplay between these nostalgic technologies be?

In the performance Sean engages the material through the haptic, intuitive methods that underpin his artistic practice: moving the material around, turning it “inside out,” and letting the interaction with the tape machine become part of the interpretative process.

This lab addresses several of the project's central research questions. It asks how interpretation can unfold when approached as an experimental and poetic process. It tests whether a HIP practice can exceed the aesthetic expectations of Early Music by engaging critically and creatively with the technologies—both historical and contemporary—that shape performance. And it explores how these interactions may reveal the worldviews that Early Music repertoire inhabits and through this illuminate contexts of today.

As a research-performance, **Recording Nostalgia** allows these questions to appear through doing: through the encounter between voice, baroque guitar, and tape. The performance acts

Research Performances

as a site of exploration, where tape recording and the materials of early music are set into contact, illuminating each other through their friction, fragility, and resonance.



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As a countertenor, Sean Bell performs his own arrangements of Early Music, which stay close to the source material's text and melody, but use new instrumentation, harmonisation, and tonality. A synthesis of historical and contemporary performance makes up the core of his artistic practice. He sees his relationship to interpretation as a practice of Historically Informed Performance (the method used in Early Music, often shortened to HIP). However, the repertoire always acts as material with which to create, without a preconceived idea of what the result will be. Bell works broadly and exploratively with all these composite elements in order to embody the interpretation.

Representative video recording relevant to the project:

<https://youtu.be/Fhj0r4KpVPo>