

REINTRODUCING THE CORNET INTO MODERN TRUMPET PEDAGOGICAL  
PRACTICES

CREATIVE PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF MUSIC

BY

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MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 2016

## **ABSTRACT**

**CREATIVE PROJECT:** Reintroducing the Cornet into Modern Trumpet Pedagogical Practices

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**DEGREE:** Master of Music

**COLLEGE:** Fine Arts

**DATE:** May 2016

**PAGES:** 22

Head explores the historical, physical, and musical aspects of the cornet and provides a thorough process for reintroducing the cornet into modern trumpet pedagogy. The cornet was once the primary soprano brass instrument of the elite soloist and student alike, and modern performers are unable to effectively produce a high quality cornet tone. This is because the cornet is relatively absent in most music training institutions of all levels. The issue here is that the cornet is very popular outside of academia and within many different professional and amateur performance areas in the United States and across the world. With the creation of a training tool that systematically incorporates the cornet's solo repertoire, orchestral excerpts, and performance requirements into a trumpet student's musical training, instructors can guide their students more effectively. This will result in trumpet players who have a greater understanding of the cornet and are more prepared for performance with the instrument. Teachers will likewise have a guide to help teach the instrument, and regular use of the instrument will thus increase.

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The cornet as we know it has virtually been removed from pedagogical practices within the education systems of higher learning. The cornet was once the primary soprano brass instrument of the elite soloist and student alike. In fact, many of the pedagogical texts and method books used by students and teachers today were originally written specifically for the cornet. For example, Jean Baptiste Arban's famous *Complete Conservatory Method for Trumpet* was once labeled as the *Complete Conservatory Method for Cornet*. Like many other texts, this adjustment was made when the cornet fell out of favor with modern-day American brass players. The puzzling issue here is that the cornet is rather popular outside of academia and within many different professional and amateur performance areas in the United States and across the world. Unlike the trumpet, the cornet has a stunning lack of scholarly publications; within the *Brass Anthology* (1991), which is a catalog of all brass-related articles that were published in *The Instrumentalist* from 1946-1990, only five articles directly pertain to the cornet. Additionally, within the same publication the Index of Articles by Category lists all common brass instruments as category heads, except the cornet (*Brass Anthology*, 1991).

So what do we now define as being a cornet? The cornet is a soprano brass instrument of roughly four-and-a-half feet of tubing while approximately two-thirds of the instrument's bore has a conical shape. The instrument is coiled in two 360-degree bends and is fitted with Périnet-valves. Generally cornets are visually shorter in length, due to extra bends in the tubing of the leadpipe and bell, than their older sibling, the trumpet. The trumpet retains the overall shape of its ancestor, the natural trumpet, while

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the cornet was derived from the valve-less posthorn, although the modern cornet only holds minor resemblance to the posthorn with its mouthpiece, bell, and two 360-degree bends (Baines, Myers, n.d.). Most cornet mouthpieces are shorter in length and have either funnel-shaped cups or extra-deep bowl cups. Cornets are currently produced in three keys: Bb, C, and Eb. Many composers during the romantic period would write for Bb or A cornet and occasionally other keys such as cornet in G, which can be found in H. Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* (Eldredge, 2002).

As stated previously, the cornet was originally derived from the German-made valve-less posthorn (Eldredge, 2002). The first form was the *cornet simple*; which was the natural form of the instrument (no valves). Soon after, various forms of German-designed valve systems were added; one of the most prominent was the Stölzel-valve system, which gave the instrument two valves. By 1829 the *cornet a piston* (as it was called) gained a third valve. The earliest cornet to have relatively the same design as modern cornets came into being through the renowned instrument inventor and designer Adolphe Sax when he added the Périnet-valves to the instrument in 1842 (Eldredge, 2002). Unlike the Stölzel-valve, which utilized vertical movement of air through the valve, the Périnet-valve system directs air horizontally through the valve itself and not the valve casing (Bate, Tarr, n.d.). This design would become the permanent form for the cornet.

Not long after the cornet's initial development, its popularity amongst musicians overtook the trumpet. This was mostly due to having conical tubing, which gave composers a much more diverse tonal quality to work with than was present in the

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cornet's cylindrical brother (Baines, Myers, n.d.). The trumpets of this time had smaller bore sizes than modern trumpets and were generally characterized by a thin and harsh tone. The trumpet has a cylindrical bore that allows performers to produce more high overtones and creates an intense quality and more brilliant sound (Meyer, 1969). The overall bore design of the trumpet saw great shifts during the mid-20th century, especially in the United States. Manufacturers modified the trumpet's bore size to be larger, which then helped performers in producing a greater range of tonal colors. Consequently, the popularity of the trumpet and the variety of its performance styles increased (Olson, 1963).

Institutional learning has been a practice throughout recorded history. Although specialized institutions of learning can be found throughout the world now, this was certainly not the case in the 19th century. Though the sacred realm of music had its own musical training establishments, the first secular schools came into fruition at the end of the 1700s (Weber, n.d.). Soon afterwards, they began to emerge across Europe and then spread throughout the world. While the trumpet is one of the more ancient instruments and has been a part of music making for centuries, the cornet began to take form in France during the 1820s (Eldredge, 2002). J.B. Arban in the 1860s was a well-established soloist, conductor and educator, but sought the help from what is now called the *Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse*. Arban's goal was both to institutionalize the study of the cornet and to prevent the disappearance of the trumpet, which is just the opposite of today's predicament (Arban, 1936). Arban was appointed the position of Professor of Cornet in 1869, and the Conservatory's Committee of Music

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Study called his text a “general resume of the ability and knowledge acquired” by J.B. Arban (Arban, 1936, p. vi). This firmly established the cornet in the academic institutions. When Arban was granted his position at the conservatory it was for the sole purpose of teaching cornet and not trumpet, which was taught by a his personal teacher François Dauverné, and later his colleague Jules Cercilier (Tarr, n.d.). In the preface of his text, Arban’s writing demonstrates that the cornet is now in a similar place to where it had been in 1864: “At the present time, the incompleteness of the old school of performers is unanimously acknowledged, as is also the insufficiency of their instruction” (p. iii). He also states that performances by musicians using the cornet without proper training on the instrument, “presented the lamentable spectacle of imperfections and failures of the most painful description” (Arban, 1936, p. iii). The original text was finished in 1864; the final edition in its current state was published in 1894. He explains the popularity of the instrument but notes also that it once had a very low demand rate. He further remarks that this was in large part due to the lack of sufficient training for musicians with the instrument (Arban, 1936).

Most if not all modern brass performance areas call for the cornet at some point and professional trumpet players are required to use the instrument, although not as often as the standard Bb or C trumpet. Amateur and student ensembles vary greatly with their brass instrumentation; this is due to several reasons such as cost of the instrument and the ability of the performer. Composers, by using the flügelhorn, often substitute for the cornet’s mellow tone and this trend continues to grow. So what exactly is the reason the cornet has fallen from such great heights: cost, design changes, or

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personal preferences? Irrespective of these issues, which are issues that many instruments have faced, the one hurdle that the cornet has faced before and currently faces today is the lack of sufficient professional training on the instrument.

Trumpeters, composers and ensemble directors see the cornet as an auxiliary instrument for trumpet players. This is generally because its mellow tone qualities are difficult to produce by untrained musicians, and then can be even more difficult to distinguish in comparison to the trumpet when played side by side. A study that was published in 1957 in *The Instrumentalist* by Kyme determined that few trained music education teachers at that time could distinguish between the tone qualities of trumpets and cornets. Kyme (1957) selected a high school wind band to perform the same piece three times, each time increasing the amount of cornets used within the trumpet/cornet section of the ensemble (from none to completely cornet) for six screened adjudicators. The study used 103 participating adjudicators who gave written remarks about the performances; not a single adjudicator made note of the tone quality or of any change to it. Also, at this point in time the cornet and trumpet shared relatively equal importance in both educational and performance settings. Through this study we can infer that the students and adjudicators lacked sufficient training on one or the other of the instruments and this insufficiency increased the difficulty of producing and determining the tone quality. How can we preserve the instrument and create a structured curriculum for the students who desire to learn?

At the present time, it is unlikely for most institutions to hire an instructor for an instrument that is now widely considered an auxiliary. There is no lack of cornet

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repertoire; nevertheless, contemporary composers write for the instrument less and less (although, a few like Phillip Sparke, have been quite successful in continuing to write for the cornet). Its use continues across the world in wind band, military band, orchestra, solo competitions, Dixieland jazz, and it holds eight individual parts in the British and continental European-style brass band ensembles. Because of the modern trumpet's versatility, many performers choose to use the trumpet over the cornet; whether or not they achieve the desired sound of the composers is a different discussion entirely. Some could argue that having training on the cornet would make someone a more marketable musician, except in certain audition settings. Ironically, the United States President's Own Marine Band explicitly forbids the use of cornet in the audition process, even though most of audition material is written for the cornet and the instrument would be used by the musicians that are employed to perform with that ensemble (United States Marine Band, n.d.). In contrast, in orchestral settings if a cornet excerpt is required (such as the iconic "*Danse Napolitaine*" from Tchaikovsky's ballet, *Swan Lake*), the solo would need to be played on a cornet.

A true cornet has a resonate, euphonic, and rich tone as a result of the conical bore, while the trumpet has a cylindrical bore and produces a brassy and brilliant sound (Meyer, 1969). This mellow tone is the single most difficult part about performing with a cornet, but its technical demand is nearly identical to the trumpet, which explains why many method books have switched to that instrument. Many musicians who play the cornet use extreme equipment or modify existing manufacturers' equipment to force the rich and resonant (commonly referred to as "dark") tone quality. These adjustments



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