

SOPRANO CORNET:
THE HIDDEN GEM OF THE TRUMPET FAMILY

by

YANBIN CHEN

(Under the Direction of Brandon Craswell)

ABSTRACT

The E-flat soprano cornet has served an indispensable role in the British brass band; it is commonly considered to be “the hottest seat in the band.”¹ Compared to its popularity in Britain and Europe, the soprano cornet is not as familiar to players in North America or other parts of world.

This document aims to offer young players who are interested in playing the soprano cornet in a brass band a more complete view of the instrument through the research of its historical roots, its artistic role in the brass band, important solo repertoire, famous players, approach to the instrument, and equipment choices.

The existing written material regarding the soprano cornet is relatively limited in comparison to other instruments in the trumpet family. Research for this document largely relies on established online resources, as well as journals, books about the history of the brass band, and questionnaires completed by famous soprano cornet players, prestigious brass band conductors, and composers.

¹ Joseph Parisi, Personal Communication, Email with Yanbin Chen, April 15, 2019.

In light of the increased interest in the brass band in North America, especially at the collegiate level, I hope this project will encourage more players to appreciate and experience this hidden gem of the trumpet family.

INDEX WORDS: Soprano Cornet, Brass Band, Mouthpiece, NABBA

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The E-flat soprano cornet carries one of the most important roles and color palettes in the British brass band, and as such, cannot easily be replaced by other instruments. However, it is an instrument in the trumpet family that is rarely played by most trumpet players during their career. It is primarily used in the British brass band setting, and as a result, it does not receive the same exposure as other types of trumpets. However, the limited use of the soprano cornet does not reflect the significance of this instrument in the trumpet community. This dissertation organizes a diverse collection of materials including brass band journals, reliable online resources, and numerous questionnaires filled out by famous soprano cornetists, brass band composers, and conductors to help readers have a more comprehensive view of this less familiar instrument.

The inspiration for this project derives from the author's own experience of being the soprano cornet player in the University of Georgia British Brass Band during his doctoral studies. Personally, learning to play the soprano cornet was not an easy transition from the trumpet, especially due to the limited availability of resources and information. As interest in the brass band increases in North America, the need for research about the soprano cornet becomes apparent.

This study focuses on different aspects of the soprano cornet including its historical background, artistic role in the brass band, famous players and solo repertoire,

approach to the instrument, and equipment choices. The history of the British brass band is rooted in the background of the working class in England in the early nineteenth-century, and much historical information regarding the bands was passed on verbally. Therefore, written resources related to the soprano cornet are not as abundant as other related topics.

The research on the historical roots of this instrument is based on its relationship with the saxhorn family. Books and journals connected to Adolphe Sax and the history of the brass band movement in England were carefully examined. Online resources were widely used as a basis for the research for the chapters about solo repertoire, notable players, and the soprano cornet's role in the band. Only reliable, legitimate sources were considered, such as leading brass band websites *4barsrest* and *Brass Band World*. Information found on the various instrument manufacturers' websites was used as the main resource for the chapter regarding equipment choices.

Opinions on how to play a brass instrument vary depending on a player's background and experiences. There are no universal pedagogical methods that can apply to every circumstance. The chapter on the approach to the instrument draws its information from legendary wind instrument pedagogue Arnold Jacobs' teaching philosophy *Song and Wind*, the author's personal interactions with Philip Smith, former Principal Trumpet of the New York Philharmonic and Bandmaster of the University of Georgia British Brass Band, as well as the author's personal experiences with the soprano cornet.

This project would not be complete without input from people who are professionally involved with the soprano cornet or brass band. Interviews with leading

soprano cornetists in the world and with famous brass band conductors and composers are a key factor in this document. Questionnaires completed by those musicians are included in the appendix at the end of this document. With the assistance of Mr. Smith, the author was able to gain valuable information from top musicians in contest bands (Black Dyke Band, Cory Band) and Salvation Army bands (International Staff Band, New York Staff Band), as well as British bands and American bands (Fountain City Brass Band). Their opinions have contributed a tremendous amount to this project.

The author's personal experiences with the soprano cornet in terms of approach and equipment choices are included in this project for reference. The experience of playing the soprano cornet in a brass band is unique. The goal of this project is to offer more information to trumpet players interested in playing the soprano cornet, particularly students, but also to encourage more players to experience this instrument.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF THE SOPRANO CORNET

The soprano cornet is closely associated with the British brass band movement of the nineteenth century, and its history is connected to British brass band history. It is impossible to draw a comprehensive picture of the soprano cornet's history and evolution without looking into how the brass band developed in the past. The brass band was mainly an art ensemble populated by the working class, and much of its tradition was passed on verbally. Therefore, in its relatively short history, there is not much written evidence preserved in comparison to other types of art music. This chapter will focus on brass band history through examination of the existing literature.

Start of the British Brass Band

Before the nineteenth century, amateur brass playing was not a popular tradition in Britain.¹ Early military bands and church bands played important roles in the birth of brass bands. Some players from military bands extensively influenced the brass band movement.² Famous brass band scholar Trevor Herbert summarizes four fundamental elements in mid-nineteenth century brass band development in his article *Nineteenth-Century Bands: Making a Movement*:

“The availability of relatively cheap instruments that were comparatively easy to play, the existence of a network of educated music ‘professors’ of one sort or another, the new social environment in which working people found themselves,

¹ Trevor Herbert, “Nineteenth-Century Bands: Making a Movement” in *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History*, ed. Trevor Herbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

² Ibid, 16.

and the commonly held belief among the most influential in society that music was a path to rectitude.”³

The mass engagement of the working class in instrumental music pushed the brass band movement to be recognized as “one of the more important aspects of British art music in the nineteenth century.”⁴

Invention of the Valve System

The invention of the piston valve system was among the principal reasons for the rise of the mass brass band movement. However, valve instruments were not the main part of the early bands. The keyed bugle invented and patented by Joseph Haliday in 1810 was the main instrument in the early bands due to its ability to play chromatically. Keyed bugles built in C and B-flat were the most widely used versions at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The smaller E-flat bugle did exist but was used less frequently in the early days.⁵ Although it did not get much exposure in the British arena, it was an important instrument in the bands of America. E-flat bugle players were considered the leaders of the band since they often played the soprano melody line. The popularity of keyed bugles did not last long before being replaced by instruments from the saxhorn family, not only because the intonation and quality of tone were still weak on the keyed bugle, but because the manufacturing process of the keyed bugle was more complicated than instruments using the valve system.⁶

³ Ibid, 34.

⁴ Ibid, 10.

⁵ Arnold Myers, “Instruments and Instrumentation of British Brass Bands” in *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History*, ed. Trevor Herbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159.

⁶ Herbert, 29.

The invention of the valve by Heinrich Stölzel and Friedrich Blühmel in the 1810s marked a new era for the brass instrument family. However, it took a long time and input from many people to improve the quality of the valve system. The piston valve widely used today was mainly influenced by the improved valve technology of Paris maker Etienne François Périnet. His valve not only revolutionized brass instruments but also contributed heavily to the development of the all-brass band.⁷

The Relation Between the Soprano Cornet and Saxhorns

British brass band specialist Bram Gay described the soprano cornet as “essentially a saxhorn in high E-flat (Berlioz would recognize it instantly),”⁸ which presents important evidence to trace back the history of this instrument. Belgian-born inventor and instrument maker Adolphe Sax patented the instruments known as saxhorns in 1843. Although the authenticity of whether Sax actually invented those instruments has been questioned over the years, he was still given credit for producing a wide range of instruments that have excellent qualities. Even during his lifetime, Sax was involved in multiple lawsuits with rival makers over the patent for the invention of the saxhorn.⁹ Whatever the truth is, the newly-invented saxhorns used the same valve system as the cornet, which had Périnet valves. The quality of the instruments, including their intonation and tone color, was significantly better than previous instruments like keyed bugles.¹⁰ One year later, after the saxhorn was patented, Sax met a touring musical family

⁷ Roy Newsome, *Brass Roots* (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), 24.

⁸ Bram Gay, “Cornet High and Dry,” *Sounding Brass & The Conductors*, January 1978, 101.

⁹ Myers, 169.

¹⁰ Roy Newsome, “The 19th Century Brass Band in Northern England: Musical and Social Factors in The Development of a Major Amateur Musical Medium” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Salford, 1999), 18.

from Britain, the Distins, while they were visiting Paris. The head of the family, John Distin, was one of the bandboys from the early military bands. The connection between Sax and the Distin Family prepared the British brass bands for adoption of the saxhorns.¹¹

The Distins were a family of five playing brass instruments in the 1840s. The father, John Distin, was a prominent keyed bugle player in the Grenadier Guards, and his sons (George, Henry, Theodore, and William) also played instruments including slide trombone, French horn, slide trumpet, and cornet.¹² Interestingly, the Distins did not particularly impress audiences during their European tour as they did in Britain. In fact, the situation was even worse as some audiences greeted them with cat-calls and laughter due to poor performance from their inferior instruments. However, after they heard the saxhorns in 1844, John Distin decided to adopt the saxhorns for the family quintet, which brought them huge success in France at the Jullien Promenade Concert at Covent Garden Theatre.¹³ Not only were they invited by French composer Hector Berlioz to play in a concert at the *Opéra Omique*, but they were also asked to perform for King Louis Phillippe, who spoke to them in English after the concert in addition to giving them decent payment.¹⁴

After returning to Britain, the Distins started to promote the saxhorns. The homogenized sound from the saxhorns and the wide range in register from soprano to contrabass facilitated their entry into the brass band world. The Distin family's fame was another major reason that saxhorns were adopted immediately. In his article *Instruments*

¹¹ Myers, 169.

¹² Newsome, "The 19th Century Brass Band in Northern England: Musical and Social Factors in The Development of a Major Amateur Musical Medium", 17.

¹³ Ibid, 18.

¹⁴ Wally Horwood, *Adolphe Sax 1814-1894 – His Life and Legacy*, 3rd ed. (England: Egon Publishers Ltd, 1992), 58.

and Instrumentation, Arnold Myers discussed that “the Distin family enjoyed popularity and esteem in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century with which only that of the Mortimer family in the twentieth century can be compared.”¹⁵

Among the various types of saxhorns, the soprano in E-flat was used more commonly than the others.¹⁶ It was often used by bands at outdoor events because of its incisive tone quality. Because the soprano instrument was usually featured as the melodic voice, John Distin, as the leader of his family quintet, was the soprano player in the group. This instrument was also favored by Sax himself, and he often gave the leading part to the soprano saxhorn in his saxhorn band. However, the soprano saxhorn was superseded by the soprano cornet soon after it was invented in 1844,¹⁷ which matches the timeline mentioned by Adam Carse in his book *Musical Wind Instruments*, that “the cornets in high E-flat occur before 1850.”¹⁸ The large bore of the soprano saxhorn made the high register difficult to play, therefore, “it was soon replaced in general use by the more gently-tapering soprano cornet.”¹⁹ Regarding the sound of the instrument, it might have been difficult for a typical audience to tell the difference between soprano saxhorns and soprano cornets, which made the instrumentalists prioritize ease of playing.²⁰

The soprano cornet and soprano saxhorn’s appearances are quite different, with the bell of each instrument pointing in a different direction. The soprano cornet points to the front and the soprano saxhorn points upwards, which makes their connection questionable. Anthony Baines explained the shape connection between the soprano

¹⁵ Myers, 169.

¹⁶ Newsome, *Brass Roots*, 26.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Adam Carse, *Musical Wind Instruments* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1965), 249.

¹⁹ Horwood, 156.

²⁰ Ibid.

cornet and the soprano saxhorn in his book *Brass Instruments: Their History and Development*: “sopranos in high E-flat (sometimes F) include: in England the soprano cornet which preserves the form of the bell-front soprano saxhorn.”²¹ Although most of the saxhorns, including soprano saxhorns, were made in a shape similar to the modern tenor horn or euphonium, there are soprano saxhorns built in a cornet fashion with the bell pointing forward that still exist. They were either piston or rotary valve depending on where the horn was made.

By 1857, two soprano cornets were used by the Royal Artillery Band in Britain. However, the *Garde Républicaine* in France was still using a soprano saxhorn as late as 1912.²² The soprano cornet was more important in Britain than in France mainly because of its prominent use in the brass band, and it did not last very long in the wind band history outside Britain since its part was more easily covered by instruments like a piccolo or E-flat clarinet with less effort.²³

Although the soprano cornet is now only used in the brass band, its predecessor, the soprano saxhorn, was once featured in music composed by Berlioz. During Berlioz’s lifetime, he was friends with Sax and enamored with Sax’s instrumental inventions. In his opera *Les Troyens*, Berlioz put soprano saxhorn in E-flat, sopranino saxhorn in B-flat, and other lower saxhorns in the offstage bands. The sopranino saxhorn pitched in B-flat was also called the piccolo saxhorn, and was similar to the modern-day piccolo trumpet

²¹ Anthony Baines, *Brass Instruments: Their History and Development* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 231.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

in B-flat.²⁴ Besides its appearance in *Les Troyens*, sopranino saxhorn was also used in the march of Berlioz's *Te Deum*.

Early Use of the Soprano Cornet

In the 1850s and 1860s, the soprano cornet was often pitched in the key of D-flat instead of E-flat, and players used to apply different crooks on the horn to read parts in different keys.²⁵ It was quite a task to switch crooks during rehearsals and performances, but it allowed players to avoid struggling with transposition, which is a fundamental skill for modern-day trumpet players. Surviving band forms from the 1860 Crystal Palace contest, which was believed to be one of the earliest nation-wide brass band championships, demonstrate that D-flat was the more popular key for the soprano cornet.²⁶ In a band with eighteen musicians, there were typically one or two soprano cornet players. The majority of them played D-flat soprano cornet, while the others played E-flat soprano cornet.²⁷

Since the mid-1870s, brass instruments in the contest band have not changed in terms of type and number,²⁸ but the instruments' quality has improved. In the early twentieth century, Besson & Co's "Enharmonic Valves" and Boosey's "Compensating Pistons" were adopted by most of the top bands in England on their valved instruments, with the exception of the E-flat soprano cornet.²⁹ The reason why the soprano cornet did

²⁴ Ibid, 157.

²⁵ Myers, 161.

²⁶ Ibid, 171.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 174.

²⁹ Ibid, 180-181.

not get an upgrade is unknown, but it might contribute to the fact that the soprano cornet chair is often called the “hot seat” in the band.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOPRANO CORNET IN THE BRASS BAND

Just as wind bands need a soprano instrument such as piccolo or E-flat clarinet, British brass bands need one, too. It is the soprano cornet, when played well, that has a “wispy, flute-like quality.”¹ Commonly, there is one soprano cornet player in the brass band, the role of which is unique in the band. Not only is it needed to cover the register one octave higher than the B-flat cornet, but it is also occasionally required to be the solo or counter voice on top of the band. Former soprano cornetist of the Black Dyke Band Benjamin Richeton described the soprano cornet as the “cherry on the cake”² and “the striker in a soccer team.”³; Bram Gay said, “The E-flat instrument [soprano cornet] has a capacity of the lyrical which is hard to sustain in smaller instruments...it can make a contribution, through its flexibility and highly individual colour (in a medium where a fresh colour is a life-saver) hardly to be achieved by any piccolo we have so far seen.”⁴ The music director of Fountain City Brass Band, Dr. Joseph Parisi, thought a great soprano cornet player to be the catalyst in the band when it comes to dictating stylistic characteristics and nuances.⁵ These statements illustrate the irreplaceable character of the instrument and its unique position in the brass band.

¹ Kevin Thompson, *Wind Bands and Brass Bands in School and Music Centre*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 97.

² Benjamin Richeton, Personal Communication, Email with Yanbin Chen, April 14, 2019.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gay, 101.

⁵ Parisi, Personal Communication.

Over the years, the writing for and role of the soprano cornet have undoubtedly changed and evolved, and are still developing in a new direction. As discussed in Chapter One, the early soprano cornet part in the 19th century was pitched in D-flat instead of E-flat. The writing for the soprano cornet was not necessarily as challenging as compositions in modern brass band repertoire. In some of the earliest surviving published brass band music from the early 1840s, the soprano cornet part is sometimes optional among all the parts,⁶ for many reasons. One of the reasons is that clarinets were occasionally used to replace the solo cornets or “provide brightness in the upper register in the role usually played by the soprano cornet.”⁷ It was also sometimes substituted by the E-flat trumpet in order to expand the high register produced by soprano cornet.⁸

The tone color of the soprano cornet is what makes it stand out from the band and why it is loved by brass band enthusiasts all over the world. The earliest known appearance of the soprano cornet in a contest situation can be traced back to 1845 at Burton Constable, near Hull. Although the brass bands during that time had a maximum of only twelve players, the winning band was the only group that had a soprano cornet in the competition.⁹ It is impossible to determine whether the soprano cornet was the decisive component, but its unique sound almost certainly contributed to the winning performance.

Although the ensemble size and instrument types in British brass band have not changed since the mid-1870s, the instruments have evolved tremendously, which is why

⁶ Myers, 162-164.

⁷ Ibid, 156.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Newsome, “The 19th Century Brass Band In Northern England: Musical And Social Factors In The Development of A Major Amateur Musical Medium”, 58.

modern brass bands sound different from bands in early recordings.¹⁰ Compared to the brass bands of the late Victorian period, which were bright, light, and crisp in style, modern brass bands sound louder and thicker.¹¹ Composition for the soprano cornet has also evolved due to development of the instrument and improvement in playing ability.

Early Writing for the Soprano Cornet

Original works for British brass band have a relatively young history, beginning in 1913 when British composer Percy Fletcher wrote *Labour and Love* for the 1913 National Championships.¹² The soprano cornet is often featured as a voice doubling the solo cornet part when the melody goes into a high tessitura. The added shimmering tone color brings out the main tune and relieves the pressure on the solo cornets. Fletcher did not compose many challenging high parts for the soprano cornet in this piece. The highest note for the soprano cornet part is B-natural (B5) on this E-flat pitched instrument, and the composer gave the option to perform the lower-octave note at the player's preference. Compared to a modern brass band composition, this piece is not as challenging in terms of physical demand. However, the role of the soprano cornet in the early band was well established: it had limited exposure via a few solo measures, an occasional countermelody at the top range of the band, and helped the melody intensify when the music would build towards the climax point.

Although the early period of soprano cornet writing was generally not as difficult as modern compositions, there were still a number of surprisingly challenging passages.

¹⁰ Myers, 174.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *4BarsRest*, "The Top 10: The Greatest Brass Band Contest Composers," accessed February 10, 2019, <https://www.4barsrest.com/articles/2002/art189.asp>.

For instance, the second movement of Fletcher's 1926 composition *An Epic Symphony* features an important soprano cornet solo, which is still regarded as one of the most difficult soprano cornet solos in brass band literature.¹³

In comparison to other styles of composition, the style of early brass band music would most resemble the music in the classic and romantic periods. Soprano cornet parts in the early twentieth century were more square in terms of rhythm, range, and the amount of exposure. The higher pitch and narrower bore of early twentieth-century instruments shaped how the instrument was used in band music. Although bands in the early nineteenth century played in a pitch standard close to $A_4=440$ Hz, similar to the modern system, the pitch level started to rise in mid-nineteenth century Britain until it settled at $A_4 = 452.5$ Hz. This situation did not change in the brass band world until the York Citadel Salvation Army Band started to play at the lower pitch standard of $A_4 = 439$ Hz in 1964.¹⁴ In the 1970s, the bore size of brass instruments was adapted to a wider bore to compensate for the intonation standard having shifted to the lower pitch. Although the trombone was the instrument most greatly affected by the change in bore size, the difference in sound and response was still noticeable on the E-flat soprano cornet.¹⁵ Needless to say, the higher pitch and narrower bore of the instrument did not favor more extensive playability on the soprano cornet, and contributed to the notorious intonation issues that have affected soprano cornet players for over a century. These issues caused composers to restrict extensive use of the soprano cornet in their music.

¹³ Kenny Crookston, Dave Kinross, and Steve Stewart, "Ep 42 – Steve Stewart," Brass Band Podcast, Podcast audio, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://brassbandpodcast.podbean.com/e/ep-42-steve-stewart/>

¹⁴ Myers, 183.

¹⁵ Ibid, 185.

Famous composers like Gustav Holst, Edward Elgar, and Ralph Vaughn Williams were involved in brass band contest music writing. The soprano cornet is featured similarly to how Fletcher uses it in his music, in which it functions more like a soprano-register instrument in a military wind band. Other pieces written in that typical style are Gustav Holst's *A Moorside Suite*, Edward Elgar's *Severn Suite*, and Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Variations for Brass Band*.

The Revolution of Brass Band Compositional Style

Brass band writing has undergone a revolutionary change since the mid-twentieth century. Lower-pitched and wider-bore instruments changed the entire brass band sound; the brass band was able to play in a more symphonic style with greater power. The soprano cornet was capable of producing a richer tone with wider dynamic contrast than before. Gilbert Vinter opened the door to the use of vibrant timbres and moods with new textures, ideas, and challenges, which hugely influenced composers in the next generation like Philip Wilby, Edward Gregson, and Philip Sparke.¹⁶ With this new style of composing, brass band music was more imaginative and adventurous than before. Soprano cornet started to become an irreplaceable part of the band rather than simply an extra color on top of the band as in the earlier literature. The new standard for the soprano cornet player required playing in a higher range and with more demanding dynamic variety, more virtuosic passages written both as support for the solo/repiano cornet section and for solo voice, and more extensive playing in general. With the increasing

¹⁶ *4BarsRest*, "The Top 10: The Greatest Brass Band Contest Composers."

interest in the brass band and more challenging music, the number of virtuosic soprano cornet players was growing as well.

Over the past twenty years, composition for the soprano cornet has changed drastically. The physical demands as well as the musical challenges are extremely significant. High C (C6) on the soprano cornet was an occasional note in its early days, but now it is quite common. In recent years, even high Ds (D6) and Es (E6) have been written for contest pieces. Due to the incredible physical challenge of playing those parts, sometimes contemporary bands will have two soprano cornet players in the back row to assist each other. The substitution of piccolo trumpet can sometimes be tempting to a soprano cornet player. However, many professional soprano cornet players believe the sound of the piccolo trumpet does not have the same quality as the soprano cornet and it simply does not fit into a brass band. It is also against the rules in certain contests, such as the Nationals.¹⁷ Without a doubt, brilliant and ear-piercing soprano playing can thrill audiences and add excitement to the performance. Nevertheless, both the audiences and players can grow weary of listening to and presenting that type of performance year after year. As editor of *4BarsRest* and former soprano cornet player Iwan Fox discussed in one of his articles:

“Boundaries have certainly been pushed, and expectations increased; although at times the soprano has become nothing more than a high-wire acrobat; the audience baited by the prospect of calamity. That said, there is still a thrill like no other when you hear an exceptional player on a contest platform performing at the controlled limits of their abilities; one who knows how to mix vibrancy and verve with delicacy and decorum; adding light as well as textural shade to the ensemble sound.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Richeton, Personal Communication.

¹⁸ Iwan Fox, “The End of The High-Wire Antics? Does an Exciting New Soprano Era Beckon?” *4BarsRest*, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.4barsrest.com/articles/2017/1668.asp>.

The Future of Brass Band Compositions

Fortunately, there has been music written that challenges the soprano cornet player in a different manner, as Fox again states that “stylistic nuance, texture and colour are becoming the new markers of excellence; dynamic excess and ear-drum splitting stratospheric range, less so.”¹⁹ As most trumpet players have experienced, sometimes loud and high playing is not necessarily the most difficult thing to do; a simple lyrical melody in the high register with a soft dynamic can certainly raise the player’s nerves. The Cory Band’s soprano player, Steve Stewart, said in an interview at the European Championships that “the ability to play the very high stuff is now a basic requirement - but it is the way in which you deliver it that now counts more than ever. Warmth, elegance, and tonality was in danger of being lost forever.”²⁰ Having said that, Stewart still does not think writing high E for soprano cornet is a good idea – he thinks that note on the instrument is just “too squeaky.”²¹ During his interview, he encouraged composers to write more elongated soprano cornet solos instead of turning the end of the piece into a high note contest.²² Stewart is not the only person who feels that way. Former soprano star of the Foden’s Band, Alan Wycherley, expressed the same concern. He stated that “the true strengths of the soprano cornet are being ignored”²³ and that the writing for the instrument nowadays leans more towards the style of piccolo trumpet.²⁴ William Himes, former conductor of the Chicago Staff Band and famous composer and arranger for brass band, thinks the technical and range boundaries of the soprano cornet have been pushed

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Crookston, Kinross, and Stewart.

²² Ibid.

²³ *4BarsRest*, “Soprano Progress at Open?” <https://www.4barsrest.com/news/detail.asp?id=10366>, accessed February 13, 2019.

²⁴ Ibid.

through different generations, but if the boundary is pushed beyond its traditional function in the band, it would “diminish its inherent beauty and logical purpose.”²⁵

Even to this day, lyrical soprano cornet playing is still widely appreciated by both players and audiences. With advances in instrument manufacturing and the superb playing ability of numerous soprano cornet players, it is crucial to re-embrace the tradition with new compositional ideas and to re-route the soprano cornet back to the track of high art music rather than mere utilitarian effectiveness.

²⁵ William Himes, Personal Communication, Email with Yanbin Chen, April 14, 2019.

CHAPTER 4

SOPRANO CORNET REPERTOIRE

The soprano cornet is a relatively new instrument when compared to other instruments in the trumpet family. The rareness of the instrument, the difficulty of playing the instrument, and the lack of refined manufacturing techniques in the early twentieth century all worked against the soprano cornet being identified as a solo instrument. However, with the growth of brass bands in the world, in addition to the improvements in instrument making, there are many soprano cornet players now able to display their skills at a soloist's level. The solo repertoire for this unique instrument has also grown rapidly in recent years.

Rhapsody (1970)

The compact, miniature piece for soprano cornet entitled *Rhapsody* has been regarded as one of the most important solo pieces for the repertoire since 1970.¹ *Rhapsody* is one of three pieces written by British composer Edward Gregson under the pseudonym Robert Eaves, the other two being *Introduction and Burlesque for Bass Trombone* and *Cornet Roundabout*.²

As the conductor of Cory Band, Philip Harper, says, “the composer develops the contrasting themes with a classical rigour to create a solo which easily stands the test of

¹ Philip Harper, liner notes for *Over the Horizon*, Steve Stewart, Cory Band, Philip Harper, Doyen DOYCD376, 2017, compact disc.

² Roy Newsome, *The modern brass band: from the 1930s to the new millennium* (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 126.

time.”³ This piece challenges players to have not only the control to execute technical passages with elegance, but also the flexibility to express the music through a variety of ranges and dynamics.

Capriccio (1979)

One of the early works Philip Sparke wrote in 1979, *Capriccio* is a three-minute piece that features the energetic and lively character of the soprano cornet. Written for noted soprano player Brian Evans, *Capriccio* serves as one of the early original works for soprano cornet. Philip Sparke’s style of music writing catches audiences’ attention immediately, even in his early compositions. “Quirky syncopations and playful leaps in range”⁴ play important roles in *Capriccio*. The opening trumpet fanfare from Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 is featured in this piece as well.

Demelza (early 1980s)

One of the most famous soprano cornet solo pieces, *Demelza*, was written by British composer Goff Richards under his pen name Hugo Nash.⁵ At the request of star soprano cornet player Brian Evans and the late Geoffrey Whiteham, *Demelza* was composed for the Hammonds Sauce Works Band in the early 1980s.⁶ This lyrical, tuneful short piece has been arranged for soprano cornet, E-flat tenor horn, and even a Swedish opera singer.⁷

³ Harper.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ World of Brass, *Demelza*, accessed January 26, 2019, <http://www.worldofbrass.com/rskirkde05bb-demelza.html>.

⁶ *4BarsRest*, “Demelza surprise for Goff,” accessed January 26, 2019, <https://www.4barsrest.com/news/detail.asp?id=11081>.

⁷ Ibid.

The piece is based on the character Demelza from the BBC program *Poldark*,⁸ a TV adaptation of Winston Graham's novel *The Poldark Series*. Although the reason why Richards chose this character as the basis for his composition is uncertain, it is notable that the town in which Richards was born and the setting of the novel are both Cornwall, England. In the novel, Demelza was defined as "thy sweetness," she was also described as "a charming amusing, lovely young woman."⁹ This solo piece reflects all the personalities of Demelza through the simple, touching melody. The soprano cornet's ability to sing in the high register with a pure, warm sound creates a musical portrait of the character that is a wonderful connection between music and literature.

Escapade (1989)

American composer Joseph Turrin has written numerous works for brass instruments over the years, especially for trumpet, due to his longtime collaboration and friendship with soloist Philip Smith. *Escapade* was written for a recording project involving Philip Smith, Bramwell Tovey, and the Rigid Containers Group Band of England in 1989.¹⁰ This piece was originally written for piccolo trumpet with brass band accompaniment. In addition to the B-flat piccolo trumpet part, *Escapade* also includes an E-flat trumpet/cornet part in its latest edition.¹¹ Turrin mentioned in one interview that he hoped this piece would become an alternative option to the popular E-flat cornet/trumpet

⁸ World of Brass, *Demelza*.

⁹ *Wikipedia*, "Poldark," accessed January 26, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poldark>

¹⁰ John Korak III, "A Performance Analysis of Joseph Turrin's Works For Solo Trumpet, A Lecture Recital, Together With Three Recitals of Selected Works by J.S. Bach, E. Bloch, H. Tomasi And Others" (Dissertation, University of North Texas, 1999), 82.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

Concertino by Sachse.¹² Peter Roberts recorded *Escapade* on soprano cornet for his solo album *Legend* with the Yorkshire Building Society Band.

In terms of the length of the music, *Escapade* is a short, energetic work that is suitable for many different performance circumstances. It serves well as both an opener or encore on a recital program, and can also be used in outdoor settings.¹³ However, the demanding nature of this piece is as high as the most challenging soprano cornet solo repertoire. Turrin explored the range of the instrument, incorporating high D-flat, as well as multiple high Cs. Not only does it require the performer to have security in the high register and finger dexterity, but the player must also be able to achieve lyricism and a singing voice in the most challenging register of the soprano cornet.

High Fidelity (1990)

As one of few Salvation Army solos originally written for soprano cornet, *High Fidelity* is favored by players both from contest and Salvation Army bands. This piece was composed in 1990 by Norman Bearcroft, founder and former bandmaster of the Canadian Staff Band. Based on the hymn *The Old, Old Story is True*, *High Fidelity* is written as a piece of virtuosic composition for the soprano cornet.¹⁴ Bearcroft brought “new life into the traditional ‘Air Varie’ form, whose origins go right back to the early 19th Century.”¹⁵ This type of theme and variation composition gives the soprano cornet player the opportunity to perform a similar role to that of a B-flat cornet player

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Paul Hindmarsh, liner notes for *The Kingdom Triumphant*, Stephen Cobb, The International Staff Band of The Salvation Army, SP&S SPS 169, 2013, compact disc.

¹⁵ Ibid.

performing Arban variation solos. There are four variations in this piece, the third one being “a rather touching, almost Russian sounding lament.”¹⁶ Before tackling this piece, players should first build great lip flexibility so that he or she will not be surprised by some challenging passages in the work.

The Higher Plane (1995)

Another wonderful Salvation Army soprano cornet solo, *The Higher Plane*, was written by veteran Salvation Army composer Stephen Bulla in 1995.¹⁷ Inspired by the gospel song *Higher Ground*, Bulla composed “a romp for soprano cornet that exploits both the full range of the instrument as well as its lyrical qualities.”¹⁸ Although this piece is only six minutes in duration, the wide interval leaps and the sustained high-range playing at the end of the piece can be taxing, even for experienced players.

Flowerdale (2002)

Flowerdale is among the most famous soprano cornet solos currently in existence, its popularity largely due to the superb performance of soprano cornetist Peter Roberts. *Flowerdale* was originally the third movement of brass band composer Philip Sparke’s work *Hymn of the Highlands*. David King, conductor of the Yorkshire Building Society Band, commissioned this piece in 2002 to be performed at the European Brass Band Championships Gala Concert.¹⁹ *Hymn of the Highlands* is “an extended and themed

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Douglas Yeo, “Crown of Heaven,” *The Brass Band Bridge*, December 2016, accessed January 27, 2019, <http://www.nabba.org/pdf/bridge/102.pdf>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Philip Sparke, “Hymn of the Highlands”, *The Music of Philip Sparke*, accessed January 26, 2019, <http://www.philipsparke.com/Hymn%20of%20the%20Highlands%20BB.htm>.

piece, which can act as a half concert to feature a band's soloists."²⁰ This movement was written for "arguably the greatest soprano cornet player of all time, the legendary Peter Roberts."²¹ With the skills of an incredible soprano cornet player in mind, Sparke stretches the instrument in every possible way in terms of hymn writing. The contrast of dynamics, emotion, and range, as well as the beautifully written melody, evoke images of the Flowerdale forest in Wester Ross, Scotland. As an imaginative themed piece, *Flowerdale* "depicts the tall trees swaying gently in the wind with the serenity of the area"²² in the beginning of the piece. The soprano cornet leads the audience to the famous waterfall in Flowerdale by the gorgeous, soaring melody over the band. With the prolonged singing melody in the high register of the soprano cornet and the strong, emotional ending on a high C, this is certainly a showstopper. Due to the increasing popularity of the piece, it has already been arranged for wind band, piano, and brass band accompaniment, and it can be played on a B-flat piccolo trumpet if needed.

Through the Gates of Clos Luce (2015)

Talented tenor horn player and in-demand composer Jonathan Bates not only has been the Young Composer in Association with the Black Dyke Band and been mentored by Edward Gregson,²³ but was also chosen to write test pieces for several major

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Philip Sparke, *Flowerdale from Hymn of the Highlands* (London, England: Angle Music Press, 2009), 3.

²² Just Music, "*Flowerdale from Hymn of the Highlands* – Parts & Score, Solos – Eb. Soprano Cornet," accessed January 26, 2019, <https://www.justmusicuk.com/publications/details/JM40475>.

²³ *4BarsRest*, "4BR Interview Jonathan Bates," accessed January 28, 2019, <https://www.4barsrest.com/articles/2017/1612.asp>.

championships in Europe. At the age of nineteen, Bates was hired as the solo horn player in the Black Dyke Band.²⁴

Written for the Flowers Band's soprano cornet player Paul Richards,²⁵ *Through the Gates of Clos Luce* was also a movement from Bates' *Continental Concerto*.²⁶ This piece is inspired by Bates' trip to Amboise in the Loire Valley, France,²⁷ where the great Leonardo da Vinci lived from 1516-19. Bates brought a light jazz influence and passionate melodic styles to this piece,²⁸ which is fresh for audiences. However, this relaxing piece still demands stamina and confidence in the high register.²⁹

Concerto for Soprano Cornet

The *Concerto for Soprano Cornet* written by Dan Price is the first three-movement original major work for soprano cornet. As a ground-breaking piece, this concerto is specifically written for a newborn instrument – the Stomvi four-valve E-flat soprano cornet, which expands the low range on the instrument. This innovation gave the composer greater opportunity to write a piece that can fully use the potential of the instrument.

Commissioned for the Cory Band's star soprano cornet player Steve Stewart, *Concerto for Soprano Cornet* stretched the instrument in every possible way. From

²⁴ Buffet Crampon, "Jonathan Bates," accessed January 28, 2019, <https://www.besson.com/artist/jonathan-bates/>.

²⁵ WorldofBrass, *Through the Gates of Clos Luce*, accessed January 28, 2019, <http://www.worldofbrass.com/sheet-music/brass-band/solos-and-features/soprano-cornet/sps30177-through-the-gates-of-clos-luce.html>.

²⁶ Just Music, "Through the Gates of Clos Lucé – Parts & Score, Solos – Eb. Soprano Cornet," accessed January 28, 2019, <https://www.justmusicuk.com/publications/details/JM71978>.

²⁷ Jonathan Bates, "Brass Music," Wix.com, accessed January 28, 2019, <http://www.jonathanbates.co.uk/>.

²⁸ Just Music. "Through the Gates of Clos Lucé – Parts & Score, Solos – Eb. Soprano Cornet."

²⁹ Ibid.

extended range – it goes up to high E natural – to all types of trumpet technique, including demanding wide intervallic leaps and long passages of taxing playing, Price wrote what is perhaps the most difficult soprano cornet solo yet composed. This piece even took experienced player Steve Stewart six months to learn.³⁰

Dedicated to Stewart's mentor James Watson (former trumpet professor at the Royal Academy of the Music in London and former bandmaster of the Black Dyke Band), *Concerto for Soprano Cornet* draws its inspiration from the famous *Arutiunian Trumpet Concerto*.³¹ The muted second movement is an homage to the muted trumpet solo from the *Arutiunian Concerto*. The titles of the three movements are named after Stewart's family members.³² From Price's own words, he described this piece as:

Intrada (Mathilde), the opening movement, is heraldic in nature but includes some references to Steve's Scottish heritage in the second subject material and also as the movement, begins to unravel. The second movement, *Poem (Rachel)*, draws inspiration from the music of Ravel; its bitonal and polyrhythmic textures providing an impressionistic landscape for the soloist to work against. This movement explores both the lyrical quality of the instrument and also its extended range. The finale *Scherzo (Boris)*, is written with the conventional three-valved instrument in mind and is a real tour-de-force. The movement takes inspiration from the music of Rachmaninov and Stravinsky and although unintentional it has a Russian 'flair' to it which brings the work to a dramatic and impressive conclusion.³³

This concerto serves as the beginning of a new era for original soprano cornet solo writing. With Price's ambitious composition and Stewart's outstanding playing, the soprano cornet has proven to be as adequate a solo instrument as the other instruments in the brass band.

³⁰ Crookston, Kinross, and Stewart.

³¹ Dan Price, Liner notes for *Over the Horizon*.

³² Crookston, Kinross, and Stewart.

³³ Price.

The pieces introduced above are merely a small fraction of the soprano cornet solo repertoire. In the past fifty years, with players requesting more repertoire and composers responding to demand, the repertoire has expanded tremendously. However, most works are still in a lyrical style, or are transcriptions and arrangements, and the repertoire for soprano cornet is still in the growing stage. Some other significant pieces not addressed in this section include: *Let Me Try Again* arranged by Simon Kerwin; Ray Farr's arrangements' *Live and Let Die* and *On with the Motley*; *Concertino for E-flat Soprano Cornet and Soliloquy* by Darrol Barry.

Notable soprano cornet recordings that feature solo repertoire mentioned in this chapter are included in the Appendix B. In addition to the solo repertoire mentioned above in this chapter, the soprano cornet is also regularly featured as a solo instrument in the brass band repertoire. Since the number of pieces that have important soprano cornet solos is huge, it is difficult to discuss all of them in this chapter. However, some of the leading soprano cornetists, brass band composers, and conductors have shared their favorite ensemble repertoire in the Appendix C included at the end of this document.

CHAPTER 5

FAMOUS SOPRANO CORNET PLAYERS

Wonderful music would not reach the ears of audiences without the performance of excellent players. Those players not only encourage the next generation to strive for excellence, but also inspire composers to write more challenging music for the instrument. In this chapter, several notable contemporary and historical soprano cornet players will be introduced.

Charles Cook (Charlie Cook) (1913-1997)

The playing of Charlie Cook, considered to be one of the greatest soprano cornet players, had a profound influence in Britain during the pre-war and post-war eras.¹ Serving as the soprano cornet of the Foden's Motor Works Band from 1933 to 1961, Charlie Cook was certainly one of the longest serving soprano cornet players in any band.²

Born into a musical family on Nelson Street, Congleton, Cook studied cornet with his father Clem Cook from a very young age. By the age of seven, he was already playing in a local band under his father's baton. Cook made his debut on the radio at the age of eight and was awarded a Silver Cornet for his services with the Hadden Colliery Band after moving from the Congleton Band. At the age of 19, having moved back to

¹ *4BarsRest*, "The Top 10 Soprano Players of All Time," accessed January 12, 2019, <https://www.4barsrest.com/articles/2002/art184.asp>.

² Stewart Green, comp., "Foden's Band A History," accessed January 12, 2019, <https://www.fodensband.co.uk/assets/00-FODENS-BAND-HISTORY-AND-RECORDINGS.pdf>.

Congleton, Charlie Cook was invited by the famous Harry Mortimer to join the Foden's Motor Works Band as the soprano cornet player. He had never played the soprano cornet before, but his talent on the instrument allowed him to create his own style of soprano cornet playing. After twenty-eight years with the band, Cook was finally invited to conduct the Beresfords Band in Congleton. In 1978, a "Wednesday Night is Music Night" concert held by Foden's Band and the Beresford Band celebrated Charlie Cook's 58 years of involvement in the brass band community. According to his records, Cook was playing on a Besson soprano cornet during his time with Foden's Band.³

Charlie Cook's playing can be heard on recordings of the Foden's Band during his tenure. Bram Gay once commented, "Fine sopranos are indeed few. Charlie Cook of Foden's I always consider to have been, with Dennis Brain, one of the two finest brass players of whom I have had personal experience."⁴ In 2002, the online brass band magazine *4BarsRest* held a vote for the top ten soprano cornet players of all time. Charlie Cook was voted as the second place winner, with comments such as, "Charlie Cook was the star soprano cornet...head and shoulders above his contemporaries"⁵ and "Cook had a cast iron technique and beautiful sweet tone that set him apart from his rivals. His range was superb and his relationship with Harry Mortimer became a thing of legend."⁶

Paul Duffy (1988-)

Born in 1988, Paul Duffy grew up in Liverpool, United Kingdom. As a multi-instrumentalist today, he became well known as the soprano cornet player in the Black

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gay.

⁵ *4BarsRest*, "The Top 10 Soprano Players of All Time."

⁶ Ibid.

Dyke Band.⁷ At the age of seven, Paul initiated his studies by playing the cornet in the local brass band in Liverpool.⁸ Later on, he was accepted into the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain, and soon became the principal cornet player under music director Bramwell Tovey.⁹ In 2006, Paul Duffy joined the famous Black Dyke Band as the newly-appointed soprano cornet player. During Duffy's time with the band, the wide variety in styles of repertoire he brought to the stage were a breath of fresh air. Often heard in the concert hall were soprano cornet solos with jazz improvisation, and he was soon recognized as "one of the most thrilling soloists Black Dyke Band had ever had."¹⁰ After seven years with the Black Dyke Band, he left the band in order to focus on his personal musical journey.

Paul Duffy's debut album *Only Just Begun* was released in 2014 after ten months of preparation. On this recording project, he played twenty-five different instruments, some of which were learned after he left the Black Dyke Band. From tenor horn to tuba, double bass to drum set, not only does he demonstrate his incredible talent on different instruments, but also his talent for arranging and recording. Duffy's steps as a multi-instrumentalist musician continued with the release of his November 2015 album *Christmas, Volume 1*.

⁷ *Wikipedia*, "Paul Duffy," accessed January 16, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Duffy#cite_note-1.

⁸ Paul Duffy, "Bio," accessed January 16, 2019, <https://www.padusic.com/bio>.

⁹ *Wikipedia*, "Paul Duffy."

¹⁰ National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain.

Brian Evans (1943-2005)

Brian Evans is also considered to be among the greatest soprano cornet players who have ever lived. “If ever there was a man born to be a soprano player, then Brian Evans was it.”¹¹

Born in Oldham, Brian Evans was principal cornet with Chadderton & District Band by the age of twelve. From the record, he was still wearing short trousers when he appeared in the national finals in 1952.¹² His uncle, Fred Hilton, taught him how to play the cornet and Evans was deeply influenced by Oliver Howarth, the father of Elgar Howarth.¹³ Brian Evans was a member of the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain,¹⁴ many members of which had notable careers. Like Charlie Cook, he did not begin his career as a soprano cornet player. In 1961, Evans was picked out from the second cornet section by Alex Mortimer to play the soprano chair for CWS Manchester Band with only 24 hours’ notice before the concert.¹⁵ Although Evans himself thought that night was a disaster, his playing career was secured after that concert and he became a leading player of his generation. During his career, Evans played with numerous top bands, such as Fairey’s, British Vita, Brighouse and Rastrick, Wingates, and the famous Black Dyke Band. His engagement with the Black Dyke Band led him to play with James Shepherd Versatile Brass (James Shepherd was the principal cornetist of the Black Dyke

¹¹ *4BarsRest*, “The Top 10 Soprano Players of All Time.”

¹² Gordon Sampson, “‘Floral Dance’ cornet player Brian Evans dies aged 63,” accessed January 12, 2019, <https://www.halifaxcourier.co.uk/news/floral-dance-cornet-player-brian-evans-dies-aged-63-1-1895584>.

¹³ *4BarsRest*, “Death of Soprano Legend,” accessed January 12, 2019, <https://www.4barsrest.com/news/detail.asp?year=2005&id=782>.

¹⁴ National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain, “Players,” accessed January 12, 2019, <http://www.nybbgb.com/showcase.html>.

¹⁵ *4BarsRest*, “Death of Soprano Legend.”

Band). This list of bands alone demonstrates how important Brian Evans was as a player and musician.

One of his career highlights was being featured as the soprano cornetist on the Floral Dance recording by the Brighouse and Rastrick Band in 1977. Brian Evans was especially famous for his beautiful slow melody playing.¹⁶ He won the North of England Solo Contest twice in a row from a pool of 80 top players. The soprano cornet could not have been established as a true solo instrument without his superb technique and musicianship.¹⁷ During his time with the Brighouse and Rastrick Band, a fair number of lyrical solo pieces were arranged for him, many of which have now become audience favorites of the solo repertoire, including *Summertime*, *Misty*, *Rusalka's Song to the Moon*, *Solitaire*, and *Demelza*.¹⁸ Evans' outstanding soprano cornet playing can still be heard on his solo album *Dedications*. Many of the above-mentioned lyrical pieces were included on this wonderful recording.

Many brass band players in Britain maintain non-musical jobs during the day. Brian Evans worked as an electrician at Marshalls of Southowram.¹⁹

Brian's legendary career was praised by many of his colleagues. James Scott thought of him as "a giant of the instrument" and Harry Mortimer referred to him as "one of the outstanding soprano cornet players of the era...an artistic instrumentalist."²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Brighouse Echo, "A musician in a class of his own," accessed January 12, 2019, <https://www.brighouseecho.co.uk/news/a-musician-in-a-class-of-his-own-1-796440>.

¹⁹ Sampson, "'Floral Dance' cornet player Brian Evans dies aged 63."

²⁰ *4BarsRest*, "Death of Soprano Legend."

Benjamin Richeton

Benjamin Richeton, the former soprano cornet player of the Black Dyke Band, was born in France. Having started on piano at the age of seven, Richeton grew tired of the instrument and decided to switch to the cornet and join the local wind band and brass band.²¹ When he was fifteen, he had the opportunity to perform the *Vivaldi Concerto for Two Trumpets in C Major* with the well-known French trumpet soloist Guy Tourvon. With the encouragement of Guy Tourvon, Richeton auditioned for the European Youth Brass Band, and won the principal cornet chair. He later switched to the soprano cornet chair, which also brought him opportunities to perform on soprano cornet with the National Youth Band of Switzerland, and on principal trumpet with the National Youth Wind Orchestra of France.²²

Benjamin Richeton wanted to play in a top brass band, so he decided to move to England for his college studies. At the age of eighteen, he attended the University of Salford, studying conducting with David King and Howard Evans, composition and arranging with Peter Graham, and history with Roy Newsome.²³ As soon as he arrived in England, Richeton joined the famous YBS Band, now known as the Hammonds Saltaire Band, as the new soprano cornet player. Later on, he joined the Grimethopre Colliery Band as a cornet player then moved to the soprano chair. After Grimethorpe, he was the soprano player in the Fairey Band until joining the Black Dyke Band in 2013 as their new soprano cornet player after Paul Duffy's departure.²⁴

²¹ Stuart Watts, "Lt Col Stuart Watts and the French Connection," *The Brass Herald*, October 2017, 51.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

During Richeton's time with the Black Dyke Band, he has enjoyed winning the "triple" (British Open, National, and European Championship) in 2014 and 2015. The premiere of Peter Graham's *The Triumph of Time* in 2014 became one of his fondest memories with the band.²⁵ In 2017, after having spent four years with the Black Dyke Band, he decided to focus on his new solo recording project and took a teaching position at the University of Salford.²⁶

Peter Roberts (1950-)

When compiling a list of influential soprano cornet players, Peter Roberts is a name that cannot be omitted. Considered to be the "King" of the soprano cornet, he was voted as the number one soprano cornetist in "The Top 10 Soprano Players of All Time" poll organized by *4BarsRest*.²⁷ Bandmaster of the Black Dyke Band, Dr. Nicholas Childs, said, "Peter is a special player, he has a fantastic legacy and the total respect from his fellow bandsmen."²⁸

Born in the town of Grimethorpe, Peter Roberts began his brass band career in the Grimethorpe Junior Band. In 1963, he started to play soprano cornet and was moved into the Grimethorpe Senior Band.²⁹ Unlike most other players, who studied with teachers at some point in their careers, Roberts taught himself how to play the instrument. He humbly commented, "I've been lucky over the years and have played with some great players, so perhaps that's rubbed off on me, but there's no secret to my success – just

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *4BarsRest*, "The Top 10 Soprano Players of All Time."

²⁸ *4BarsRest*, "Peter Roberts to retire," accessed January 13, 2019, <https://www.4barsrest.com/news/detail.asp?year=2007&offset=265&id=6699>.

²⁹ *4BarsRest*, "4BR Meets the King: Peter Roberts," accessed January 5, 2019, <http://www.4barsrest.com/articles/2001/art095.asp>.

plenty of hard work.”³⁰ The diligent work Roberts put in won him numerous titles and championships throughout his career, most notably winning every section at the British Open.³¹ During his career, he has worked with several top bands, such as Grimethorpe Colliery Band, Yorkshire Building Society Band, and Black Dyke Band. Roberts’ superb playing also brought him to the United States, where he was the soprano cornet player in the Brass Band of Battle Creek for a number of years.

In addition to his busy performing schedule, Peter Roberts spent 27 years working at the Grimethorpe Colliery coal mine. Hearing problems almost ended his soprano career at the age of 45, but he persevered and played with the Dodworth Band.³² Perspective is something of utmost importance to him. In an interview conducted in 2001, he mentioned that his work as a community driver giving rides to disabled people around his town was “so rewarding. It puts brass banding in its rightful place.”³³

After having a phenomenal career, Roberts left the Black Dyke Band and retired at the end of 2007.³⁴ Fortunately, his splendid playing can still be heard on the recordings he made with various bands. The solo album *Legend* and the *Soprano Legends* album he made with two other star soprano cornetists, Kevin Crockford and Alan Wycherley, are among the must-have recordings for soprano cornet players. In 2003, Peter Roberts’ autobiography *A Legend in His Own Lifetime* was published. Although the first edition is no longer in print, another publication, *Born to Play Soprano*, was recently released by Devilish Publishing Music Publishers.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *4BarsRest*, “4BR Meets the King: Peter Roberts.”

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *4BarsRest*, “Peter Roberts to retire.”

³⁵ Devilish Publishing Music Publishers, “Born to Play Soprano,” accessed January 13, 2019, <https://www.devilishpublishing.com/books/biography/born-to-play-soprano>.

Steve Stewart

Steve Stewart of the Cory Band, one of the most exciting contemporary soprano cornetists, is certainly a superstar in the brass band world today. Born in Bathgate, Scotland, Steve Stewart began playing on B-flat cornet under the instruction of a left-handed player from the Salvation Army.³⁶ At the age of eleven, he joined the Kirkintilloch Silver Band on third cornet after moving to Lenzie with his family.³⁷ His talent soon surfaced, and he became the soprano cornet player of a championship section band at fifteen. Studying with Robert Fraser and hugely influenced by conductor Walter Hargreaves, Stewart quickly emerged as a rising star. At the age of eighteen, Stewart got into the brass final for the Young Musician of the Year.³⁸ Later on, he furthered his musical study at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music in London. He credits his four years of study with James Watson, an important figure in the trumpet and brass band world, with teaching him how to be a “proper musician.”³⁹ He was introduced to the Desford Colliery Band by James Watson during his time at the Royal Academy of Music.⁴⁰ After moving to Wales, Stewart was asked to join the world-renowned Cory Band by conductor Robert Childs.⁴¹ He has won numerous championships and awards with Cory Band and is widely recognized as one of the best soprano cornet players in the world today. During a recent interview with Nigel Seaman, Stewart revealed that he lives behind a famous zoo in Wales. From his garden, he can hear the lions roaring.⁴²

³⁶ Nigel Seaman and Steve Stewart, “Podcast 7 – Steve Stewart,” Nezzyonbrass Podcast, Podcast audio, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.nezzyonbrass.com/podcast-7-steve-stewart/>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Crookston, Kinross, and Stewart.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

In 2017, Steve Stewart released his debut album *Over the Horizon*, recorded with the Cory Band. Unlike traditional albums with lyrical tunes arranged for soprano cornet, this recording is filled with pieces composed specifically for soprano cornet. There are some classic solos, but he also commissioned a newly-composed concerto for four-valve soprano cornet.⁴³ As he mentioned in an interview, “I want it to make a significant impact with original compositions in creating new avenues of musical possibilities.”⁴⁴

The music director of the Cory Band, Philip Harper, said of Stewart that “he has the full soprano toolkit at his fingertips: he can provide extraordinary moments of high-octane brilliance; he can sail like a cloud above the tranquility of a band pianissimo; he blends his sound to match the entire cornet section; yet he is an unmistakable solo performer with his own highly distinctive character.”⁴⁵

In addition to the soprano cornet players mentioned in this chapter, there are still many brilliant players in history and active today. The full list of the top 10 soprano cornet players in the history posted by 4BarsRest, and other notable soprano cornet players is included in the Appendix A.

⁴³ Seaman and Stewart.

⁴⁴ 4BarsRest, “Stewart eyes new horizons,” accessed January 16, 2019, <https://www.4barsrest.com/news/detail.asp?id=30035>.

⁴⁵ Philip Harper, liner notes for *Over the Horizon*, Steve Stewart, Cory Band, Philip Harper. Doyen DOYCD376, 2017, compact disc.

CHAPTER 6

APPROACH TO THE INSTRUMENT

One can discuss the history and the star players of the soprano cornet at length, but eventually the conversation must turn to the actual playing of and approach to the instrument. Algernon Rose talked about the challenges of playing the soprano cornet in his book *Talks with Bandsmen*, stating that the soprano cornet “is difficult to play well and requires a thin and powerful lip. The E-flat soprano needs careful tonguing, as it is so frequently over-blown...Precision of attack, executive ability, and force, are very desirable in their way.”¹ The requirements of being a quality soprano player can be demanding. However, playing soprano cornet in a brass band can be one of the most rewarding musical experiences one can have, and practicing the soprano cornet well can also benefit a musician’s trumpet technique.

Soprano cornet player Steve Stewart of the Cory Band once said in an interview, “I think [playing soprano cornet is] just a psychological thing. People get worked up about it. It’s a cornet that’s pitched in E-flat.”² Such a bold statement might confuse young players since Stewart is already a world-class player, but there is a lot of wisdom in his words.

¹ Algernon S. Rose, *Talks with Bandsmen* (London: Tony Bingham, 1995), 175-176.

² Seaman and Stewart.

Many players believe that the soprano cornet is an instrument requiring a high-note specialist or a fanatical person to play it. Bram Gay talked about this in an article in the *Sounding Brass & The Conductors*:

The instrument [soprano cornet] seems to require a certain quirky, fatalistic personality in the player. A very famous soprano virtuoso once said that ‘to play the soprano at all you have to be a bit crazy. To play it well, really nuts. And to play it as well as I do, mad as a hatter’.³

It is always fun for players to read statements like that, but is it really necessary to be a crazy person in order to play well? The answer is obviously no. With the improvements in instrument manufacturing and many other aspects of teaching, playing soprano cornet should not be much different from playing other instruments in the trumpet family. Therefore, treating the soprano cornet as a normal brass instrument is the first step to approaching it.

The Importance of Listening

Since our first goal is to approach the soprano cornet as we would the B-flat trumpet or cornet, most of the techniques that work for the bigger trumpet or cornet also work for the soprano cornet. World-renowned trumpet soloist Håkan Hardenberger once said in an interview, “The most important tool that we ignored too much are the ears, it’s by listening that you can hear which way you should then go at the moment.”⁴ There are two elements of listening in which players should engage. The first is listening to recordings that have great soprano cornet playing, both in solo and in band settings. Seeking recordings of the players mentioned in Chapter 4 would be a good starting point

³ Gay.

⁴ Sarah Willis, “Håkan Hardenberger live in Berlin on Sarah’s Horn Hangouts,” YouTube video, posted February 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70IelAZm884>.

for players who are new to the soprano cornet, which may lead to discovering that there is a whole world of fantastic music available. As previously mentioned in this dissertation, the style of soprano cornet playing has changed over the years. The fact that a more symphonic style is popular today does not mean that older styles are no longer performed. There is much merit in those older recordings, and the playing was simply stunning even by today's standards. Stewart once said, "if you want to be successful [on soprano cornet], you have to be able to play a little bit of everything."⁵ Contemporary soprano cornet players must have the ability to play in many given styles. However, the listening material used for reference should not only be limited to the soprano cornet or brass band recordings. In the band setting, soprano cornet usually serves as the singing voice in the high tessitura, therefore vocal and other types of music that bring inspiration are recommended. Principal Tuba of the Chicago Symphony Gene Pokorny once said, "If I can make this thing [tuba] sound like Luciano Pavarotti, I would be a happy guy."⁶ Likewise, it can be wonderful for soprano cornet players to make their instruments emulate Maria Callas or Joyce DiDonato.

Besides listening to a good number of recordings, listening carefully to your own practice and performance is as crucial as any other essential element of study. Students often neglect the details of their playing while practicing. The sound is the main criterion when it comes to determining whether the player is doing the right thing or not. After having listened to many recordings, the student should have had a relatively decent concept of a high-quality soprano cornet sound, and that concept should be present at all

⁵ Crookston, Kinross, and Stewart.

⁶ San Francisco Conservatory of Music, "The Making of Gabrieli," YouTube video, posted June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHs4W3bdReI>.

times. Imagining the sound you want to produce before you play should not simply be a cliché often repeated by your teacher in order to help you improve, it is indeed one of the most important tools for players to improve their musical craftsmanship and maintain their playing at the best possible level. Paying close attention to a recording of the sound you produce will increase the sensitivity of your imagination, and striving to match the sound you produce to the sound in your mind is crucial as well. The more detailed the sound you hear in your mind, the better the result coming out of your bell will be.

Legendary tuba player and brass pedagogue Arnold Jacobs said in one of his masterclasses in 1988, “Don’t encourage mediocrity. Play at your best and don’t be second class in the head.”⁷ This statement reinforces the importance of always striving for excellence and being a first-class musician in your mind. Listening is a part of the action, but the reaction after listening is as important as the listening itself. It is not uncommon for players who are new to the soprano cornet to set a relatively lower standard on the instrument compared to the trumpet, due to the unfamiliarity of the instrument. However, the drive to achieve the goal in your imagination will help the player get used to the soprano cornet more rapidly. Meanwhile, applying the same mentality towards the soprano cornet as when approaching B-flat trumpet or cornet will relieve the unfamiliarity to it.

One of the most common challenges for a player starting on the soprano cornet is finding the right pitch and playing the instrument in tune. As when starting on the E-flat trumpet, it frequently takes some time for players to get used to the new key. The soprano cornet player of the International Staff Band, Gary Fountain, mentioned in one of his

⁷ Brian Frederickson, “Quotes,” accessed February 1, 2019, <http://www.windsongpress.com/jacobs/written/Arnold%20Jacobs%20quotes.pdf>.

articles, “Soprano cornets, whatever the manufacturer, are notoriously susceptible to intonation issues. My personal recommendation on this is to ‘get to know your instrument.’”⁸ Practicing some fundamental scales and working with a drone will help the new player become familiar with the instrument. Constantly imagining the melody in your head is one of the most popular modern brass pedagogy techniques, which stabilizes the pitch concept in the player’s mind.

Whether the soprano cornet is more like B-flat cornet or B-flat piccolo trumpet has always been a question when starting on the instrument, but it actually has unique characteristics from both instruments. The blow of the instrument leans slightly more towards the piccolo trumpet than the B-flat cornet due to shorter tube length and smaller bore size. The additional resistance created by the length of the instrument and its bore size sometimes creates difficulty, especially if the player is new to the soprano cornet. Finding the balance between the resistance of the instrument and moving air into the instrument, and using the resistance from the instrument to your advantage instead of working against it, are other important aspects that must be practiced at great length. Although there are more larger-bore soprano cornets made nowadays than in the past, some modern soprano cornets do have a more open blow than older models, which might be beneficial for certain players.

Some of the challenges of soprano cornet playing are over-inhalation and overblow. Jacobs used to say, “If too much air is taken in, there will be a massive resistance in the throat, which is very hard to cope with.”⁹ Although some other

⁸ Gary Fountain, “The Art of Soprano Playing – Gary Fountain,” USA East Music, accessed February 2, 2019, <http://music.saconnects.org/the-art-of-soprano-playing-gary-fountain/>.

⁹ Brian Frederiksen, *Arnold Jacobs: Song and Wind*, ed. John Taylor (WindSong Press Limited, 2010), 101.

pedagogues advocate taking a full breath when you play the instrument, both sides agree that resistance in the throat has a negative effect on playing the instrument. The more demanding role of the soprano cornet in the modern brass band means higher notes and louder dynamics written on the page. This gives the soprano cornet the opportunity to show its ability but also sometimes “overheats” players’ brains. Fountain suggests, “Always remember, the listener’s ear will automatically favour a higher pitched note, so there is no need to over-blow.”¹⁰ This is valuable advice for players to keep in mind when they start on the instrument. Surprisingly, the high register does not require as much air as the low register. “Consistent note production,”¹¹ as suggested by Fountain, will be one of the main goals during a practice session. Students should focus on moving the air through the instrument because only the exhalation produces sound, the inhalation does not.

Personal Experiences

There are two methods of practice I found helpful for getting used to the instrument’s resistance and pitch. The first one has been adapted from pedagogue William Vacchiano’s teaching on J. S. Bach’s *Brandenburg Concerto No. 2*. As published in Brian Shook’s book *Last Stop, Carnegie Hall*, Vacchiano thinks the challenge for playing high trumpet passages is the discomfort caused by the shallow mouthpiece, and he thus suggests that students practice fundamental exercises on a B-flat trumpet with the shallow mouthpiece.¹² Although it is not easy to fit a soprano cornet

¹⁰ Fountain.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Brian A. Shook, *Last Stop, Carnegie Hall: New York Philharmonic Trumpeter William Vacchiano*, (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2011), 56.

mouthpiece on a trumpet due to the different shank size, it is beneficial for the student to practice the soprano cornet material on a B-flat trumpet or cornet to facilitate their approach to the tune. By practicing on a lower-key instrument then gradually moving to C trumpet or D trumpet, students will get used to the resistance of the instrument, but more importantly they will have a vivid concept of the melody in different keys. Playing soprano cornet can be very demanding for the lips and for one's endurance; Steve Stewart mentioned in an interview that he sometimes uses a B-flat trumpet or even a flugelhorn to practice the music from the Cory Band if it is too taxing.¹³ This can also prevent the student from overworking on the music, which might cause pain or injury. The warm, creamy tone of a B-flat instrument will also cause the player to achieve more of a cornet-style sound on the soprano cornet rather than a piccolo trumpet sound.

The other beneficial method of practicing soprano cornet is to use a breathing device called Inspiron. This incentive spirometer was originally used as a medical tool to “give respiratory patients a visual demonstration of how much air they can inhale.”¹⁴ However, when it is set upside down, it can also be used for exhalation training during practice. There is a gauge to adjust the resistance of the device, with level 0 giving the most similar resistance in comparison to the soprano cornet. Players can insert the mouthpiece into the device and practice buzzing the mouthpiece, with the goal of keeping the ball in the up position while buzzing. However, there is a difference between using it for regular trumpet or cornet versus high-pitched instruments like soprano cornet. Since the soprano cornet does not require as much volume of air as the B-flat trumpet, maintaining the ball at the halfway point of the device will help the player gain the breath

¹³ Crookston, Kinross, and Stewart.

¹⁴ Frederiksen, 178.

control required for freedom of playing of a high-pitched instrument. “One of the most important uses of the incentive spirometer is to teach the relaxed low pressure/high flow rate concept of playing.”¹⁵

The Importance of Having the Right Mindset

Playing soprano cornet in the brass band not only requires the player to have good control on the instrument but also requires a strong mentality from the player to “go for it” under various circumstances. However, players should not confuse confident performing with a reckless approach.¹⁶ The responsibility of being the top voice of the band means the player also needs to have tasteful judgement in when to open up the music and when to simply sit on top of the band.¹⁷ The brilliance and projection of the soprano cornet are second to none, which might cause players to forget their role in the band. Fountain also mentioned this issue in his article *The Art of Soprano Playing*: “The soprano cornet is obviously an individual part, but the player must never lose sight of the fact that they are first and foremost a member of the cornet section and thus contribute to that section, helping out in the high register passages, and not just ‘glory hunting.’”¹⁸ It is easy to bring personal ego to this instrument, therefore it is important to leave the ego outside of the room before the rehearsal and focus on being an ensemble player.

Brass players are often concerned with how they feel during a performance or practice session. Many of them constantly look for a fresh, great feeling when they play their instrument. As most of us know from the Chicago school of teaching, the feeling

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Fountain.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

when playing does not matter as much as the product does. Feeling fresh every day is very difficult to achieve for multiple reasons. For a soprano cornet player, it might be even more difficult to maintain a fresh feeling through the end of a concert or rehearsal. Therefore, it is valuable to occasionally practice the instrument when you are physically or mentally tired. Players should be acutely aware that feeling tired does not mean feeling hurt – it is crucial to rest when the player is feeling pain. This balance is controlled by the player, and individuals should use their wisdom and best judgement. However, practicing intelligently when the body feels tired imitates a situation that might occur in a future concert or rehearsal. It can help players to familiarize themselves with the feeling that might occur and build a plan to cope with it. With careful practice, players should be able to learn how to get their mind back to music making instead of obsessing over the feeling. They can learn to notice where their tendencies to play in counter-productive ways lie and find the path to regaining control of the instrument. Preparation for as many kinds of scenarios as possible is essential for soprano cornet players. As the old saying goes, “hope for the best and prepare for the worst.”

Equipment choice is another major part of approaching the soprano cornet. Although there will be a more detailed discussion of equipment in Chapter 7, it is necessary for players to know that sound quality is always the top priority of playing. If the player prefers a certain shallow mouthpiece only due to ease of playing, they must also ensure that it is able to produce different tone colors when needed. In the appendix section at the end of this document, many preeminent contemporary soprano cornetists graciously shared their personal thoughts on their approach to the instrument.

The discussion of approaching the soprano cornet can be summed up by remembering to stay patient and wise in your practice, and improvement will happen over time. As Philip Smith, former Principal Trumpet of the New York Philharmonic always says, “‘Sing, sing!’ Let song be the guide, because all the technical things will be fixed if it all comes out sounding songful, if it’s sounding beautiful.”¹⁹ No matter how much time you spend on fundamental and technical practice, which are extremely essential, nothing can beat a simple tune played from the bottom of your heart.

¹⁹ Barbara Haws and Philip Smith, “Listening Through Time featuring Philip Smith (trumpet),” accessed February 4, 2019, <https://archives.nyphil.org/index.php/podcast-trumpet>.

CHAPTER 7

EQUIPMENT

There is a myth among trumpet players regarding the existence of a perfect match between the mouthpiece and the instrument. Just as oboe players never get tired of discussing reed making, trumpet players tend not to tire of trying different mouthpieces and instruments to get a better result. In this chapter, some of the most popular soprano cornets and mouthpieces will be introduced and discussed. Instrument choice should always be a personal endeavor; whatever makes you sound the best and feels the most comfortable is the best fit for you.

Like other types of trumpets, the soprano cornet has evolved within the past century. The quality of the instrument and mouthpiece continues to become more consistent. There are a few major brass instrument manufacturers producing high-quality soprano cornets and mouthpieces. These are the instruments used widely by professionals as well as college students. It is certainly a luxury for players today to have such a wide variety of choices in order to pick the equipment for their needs.

The Instrument

Besson

Founded in 1837 by Gustav-Auguste Besson, the French brand Besson has been known as one of the best cornet makers in the world. Besson cornets appear regularly in prestigious bands such as the Cory Band, the Black Dyke Band, and the Amsterdam Staff

Band of the Salvation Army. Besson's Sovereign 924G was unveiled at the British Open Brass Band Championships in Birmingham, England in 2011. Compared to Schilke and Yamaha, the Besson soprano cornet has a slightly larger bore size (0.460") than the others,¹ and features a first valve slide trigger instead of the regular first valve slide saddle that is commonly featured on other brands of instruments.

The Sovereign soprano cornet is described on Besson's website as "an absolute winner, surely one of the best cornets to emerge in its generation...It was the talking point of the event, with its beautiful tone allowing for high singing melodic lines and its ability to respond to players' need to ride on top of the band. Its excellent intonation is a revelation for generations of players who have struggled to find the right pitch. The 924G is an absolutely outstanding performer."² Famous players Jeroen Corneillie (soprano cornet player of Brassband Willebroek in Belgium)³ and Ryan Sharp (soprano player of Fountain City Brass Band) both choose to play on a Besson soprano cornet.

Schilke

Schilke is highly regarded for its high-pitched instruments, including the E-flat and piccolo trumpets. The E-flat soprano cornet is one of the largest selling Schilke cornets among all of the eight traditional shepherd's crook design cornet models. Unlike other Schilke products, the soprano cornet doesn't have a model number. Schilke's website states, "Our E-flat cornet is regarded as the definitive soprano in the world due to

¹ Buffet Crampon, "Sovereign 924G."

² Ibid.

³ Buffet Crampon, "Jeroen Corneillie," accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.besson.com/artist/jeroen-corneillie/>.

its uniformity in intonation and timbre. It allows a greater sense of security and ease in the upper register when performing the virtuosic demands in a brass band. Also available with the beryllium bell option for quicker response and improved projection.”⁴ While many instrument makers use gold brass or yellow brass to make the bell, the beryllium bell option is a unique feature offered by Schilke.

Renold Schilke stated in his paper *The Physics of Inner Brass and the Acoustical Effects of Various Materials and Their Treatment*, “I worked out a new formula for what I term beryllium bronze. This particular material has a wonderful acoustical effect that has remarkable carrying power. Its projection of sound is quite phenomenal.”⁵ Coming from a personal perspective and understanding of what it takes to be the soprano cornet player in the band, it can be stated that having an instrument that helps the player to project sound efficiently is quite crucial. The beryllium bell made by Schilke has less sound decay from a certain distance. James Donaldson, the author of the webpage for the Schilke Loyalist described, “The beryllium bell has been the standard bell on the Schilke P5-4 (piccolo trumpet) since the early ‘80s...and as the Schilke brochure states, ‘projects very well with more of the higher overtones present...at all dynamic levels.’ Research into the projection of comparable brass and beryllium bells by Schilke found that over a given distance a drop in the sound level of 5% was recorded for the beryllium bells, compared to 12% for a brass bell.”⁶ The soprano cornets that have beryllium bells are

⁴ Schilke Music Products, Inc., “Eb Soprano Cornet,” accessed January 1, 2019, <http://www.schilkemusic.com/products/trumpets/cornets/#Eb-Soprano>.

⁵ Renold O. Schilke, “The Physics of Inner Brass and the Acoustical Effects of Various Materials and Their Treatment,” The Schilke Loyalist, accessed January 1, 2019, http://everythingtrumpet.com/schilke/Brass_Clinic.html.

⁶ James F. Donaldson, “Bell, slide and finish options,” The Schilke Loyalist, accessed January 1, 2019, http://everythingtrumpet.com/schilke/Bells_slides_and_finish.html.

marked with a small “B” stamped on the ferrule on the bell tail closest to the first valve casing.⁷

The Schilke soprano cornet has the same leadpipe as the Schilke P5-4 piccolo trumpet and the same small bell as the E3L trumpet.⁸ It is not a coincidence that the Schilke soprano cornet uses the same parts as its other iconic models, as is explained by the origin of this instrument. Former principal trumpet of the London Symphony, Howard Snell, was present at the creation of the E-flat cornet; one of his former students, David King, who was also a world-renowned cornetist and brass band conductor, told the story:

“I was playing for a brass band called Desford Colliery which was conducted by Howard Snell. At this time the national brass band championships were sponsored by Boosey and Hawkes. Howard had always used a Schilke three valve E-flat trumpet in place of a soprano cornet as the tuning was much better. Boosey and Hawkes, fearing that this might catch on and harm sales of their own soprano (which was awful!) banned the use of trumpets for the championship. Howard then phoned Mr. Schilke himself and asked him to build a soprano cornet. Schilke said that he had never tried but would have a go. Nothing more was heard until a year or so later, wrapped up in brown paper and packaging, arrived the little gold-plated soprano cornet. It was the finest soprano cornet ever built and Schilke soon started selling one to every major band in the country.”⁹

Some of the most preeminent soprano cornet players have chosen to play on a Schilke instrument. Legendary soprano cornetist Peter Roberts said in an interview that he switched from a Besson Class A soprano to Schilke’s model in 1983 and has continued playing the instrument since then.¹⁰ The Schilke soprano cornet with a

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ James F. Donaldson, “Schilke Cornets,” The Schilke Loyalist, accessed January 1, 2019, <http://everythingtrumpet.com/schilke/Cornets.html>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *4BarsRest*, “4BR Meets the King: Peter Roberts.”

beryllium bell was also chosen by the University of Georgia when the school started its own British-style brass band.

Stomvi

Spanish brass instrument maker Stomvi has released the wonderful Titán soprano cornet in recent years. It is currently being used by top players including Steve Stewart of the Cory Band, National Championship of Great Britain ‘Best Soloist’ winner Paul Richard of the Flowers Band,¹¹ and Martin Irwin, the newly-appointed soprano player in the famous Black Dyke Band.¹² As implied by the brand’s slogan “Art & Technology,” the making of this instrument indeed reflects the company’s aesthetic and acoustic design concepts. From the onyx-insert valve buttons to the silver-plated 1000 thousandth finish,¹³ the appearance of the instrument is splendid. Not many people know that the founder of Stomvi, Vicente Honorato Ibáñez, started his business as a manufacturer of fine jewelry before devoting himself to the business of making brass instruments.¹⁴ A successful instrument cannot merely rely on its looks – the playability and sound are the core aspects sought by players when it comes to buying a new instrument.

The Stomvi soprano cornet offers two different leadpipes, #8 (cornet shank) and #21 (trumpet shank), so that players can choose to play the instrument with either a cornet or trumpet mouthpiece.¹⁵ Besides the regular finishing option most of the brands

¹¹ *4BarsRest*, “Get your hands on a Stomvi – but be quick,” accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.4barsrest.com/news/detail.asp?id=21209>.

¹² *4BarsRest*, “Irwin looks forward to high wire role at Dyke,” accessed January 6, 2019, <https://4barsrest.com/news/detail.asp?id=30079>.

¹³ Stomvi, “Titán Eb Cornet.”

¹⁴ Stomvi, “Company,” accessed January 6, 2019, <https://stomvi.com/en/stomvi/company>.

¹⁵ Stomvi, “Titán Eb Cornet.”

offer, Stomvi also supplies different bell options to players: Bellflex, Gold Brass, and Solid Copper. Here is the description of the three different kinds of bells from the Stomvi website:

Bellflex: The brightest sound, most suited to orchestra and wind band use.
 Gold Brass: More depth and warmth in medium and quiet dynamic. Still achieving a good bright sound at loud dynamics. Well suited to brass band orchestra. Probably the most versatile option
 Solid Copper: Warmest, darkest and most mellow sound. Ideally suited to the brass band and solo work.¹⁶

Over the past forty years, trumpet manufacturers have been constantly learning the scientific side of the instrument to incrementally improve its playability, resulting in many innovations in design. O-rings and heavy bottom valve caps are two of those innovations. Stomvi recently introduced their own design of bottom valve caps: MaxiClapper. This odd-looking valve cap is used on the soprano cornet as well. It is advised that the MaxiClapper be pitched a sixth above key of the instrument.¹⁷ According to Stomvi, it adds “dynamic comfort that widely eases the performance,”¹⁸ “improves the sound emission and the passage of the note,”¹⁹ and gives the horn “a greater volume to the harmonics, from note to note, achieving a sound implosion.”²⁰ In 2016, soprano legend Peter Roberts was asked to play a concert with the Grimethorpe Reunion Band. He played on a Stomvi soprano instrument with the MaxiClappers and commented, “there was a sweet mellowness to the sound, ease of blowing and no harshness or

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Stomvi, “MaxiClapper,” accessed January 6, 2019, <https://stomvi.com/en/products/complements/trumpet/1159-maxiclapper>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

brittleness. There seems to be a centralization of the pitch of the notes...and seasoned players remarked at the quality of sound and centralization of the notes...I could have done with this instrument 30 years ago!”²¹

Yamaha

As one of the largest leading wind instrument manufacturers, Yamaha makes soprano cornets ranging from the student model (YCR-2610III) to the professional one (YCR-8620). Although the student model is not available in North America anymore, it can still be purchased in other parts of the world, including Asia and Europe. The Yamaha professional line cornet is branded as “Neo,” and its professional line trumpet is labeled “Xeno.” The Neo soprano cornet is introduced by Yamaha as “...designed to provide comfort and security when performing in the high register while maintaining a beautiful warm sound in any range. The intonation is incredibly accurate and the cornet plays with an even, nimble response...”²² This particular instrument features a “thinner and lighter bell [that] allows for free resonance, excellent control and flexibility.”²³ The curved leadpipe with sleeve “provides the correct amount of resistance while allowing the player to achieve a full and warm tone”²⁴ according to Yamaha webpage.

Although the Neo soprano cornet was designed in the early twenty-first century, it does not feature a large bore size, as many other contemporary brands do. Compared to

²¹ Peter Roberts, “Stomvi Titan,” *Brass Band World*, accessed January 6, 2019, http://www.brassbandworld.co.uk/reviews/478/stomvi-titan?fbclid=IwAR12AfL5W5p5dGmGy8n894_ENmwkn9uArIM0OSBrxKWBRpcta0ST-iy9RIg.

²² Yamaha Corporation, “YCR-8620S Eb Cornets,” accessed January 5, 2019, https://usa.yamaha.com/products/musical_instruments/winds/cornets/ycr-8620/index.html#product-tabs.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

other popular brands like Besson (0.460’’) ²⁵ and Stomvi (0.453’’) ²⁶ the bore size of a Neo soprano is only 0.445, ²⁷ which is marked as medium-large in terms of Yamaha’s standard. Different companies have their own standards and measurements in terms of bore size. For instance, Schilke’s soprano cornet is listed as having a medium-size bore, but the measurement is 0.450. ²⁸

In the testing review written by *4BarsRest*, a leading online brass band magazine, the Yamaha Neo soprano earned 92 points out of 100. The sound, design, playability, and intonation were praised by the author. ²⁹ The success of the Neo line of cornets does not come from nothing. In the past, the design team of the whole line of instruments was actively involved with some of the top cornet experts, such as Russell Gray, Philip McCann, and David King. ³⁰ In the review written by *4BarsRest*, the author mentions that Peter Roberts was involved in the instrument development as well. ³¹ That may also explain why the Yamaha soprano cornet has a wonderful quality of sound.

Besides the four soprano cornets discussed in this chapter, there are still many other wonderful soprano cornet manufacturers. Nevertheless, these four brands are the most common horns being used. The growth of the British Brass Band in the world has also inspired more and more manufacturers to make soprano cornets. Some other famous

²⁵ Buffet Crampon, “Sovereign 924G,” accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.besson.com/en/instruments/cornets/sovereign-be924/>.

²⁶ Stomvi, “Titán Eb Cornet,” accessed January 5, 2019, <https://stomvi.com/en/products/instruments/cornets/d-eb/1125-tit%C3%A1n-eb-cornet>.

²⁷ Yamaha Corporation, “YCR-8620S Eb Cornets.”

²⁸ Schilke Music Products, Inc., “Eb Soprano Cornet.”

²⁹ *4BarsRest*, “4BR Roadtest: Yamaha Xeno Soprano-YCR8620,” accessed January 5, 2019, <http://www.4barsrest.com/reviews/products/inst026.asp#.XDDs41VKipo>.

³⁰ Yamaha Corporation, “A new chapter begins in Yamaha’s Neo story,” accessed January 5, 2019, https://europe.yamaha.com/en/news_events/2014/yamaha_neo_baritone.html.

³¹ *4BarsRest*, “4BR Roadtest.”

soprano cornets brands include Getzen, Eclipse, Blackburn, Courtois, and CarolBrass. In 2018, Portland, Oregon-based custom trumpet maker Monette made their first E-flat “Cornette.”

The Mouthpiece

When trumpet players talk about mouthpieces, it is like opening Pandora’s box. There seems to be no end in terms of searching for the perfect mouthpiece. However, mouthpiece choice does matter quite a bit to soprano cornet players. With the plethora of various brands and models, it is easy for young players to get lost in the “ocean” of mouthpieces. The goal should always be to find the one that gets the job done and makes your playing easier. Since every player has unique dental structures and lips, it is impossible to define a certain size of mouthpiece as “the one” for soprano cornet. The sizes soprano players use vary from regular trumpet sizes to the smallest mouthpiece you can imagine! The best way to find a good match is to try a mouthpiece for a few days or weeks, then make changes as necessary. Trumpet pedagogue William Vacchiano uses a brilliant metaphor for mouthpiece selection: he compares the selection process to finding the correct shoes for your feet and choosing glasses for your eyes.³²

Alliance Brass

The mouthpieces from British maker Alliance Brass, initially designed for Besson Brass instruments, were introduced to the world in 2006 by British cornet soloist Roger

³² Shook.

Webster.³³ Their product categories clearly show that the company focuses on producing British Brass Band styles of mouthpieces. Famous cornet players Richard Marshall (Principal Cornet of the Black Dyke Band) and Philip Cobb (Principal Trumpet of the London Symphony) are both Alliance Brass artists. Like Sparx, Alliance Brass makes models specifically for soprano cornet. The three models are S, S+ and the Bert van Thienen Signature Series, described below:

Table 1: Selected Alliance Soprano Cornet Mouthpieces

Model	Description
S	A new design for soprano cornet players. Brilliant sound! ³⁴
S+	Slightly brighter tone than the S model. Clear, lively sound with a touch of brilliance. This mouthpiece is a little wider in cup diameter than the S, but the cup depth is about 0.5mm shallower. It also has a slightly bigger bore, giving a big, bright sound. ³⁵
Bert van Thienen	Developed with Bert van Thienen. An ideal soprano mouthpiece. Shallow cup and a 3.6mm bore. Scintillating sound. Also great for any Piccolo Trumpet with a cornet receiver. ³⁶

There are many more mouthpiece brands than the five mentioned here. It is important to keep in mind that balance is very important in terms of choosing a mouthpiece. We should always look for equipment that makes our playing easier and better, but also consider that the player creates the music, not the mouthpiece.

³³ Alliance Brass, “About,” accessed January 8, 2019, <https://www.alliancebrassltd.com/about/>.

³⁴ Alliance Brass, “Soprano Cornet S Mouthpiece – Silver Plated,” accessed January 8, 2019, <https://www.alliancebrassltd.com/product/soprano-cornet-s-mouthpiece-silver-plated/>.

³⁵ Alliance Brass, “Soprano Cornet S+ Mouthpiece – Silver Plated.”

³⁶ Alliance Brass, “Soprano Cornet Bert van Thienen Mouthpiece – Silver Plated Body with Gold Cup and Rim,” accessed January 8, 2019, <https://www.alliancebrassltd.com/product/soprano-cornet-bert-van-thienen-mouthpiece-silver-plated-body-with-gold-cup-and-rim/>.

Vincent Bach

American brass manufacturer Vincent Bach has been an iconic figure in the instrument-making world. The company started as a mouthpiece workshop in New York, where the mouthpieces were made at a rate of only one per day in 1919.³⁷ Over the years, their brand has grown to offer more than sixty different sizes of mouthpieces made for trumpets and cornets. In their manual, Bach considered soprano cornet mouthpieces in the same category as piccolo trumpet mouthpieces.³⁸ For this reason, most of their piccolo trumpet mouthpieces may also be considered for use on the soprano cornet. Some soprano cornet mouthpiece sizes recommended by Bach are 7E, 7EW, 10 ½ E, 10 ½ EW and 10 ¾ EW. However, there are many more sizes of mouthpieces that work for soprano cornet depending on the player. The great Peter Roberts played on a Mount Vernon Bach 17C cornet mouthpiece for his entire career. The following table 2 is a sample of the models and descriptions of the mouthpieces mentioned above:

³⁷ Vincent Bach Corporation, *Embouchure and Mouthpiece Manual* (Mount Vernon, NY, 1954), 5.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 37.

Table 2: Selected Bach Soprano Cornet Mouthpieces

Model	Description
No. 7E	This mouthpiece has an extra shallow E-flat soprano trumpet (or cornet) cup and produces a very crisp, penetrating tone that sparkles in the extreme high register. ³⁹
No. 7EW	This mouthpiece also has an E-flat soprano trumpet (or cornet) cup and the description of the 7E mouthpiece also applies here. Suitable for players who are accustomed to playing with much pressure, doing extremely hard work in dance orchestra or parades, and mostly in the high register. ⁴⁰ The W stands for a wider rim diameter.
No. 10 ½ E	This model produces the same scintillating tone as the No. 7E. It “sparkles” on high tones and is given preference by players with weak lips who have to play much in the high register. Ideal for “musical acrobatics,” also for high E-flat soprano cornet or trumpet, also for piccolo trumpet in high F. ⁴¹
No. 10 ½ EW	Cup diameter and cup shape are the same as the previous model No. 10 ½ E but the extra wide rim offers support to players who have soft, fleshy lips and play continually in the extreme high register. Good for tough dance work also for E-flat soprano trumpet or cornet and for piccolo trumpet in high F. ⁴²
No. 10 ¾ EW	Shallower than No. 10 ¾ CW to produce a very penetrating, glittering tone. For extreme high register work, and for E-flat soprano cornet. Cushion rim. ⁴³
No. 17C	A lively, clear and brilliant tone, for players with thin lips whose embouchure tires easily. ⁴⁴

Sparx

Sparx has been hailed as “the world’s finest cornet mouthpieces.”⁴⁵ They are created by founders Ted Sparks, who served as solo cornet in the Canadian Staff Band,

³⁹ Ibid, 49.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 54.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The Selmer Company, L.P., *Vincent Bach Mouthpiece manual* (Elkhart, Indiana, 1989), p.21.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 22.

⁴⁵ Sparxmusic, “Testimonials,” accessed January 8, 2019, http://www.sparxmusic.com/cnt_testimonials_reviews_4barsrest.shtml.

and Gary Radke, who designed the famous GR mouthpiece.⁴⁶ As a company that makes cornet mouthpieces exclusively, their products have been praised by players from both top brass bands and world-class orchestras. The Sparx 4E, the only soprano cornet mouthpiece offered by the company, has been used by many soprano players all over the world, as one can see from the testimonials on the website.⁴⁷ This mouthpiece is designed specifically for the requirements of the modern-day soprano player. According to 4BarsRest's review, it has a "rich, focused sound that will sail above the band when pushed and just sit on top when that little bit of decoration is required."⁴⁸

Yamaha

Yamaha trumpet and cornet mouthpieces share the same numbering system as Schilke, which dates to 1966 when Renold Schilke joined Yamaha as a brass instrument development consultant.⁴⁹ Yamaha cornet mouthpieces are made with two different shanks: short and long.⁵⁰ The 6B4L mouthpiece (L stands for long shank) comes standard with the purchase of an instrument. Some other sizes recommended by Yamaha are 7D4dS and 8D2S (S stands for short shank). The following table is a size comparison to other brands and the description as explained by the Yamaha company:⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Yamaha Corporation, "History of Yamaha Wind Instruments," accessed January 7, 2019, <https://usa.yamaha.com/products/contents/winds/50th/index.html>.

⁵⁰ Yamaha Corporation, "Cornet Mouthpieces," accessed January 8, 2019, https://usa.yamaha.com/products/musical_instruments/winds/mouthpieces/cornets/index.html.

⁵¹ Yamaha Corporation, *Mouthpieces for Brass & Woodwind Instruments* (Japan, 2012), 10.

Table 3: Selected Yamaha Soprano Cornet Mouthpieces

Model	Comparable size	Description
6B4	Bach 17C	Small inner rim diameter. Suitable for playing high notes. ⁵²
7D4d	Denis Wick S	Small inner rim diameter, flat and wide for extended endurance. Bright, round tone. Outstanding high tones. ⁵³
8D2	Denis Wick S larger rim diameter	Small inner rim diameter with a relatively deep cup. Soft yet lyrical tone that is excellent for playing in the high range. ⁵⁴

Denis Wick

British manufacturer Denis Wick is a world-famous maker of instrument accessories. Their products vary from mouthpieces to mutes. The cornet mouthpieces they make have been used by brass band players all over the world, and in recent years, several new mouthpiece designs have been introduced to complement the classic model. The new models are called Heavy Top, Heritage, and Ultra. However, only Heritage has the “S” size for soprano cornet along with the classic model. According to the information from Denis Wick website, the Heritage model gives the player “maximum sensitivity and response with clearer overtones and improved range.”⁵⁵

Mutes

Because the brass band is a homogeneous-sounding ensemble due to the fact that it is made up solely of brass instruments, the use of different types of mutes becomes

⁵² Ibid, 16.

⁵³ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁵ Denis Wick Products, “Heritage Cornet Mouthpiece - Silver Plated,” accessed January 8, 2019, <https://www.deniswick.com/product/heritage-cornet-mouthpiece-silver-plated/>.

extremely important in brass band composition. Different types of mutes bring the band various colors and timbres, which enriches the sonority of the group and gives the composer greater opportunity to express his or her musical ideas.

Although the soprano cornet is not as mainstream an instrument as the trumpet, there are still several types of mutes available for its use. Famous brass accessory manufacturer Denis Wick produces multiple soprano cornet mutes including straight mute, cup mute, practice mute, and wooden straight mute. German musical instrument company Arnold Stölzel manufactures a wah-wah mute for the soprano cornet, which can easily be found online. In comparison to the trumpet, the soprano cornet does not have a wide variety of brands of mutes. Some other soprano cornet mute brands are Peter Gane and Wallace mutes.

My Personal Choice for Instrument and Mouthpiece

In the University of Georgia British Brass Band, the equipment I am using is a Schilke soprano cornet with beryllium bell and a Bach Corp 17C cornet mouthpiece. The Schilke soprano cornet has a sound blended with warmth and brilliance, as well as decent intonation. However, the resistance of the instrument may vary according to the technique of different players. For instance, the blow of the instrument was slightly more restricted to me at first, therefore, the slides of the instruments were chamfered slightly to gain a more even and open feeling of blowing.

Finding a soprano cornet mouthpiece that both feels and functions wonderfully might take players some time. I started to experiment with using the Bach 17C cornet

mouthpiece after I read the interview with Peter Roberts.⁵⁶ This size of mouthpiece is very rarely used in modern days because of its relatively small rim diameter compared to most regular trumpet mouthpieces. However, the small rim diameter offers players a certain ease in the high register, while the relatively deep cup (compared to a shallow Bach E cup) still allows players to produce a warm and singing tone. Learning how to play with a full and pleasing sound on a small mouthpiece has been challenging as well as beneficial. Although the small rim diameter helps players with range and endurance, there is also less room to compensate than with a bigger mouthpiece, which requires players to gain more accurate execution. Choosing a mouthpiece is very personal; the goal for us is to prioritize finding something adequate for the job, then to take playing comfort into account. Playing the soprano cornet chair in a brass band not only improves the common trumpet techniques we use, but also greatly helps players to build their confidence on the stage.

In the appendix section, some of the most highly-regarded soprano cornetists in the world have shared their personal choices, including instrument and mouthpiece selections, so readers will gain a variety of references.

⁵⁶ *4BarsRest*, “4BR Meets the King: Peter Roberts.”

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APPENDIX A

NOTABLE SOPRANO CORNET PLAYERS

The Top 10 Soprano Cornet Players of All Time posted by *4barsRest*:

Number	Name	Brass Band Associations
1	Peter Roberts	Grimethorpe Colliery Band; Yorkshire Building Society Band; Black Dyke Band; Brass Band of Battle Creek
2	Charlie Cook	Foden's Band
3	Brian Evans	CWS Manchester Band; Brighouse and Rastrick Band; Fairey's Band; Black Dyke Band
4	Emlyn Bryant	Fairey's Band
5	Alan Wycherley	Fairey's Band; Desford Colliery Band; Foden's Band
6	Martin Winter	Foden's Band
7	Tommy Waterman	Black Dyke Band
8	Kevin Crockford	Black Dyke Band; Grimethorpe Colliery Band; Fairey's Band
9	Bernard "Buddy" Burns	Black Dyke Band
10	Joseph Brooks	Foden's Band

Other Notable Soprano Cornet Players:

Name	Brass Band Associations
Martin Britt	Bayerische Brass Band ("3BA"); GUS Band
Jeroen Corneillie	Brassband Willebroek
Paul Duffy	Black Dyke Band
Gary Fountain	International Staff Band
Ronald Harrison	International Staff Band
Martin Irwin	Black Dyke Band; Fairey Band
Connor Lennon	Brighouse and Rastrick Band; Black Dyke Band
Benjamin Richeton	Fairey Band; Black Dyke Band
Paul Richards	Flowers Band
Ryan Sharp	Fountain City Brass Band
Steve Stewart	Cory Band; Kirkintilloch Band
Bert Van Thienen	Cory Band; Paris Brass Band; Brassband Willebroek
Christopher Ward	New York Staff Band

APPENDIX B

NOTABLE SOPRANO CORNET RECORDINGS

This list consists of soprano cornet solo recordings and brass band recordings featuring soprano cornet solos. (Recordings with asterisks include pieces mentioned in Chapter 4)

Recording	Soprano Cornetist	Label
Ad Optimum *	Peter Roberts	Mirasound
Dedications *	Brian Evans	Kirklees
Legend *	Peter Roberts	Egon
Over the Horizon *	Steve Stewart	Doyen
Soprano Legends *	Peter Roberts; Kevin Crockford; Alan Wycherley	Doyen
Stratos *	Paul Richards	World of Brass
The Kingdom Triumphant *	Kevin Ashman	SP&S
Two Part Invention	Michelle Ibbotson	ObrassoRecords

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEWS¹

Martin Britt

Soprano Cornet of the Bayerische Brass Band

1. Did you start immediately on soprano cornet or cornet/trumpet?

I started on trumpet but was asked aged 11 if I'd like to play Sop in a youth Brass Band. I continued to play trumpet alongside sop in bands (graduated from Royal Academy of Music on trumpet)

2. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

To enhance the harmonic range of the band, to create excitement in the band sound and to act as violin, oboe, and especially flute in colour, as well as 1st trumpet and lead.

3. What is your favorite soprano cornet solo or what is your favorite band piece from soprano cornet point of view?

I don't particularly like the instrument as a solo instrument with band, much prefer unaccompanied solos (Syrinx, Debussy, Bach string music such as the Partitas).

¹ Answers from this section are transcribed exactly as received from the interviewees.

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists? Is there any other inspiration other than soprano cornet players?

Martin Winter

Craig Bennett

Tracey Redfern

Kevin Crockford

Alan Wycherley

My main influences are James Watson, Iain Balmain (Bb trumpet players) and David Staff (Natural trumpet)

5. Have you had any specific/significant challenges with the instrument, how did you overcome them?

The mental challenge of consistency whether feeling confident or not. I've learned a lot through teaching as it makes you think about how you do what you do, and through applying psychological techniques of Special Forces.

All of those aspects are based on simplification, removing all the noise around "how to play a brass instrument".

6. What advice would you pass on to someone who is beginning to play the soprano cornet?

You have a choice to either enjoy your playing or to worry every time you perform. Chose enjoyment, you'll have more fun and it'll be obvious to everyone who hears you.

Back to basics:

i. It works on air so breath

ii. Use fast air not lots of air, by using your tongue to speed up the air

iii. Take out ALL of the extraneous movements from your chops

7. What equipment (cornet and mouthpiece) do you use? Have you ever used piccolo trumpet to play the soprano cornet part?

I'm a Schilke Artist: Schilke B bell and a Schilke 14B. Whilst I love playing a picc, it rarely has a place in a brass band. If you're playing a picc, the band is now a brass ensemble. The sound is simply wrong and with a reasonable range of up to high Eb on a sop, there really isn't any need to compromise on the Brass Band sound.

Stephen Bulla

World-renowned Composer/Arranger

Former Chief Arranger for “The President’s Own” Marine Band

1. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band? / What sound or characteristics are you looking for when you are composing or conducting?

There are many characteristics that I look for from the Eb Soprano Cornet as a composer. I often will use it to highlight inner lines, for example an octave above the Eb Horns. Also, rather than doubling the solo cornets all the time, I will judiciously use the soprano to reinforce only certain parts of the solo cornet lines. Sometimes an octave above, sometimes in unison for strength at the top. A third thought relates to the sound characteristic of the instrument. This needs to be a player that knows how to blend into a cornet section, avoiding playing too bright or harsh in any way. Much like a good brass band bass trombone player, the tasteful soprano player should know when to “turn on the juice” or lay back and enhance the section.

2. With the current trends of brass band compositions, do you expect the role of soprano cornet to change?

No. The role of the soprano player need not change, just as the standardized brass band instrumentation need not change. The soprano will continue to function as a solo instrument (like flugelhorn and bass trombone) that provide a composer with specialized tools both for effect and color in scoring. Of course every player achieves this in varying degrees of success.

3. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists; what is some of your favorite soprano repertoire?

Favorite Eb Soprano cornetists:

- *Peter Roberts*
- *Brian Evans*
- *Alan Wycherley*
- *Kevin Crockford*
- *Steve Stewart*
- *Gary Fountain*
- *Michael Delaune*
- *Ryan Sharp*

Favorite Eb Soprano solos:

- *The Higher Plane*
- *Rhapsody for Soprano Cornet*
- *High Fidelity*
- *Solos by Peter Graham*
- *Solos by Phil Sparke*
- *Piper of Dundee (Horn)*

Stephen Cobb

Bandmaster of the International Staff Band

1. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

My sense is that the role of the soprano cornet (player) is a microcosm of the brass band as a whole in the past the soprano player was there to provide colour , additional range ,and additional volume , particularly in the upper register , supporting the solo cornet section, and its principal cornet player in particular. However, the music brass bands are required to play these days has changed significantly, and for all of us involved in banding this has had an impact on how we approach our respective roles within the band. For the soprano cornet(player) this means an often more robust style of playing when required, an ability to play in different styles, and, in my view, be prepared to have more technical and soloistic challenges to deal with.

2. What sound or characteristics are you looking for when you are composing or conducting?

As a conductor (and also a player) I am essentially wanting a soprano player to produce a warm, round sound - sound is so important! Given the fact that the instrument is often a "solo" instrument, I'd consider a good note production and an ability to play in tune (understanding the vagaries of the soprano instrument on certain notes!) are important. Technique is increasingly important in current repertoire too.

3. With the current trends of brass band compositions, do you expect the role of soprano cornet to change?

I've probably covered some of this already, but I think the soprano cornet has become a far more solo instrument than it once was (as has the flugel horn). Both within competitions /contests and concert repertoire more demands are placed on the soprano cornet player in a brass band - to some degree with range but definitely in the area of facility and technique. It may be that for now the expectations placed on players will stay as they are, but during a time when our repertoire seems to be very rhythmically driven rather than by inventiveness and form who knows....

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists; what is some of your favorite soprano repertoire?

I don't really have favourite players on any instrument - nor do I tend to compare players on any instrument. In my formative years however, I used to love hearing a former soprano cornet player in The International Staff Band player - his name was Ron Harrison. I appreciated his body of sound and his ability to play (largely) in tune. By the way, he was also a lovely Christian man who I had great respect for. Of the current generation of soprano players "out there" I have a very high regard for the playing of Gary Fountain, the current soprano player in the ISB - I hear him every week and he is a special player in my view.

Repertoire for soprano is still limited but for me Flowerdale (Philip Sparke) is a wonderful solo for the instrument. Stephen Bulla's Higher Plane also works extremely well.

Peter Graham

World-renowned Brass Band Composer

1. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

1) Additional colour and extension of register

2) Support for solo cornet upper register

2. What sound or characteristics are you looking for when you are composing or conducting?

Simply ensuring that the sound blends with the rest of the cornet section.

Characteristic band sound is changing in Europe.

3. With the current trends of brass band compositions, do you expect the role of soprano cornet to change?

I can see potential for two soprano cornets becoming the norm. Already in certain competitions (eg. European Championships) 2 are often employed because of the demands of contest repertoire.

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists; what is some of your favorite soprano repertoire?

Can't say I have any particular favourites. The players I have worked with/heard over the years who stand out include Peter Roberts and Alan Wycherley.

Currently Gary Fountain impresses. I'm not familiar with solo repertoire.

William Himes

World-renowned Composer/Former Bandmaster of the Chicago Staff Band

1. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

Typically, the soprano has the same relationship to the cornets as the piccolo to the flutes. It most often adds glistening octaves to the cornet line and at times, reinforces the solo cornet's upper register. Another common function is to duplicate in inner line in lower parts (i.e., horns, euphonium) but still above the cornet line.

2. What sound or characteristics are you looking for when you are composing or conducting?

Purity of tone, occasional brilliance and clarity of line. Unless it is a solo, a straight, non-vibrato is most suited to its function.

3. With the current trends of brass band compositions, do you expect the role of soprano cornet to change?

While range and technical boundaries are always pushed from generation to generation, the unique function of the soprano cornet is fairly narrow and defined. To push its function beyond the aforementioned role (in question 1) would diminish its inherent beauty and logical purpose.

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists; what is some of your favorite soprano repertoire?

Sorry, this is out of my area of interest and expertise. I have no comment here.

John Lam

Bandmaster of the Canadian Staff Band

1. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

In my opinion, the soprano cornet has multiple roles in the brass band.

Firstly, I see it as a unique contributor to the band's overall timbre and colour.

This can apply to 'full band' sound, or it can more delicately accentuate just the cornet section, or any of the 'chamber ensembles' to be found within the brass band in any given composition.

Secondly, I view the role of soprano cornet as a unique choice for solo or 'one parts' in more involved compositions. I enjoy it when used sparingly in a delicate way, and for just the right amount of time, so that the player avoids a situation where fatigue becomes a factor. Arrangers and composers should take note of the fact that, because a soprano cornet can play high, it doesn't necessarily mean it should do so for long periods of time.

Thirdly, the soprano cornet functions as a support for the top two solo cornets. I feel this is achieved best when the soprano part is supporting an octave above, and the player shows discernment in knowing when to take a break at times when they are doubling in the same octave when timbre is not a requirement. This requires experience and maturity, but will allow the soprano cornet player extra stamina for the duration of a concert.

2. What sound or characteristics are you looking for when you are composing or conducting?

This depends on the genre of music is being performed. I mostly appreciate the soprano cornet when it achieves a lyrical, unforced effect that resembles a choral effect, and when superior intonation produces overtones that enrich the overall sound of the ensemble, or sub-ensemble within the band.

3. With the current trends of brass band compositions, do you expect the role of soprano cornet to change?

Yes. There seems to be a current preoccupation with pushing the limits of technique and range of all instruments within the brass band, and I am already seeing soprano cornet parts being pushed into a 'too high for too long' area that is not attractive to this listener. It is my opinion that some current brass band enthusiasts are looking for spectacle rather than music. Some composers and arrangers write soprano cornet parts to imitate high trumpet parts from parallel ensembles, forgetting that cornets are conical and trumpets are cylindrical. The timbre often fails to match the intent, and the desired effect is lost. Perhaps compare it to when old concert band transcriptions of orchestral classics used to assign violin parts to Eb Soprano clarinet. It was not always effective in communicating the intent of the original music.

On the other hand, some composers are recognizing the value of how effectively the soprano cornet can play the same role as oboe, or piccolo, and even consider having an additional soprano in the ensemble so duets and other small ensembles within a piece can be used effectively.

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists; what is some of your favorite soprano repertoire?

Favourite Players:

Stewart Dalrymple, formerly of London Citadel Band and now in the New York Staff Band

- *Very classy approach to the instrument and makes informed and disciplined musical choices.*

Kevin Metcalf, formerly of the Canadian Staff Band

- *Smart player and flexible in a wide variety genres. Could make the instrument sound like a Dixieland clarinet when needed. Nerves of steel.*

Favourite Soprano Cornet Repertoire:

These are excerpts, not solos. And I may email you with a couple more as I continue to think about this.

- 1) *The Call of the Righteous – Leslie Condon*
- 2) *The Children's Friend – Erik Leidzen*
- 3) *The Kingdom Triumphant – Eric Ball (more for the example of how he orchestrated it)*
- 4) *Mountain Camp – Donald Osgood (see London Citadel Band CD recording – Stewart Dalrymple on soprano part...)*

Too many others to think of... I'll send you more as I recall them!

Joseph Parisi

Music Director of the Fountain City Brass Band

1. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

The soprano cornet, as the highest single voice in the brass band has the opportunity to provide beauty, power, lyricism, and flexibility to the overall brass band. In a British style brass band the soprano cornet can be lyrical voice that adds beauty to overall sound of the band with the finesse of vibrato, nuance, and musical line. This same instrument can also be the exclamation point in a more impactful moment with the obvious range, timbre, and volume aspects of its sound.

In many pieces the soprano cornet can dictate style, dynamic, and articulation. This is especially true when one looks at everything from a traditional British march to a more contemporary Big Band piece. I believe the flexibility of genre and literature and the ability to switch between various styles are strengths of a brass band. A strong soprano player will be a catalyst for dictating many of those stylistic characteristics and nuances.

2. What sound or characteristics are you looking for when you are composing or conducting?

A soprano cornet player needs to be able to know the genre in which they are playing in order to contribute to the overall sound of the group. In some instances the sound is not far from a piccolo trumpet, with a light articulative approach and sensitive to its contribution to the sound of the overall band. In other aspects, it must rise above others adding emphasis, guiding melodic content, always giving

attention to the use of vibrato (dictated by genre and style), timbre, and role with others or by itself. A soprano cornet player must have extreme variety of timbre, vibrato, dynamic, articulation, etc. It IS the HOTTEST seat in the band – definitely the most exposed in terms of consistency, independence, and stamina.

3. With the current trends of brass band compositions, do you expect the role of soprano cornet to change?

As brass banding has included more conservatory/school of music trained musicians, it appears there is a trend to vary the uses of vibrato (as compared to historical recordings of the same instrument). A good soprano cornet player will adapt based on the genre and style (as opposed to some historical recordings where the vibrato was “always on”). Although it may be à propos to recognize the immediate role and necessity of vibrato use based on the piece. Players of soprano cornet are showing great fortitude and increased ability in range and technique. This will continue to have composers demand more from them. This has been most evident as test pieces over the last two decades increase challenges to soprano players. (Take a listen to Music of the Spheres by Philip Sparke to see such demand of the player.)

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists; what is some of your favorite soprano repertoire?

The first two are tied for me....

Peter Roberts: Flowerdale On the Motley (transcription) Best live sop perf. - YBS

Brass Band – beauty and consistency

Brian Evans “Capriccio” - Sparke Solitaire—finesse, beauty, articulation

Roy Roe—Rhapsody for Eb Soprano Cornet singing vibrato with musicality

Current:

Steve Stewart One Day I'll Fly Away – Cory Band – power and energy

Marielle Rey— Valaisia Brass Band – strength and consistency in performance

*Ryan Sharp— Fountain City Brass Band – American with great range, style,
variety in sound*

Paul Richards

Soprano Cornet of the Flowers Band

1. Did you start immediately on soprano cornet or cornet/trumpet?

I started on Bb cornet, played that for many years, moved to Sop about 12 years ago.

2. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

Sop provides range, dynamism, colour but should also be regarded as a solo instrument.

3. What is your favorite soprano cornet solo or what is your favorite band piece from soprano cornet point of view?

I love Spiriti. Best Sop part ever.

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists? Is there any other inspiration other than soprano cornet players?

Favorite sop player is Peter Roberts, all time legend. Also a huge fan of Brian Evans, who I model a lot of my playing on.

5. Have you had any specific/significant challenges with the instrument, how did you overcome them?

No specific problems playing wise, we do get asked to play higher and higher, I sometimes struggle with notes about top C, occasionally have to use a different mouthpiece to achieve the results.

6. What advice would you pass on to someone who is beginning to play the soprano cornet?

Practise, use lots of air, lots of scales and long notes, practice, air, practise!

7. What equipment (cornet and mouthpiece) do you use? Have you ever used piccolo or E-flat trumpet to play the soprano cornet part?

Stomvi Titan with large brass bell, Denis Wick Heritage S. Don't use anything else.

Benjamin Richeton

Former Soprano Cornet of the Black Dyke Band

1. Did you start immediately on soprano cornet or cornet/trumpet?

No. I started on B flat then joined the local brass band. After a few years the soprano cornet player left so I gave it a go... I believe this story is common with many soprano cornet players.

2. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

It's the cherry on the cake. It provides the top harmonic in the chord. It is like the striker in a soccer team. It needs to lurk in the dark, then stand out and strike when needed. It adds excitement and sizzle to the sound in the loud passages, and some lovely lyrical features when it's quiet. I help out many bands on all cornet seats, and it's never as exciting as sop. It can make you feel invincible when you 'nail' exposed passages, may they be high or technical, or both. It's by far the most exciting part to play in a brass band. There's something about playing soprano cornet in a brass band that's like nothing else out there in the music world...

3. What is your favorite soprano cornet solo or what is your favorite band piece from soprano cornet point of view?

The one I enjoyed playing most is On with the Motley (Vesti la giubba). I enjoy playing most test pieces, and marches.

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists? Is there any other inspiration other than soprano cornet players?

My favourite has always been Kevin Crockford. I find he has a particular sound and presence. I also admire Peter Roberts, of course, considered by many (me included) to be the best soprano cornet player ever. I believe Paul Richards to be the best soprano cornet in the world right now, he has everything, a sweet lyrical sound, power, stamina, intonation.

Aside from soprano cornet players, my main inspiration is Maurice André. Every note he played was a masterpiece! I also love Chet Baker – just, it's harder to incorporate his playing into mine as it's a radically different scene.

5. Have you had any specific/significant challenges with the instrument, how did you overcome them?

Blending in, stamina, intonation... Like everybody else! Power was an issue too, as I never was a 'loud' soprano player so I had to work on that too. I always relished quiet playing though. For most soprano players, it's the opposite. All get better the longer you play in a brass band, and the higher the standard of the band you play for. Finding a good instrument is crucial, so is finding a mouthpiece that suits you.

6. What advice would you pass on to someone who is beginning to play the soprano cornet?

Lots of low notes, lots of long notes. Ascending scales and arpeggios. Work all ranges and dynamics. Keep your lip fresh always, stop playing when you get tired. Know when to play and when not to play. Team up with the repiano player, you are a team. Don't stop playing your other instruments, don't just play soprano.

7. What equipment (cornet and mouthpiece) do you use? Have you ever used piccolo or E-flat trumpet to play the soprano cornet part?

Schilke instrument and Warburton mouthpiece (roughly Bach 7C). I tried a few other soprano cornets over the years and liked the Xeno/Neo a lot but found the Stomvi to be stuffy above top A flat. I would love to try the Blackburn instrument. I was tempted to use a piccolo trumpet for the National Finals with the Fairey Band when the piece was Daphnis and Chloe, but didn't end up doing it. I believe it was against the rules...

Ryan Sharp

Soprano Cornet of the Fountain City Brass Band

1. Did you start immediately on soprano cornet or cornet/trumpet?

I did begin on trumpet. During the early portion of my trumpet-life I was largely a commercial trumpeter playing a lot of lead trumpet in big bands eventually touring as the lead trumpet player with the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus and playing on many gospel albums. I went back to graduate school and began to study classical literature and found a love of that “side” of the trumpet. It was during my DMA studies I was introduced to brass banding through my dear friends Matt Vangjel, Lee and Helen Harrelson, and my Fountain City Brass Band family. They had an opening for soprano cornet and a colleague of mine in the trumpet studio (Matt) at UM-KC asked me to check out the band, I’ve been hooked ever since!

2. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

There are so many, this is one of the things I love most about playing sop. In the span of seconds you can be playing an incredibly soft, light, nimble flute-like line then in the next phrase you have to crush an 8va phrase followed by knuckle-busting technical passages. The musical and physical flexibility is a challenge unlike any other setting I have ever encountered in music.

3. What is your favorite soprano cornet solo or what is your favorite band piece from soprano cornet point of view?

There are many pieces I love to play. Any movement from the Hymn of the Highlands is great, Wilfred Heaton's Partita is an epic masterpiece for sure, I feel like it's the best piece ever written for brass band.

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists? Is there any other inspiration other than soprano cornet players?

Peter Roberts is the king of course! Alan Wycherley is another favorite, mostly I enjoy hearing someone who surpasses the difficulty of the instrument and plays with a sweet sound. It, the sop, is an instrument that can sound terrible so easily and when someone learns to make it sing that is beautiful! It's also the pursuit of this that keeps me working my tail off!!! I listen to a lot of singers as well: Jesse Norman, Jussi Bjorling, Dieter Fischer-Dieskau, and Anna Netrebko are a few.

5. Have you had any specific/significant challenges with the instrument, how did you overcome them?

The horn itself, like other small horns, suffers from quite problematic intonation. This has been a struggle but the biggest issue is what I mentioned in the previous question. The player must learn how to sing through the instrument at all dynamic ranges and registers. It's easy to rail some high/loud passage but to perform it beautifully with elegance AND power is another matter.

6. What advice would you pass on to someone who is beginning to play the soprano cornet?

Get a tune book from the Salvation Army or the redbook or Bordogni, Conconne, etc... and learn how to sound like a flute, violin, operatic soprano. We must forget what we know about being a trumpet player, mostly but not completely, and make

sublime music. To be fair, great trumpeters do this but it seems to be something not every trumpet player strives for. My single favorite thing about British Brass band, whether it's a contesting band or a Salvation Army band, is the deep roots in hymn-tune playing. This is at the heart of the banding movement and the soprano voice is always so clearly heard on top and to an extent has to lead this approach. If I get a bit nasty that can spread down through the band.

7. What equipment (cornet and mouthpiece) do you use? Have you ever used piccolo or E-flat trumpet to play the soprano cornet part?

I've never used any other instrument to play the soprano book in a brass band, nothing else has the right sound. After working with David King I've settled on a Mt Vernon Bach 10 1/2 C. It works well for everything and has become my regular mouthpiece for everything on sop. My horn is the Besson Sovereign. It has been a good horn for me but I'm hoping to get one of the Yamaha Neo's soon, Yamaha is just making some brilliant horns now. My B-flat is a Yamaha Xeno.

Derek Smith

Former Bandmaster of the New York Staff Band

1. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

Soprano cornet is like the icing on the cake. When the range gets higher in the solo cornet part, it is sometimes easier for the soprano cornet to take those high parts to make things easier for the solo cornets.

2. What sound or characteristics are you looking for when you are composing or conducting?

Sometimes the soprano cornet will continue the phrase from the solo cornet into the upper register. You don't want to hear that melody getting traded off. You want to hear one continuous line.

3. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists; what is some of your favorite soprano repertoire?

Ronald Harrison of the International Staff Band

Arnold Hulteen of the New York Staff Band

Philip Ditmer of the New York Staff Band

Benjamin Richeton of the Black Dyke Band

Arnold Hulteen and Philip Ditmer were both cornet players drafted to be soprano cornet players.

Philip Smith

William F. & Pamela P. Prokasy Professor in the Arts

Hugh Hodgson School of Music at the University of Georgia

Bandmaster of the University of Georgia British Brass Band

1. What sound or characteristics are you looking for when you are composing or conducting?

I am looking for the soprano cornet player to be able to blend in the color of cornet section, and also have the ability to add the shimmering color and sound on top of the band when it is written or required. A lead trumpet player is not the kind of soprano cornet player I am looking for. Color, beauty of sound, and good intonation are the criteria. The soprano cornet player should also be able to boost the top part of solo cornet row, so that they can relax a little bit. There are a few times soprano cornet needs to be able to jump out and become the lead voice. Music such as Triumph of Peace is a good example, but I don't want the soprano cornet to be bold and blast all the time. I prefer it to be an extension of the solo cornet row.

2. With the current trends of brass band compositions, do you expect the role of soprano cornet to change?

Although I am not up to date on all the current brass band repertoire, from what I understand and music I have heard, there are stronger and stronger demands being placed on the entire cornet section. Cornet parts used to have occasional high Ds, but now we began to see regular high Es. Same for soprano cornet, As and Bs were the regular, high C was rarely written. Nowadays regular high Cs

and even Ds are found. The limits have constantly been pushed, which puts great stress on the players. From my understanding, in some recent things bands have been requested to use two soprano cornet players. I don't know whether or not I like that idea, obviously if you are going to play that piece you have to do that. I don't necessarily think that a brass band is going to go to a position of expanding the section to always include two sopranos. I don't think that's necessary. I wish composers wouldn't write for two sopranos.

3. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists; what is some of your favorite soprano repertoire?

Ronald Harrison of the International Staff Band

Gary Fountain of the International Staff Band

Chris Ward of the New York Staff Band

Peter Roberts

Steve Stewart

Soprano Cornet of the Cory Band

1. Did you start immediately on soprano cornet or cornet/trumpet?

I started on cornet at the age of 8 years old. Moved through the different positions within a cornet section and landed on sop at 15. By that time I was starting my journey as a trumpet player so the move onto sop was quite a natural progression.

2. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

Mostly to blend in with the cornet section and come over the top when required! The when required bit is very important! Also to deliver the solos that are written to the best of my ability.

3. What is your favorite soprano cornet solo or what is your favorite band piece from soprano cornet point of view?

The title track from my solo album Over The Horizon is my personal favourite. For very personal reasons. My favourite test piece for sop would probably have to be Spiriti by Thomas Doss.

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists? Is there any other inspiration other than soprano cornet players?

No particular favourite sop players. I have admiration for anyone who takes up the challenge! It is a significant challenge! I find inspiration mostly in other instruments. From voice to violin.

5. Have you had any specific/significant challenges with the instrument, how did you overcome them?

Practice and experimentation. I'm very fortunate that I had a decent career on trumpet. Over the years you learn to think on your feet! Always expect the unexpected and always remember there is more than one way to skin a cat!

6. What advice would you pass on to someone who is beginning to play the soprano cornet?

More air!!!

7. What equipment (cornet and mouthpiece) do you use? Have you ever used piccolo or E-flat trumpet to play the soprano cornet part?

I'm very lucky to be a Stomvi Artist. So they provide my Sops. Not used a piccolo or Eb trumpet for a long time in bands.

Ronald Waiksnoris

Former Bandmaster of the New York Staff Band

Music Director of the Imperial Brass

1. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band? / What sound or characteristics are you looking for when you are composing or conducting?

As a conductor, I am looking for color from the soprano cornet. Pitch and rhythm are crucial. Dynamic range is very important. There are times for the soprano cornet to dominate and times for the soprano cornet to simply provide the upper overtones. A fine soprano cornet player makes a great band better. A weak soprano cornet player is often a detriment to even the best bands. Above all, I look for a soprano cornet player to have nerves of steel.

2. With the current trends of brass band compositions, do you expect the role of soprano cornet to change?

Current trends in brass band competition call for the soprano to extend range, dynamics and endurance. I'm not in favor of the soprano being used as a "lead trumpet".

3. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists; what is some of your favorite soprano repertoire?

I have appreciated many soprano cornet players through the years. My favorites come from the British bands. I'm sure other European bands and American bands have fine exponents as well. Soprano players of the International Staff Band of The Salvation Army that I have enjoyed very much are Ron Harrison and

Gary Fountain. Also from the British brass band scene, Peter Roberts of Black Dyke and Battle Creek, Kevin Crockford of Grimethorpe, Black Dyke and Fairey Band fame; Alan Wycherley of the Fairey Band and most recently, powerhouse player, Steve Stewart the virtuoso player of the Cory Band.

Solo repertoire for soprano cornet is limited but I would suggest the following pieces as favorites: Demelza, the Lord's Prayer, Flowerdale, and the Higher Plane.

Ronald Waiksnoris

Soprano Cornet of the Montclair Citadel Band

Former Principal Cornet of the New York Staff Band

1. Did you start immediately on soprano cornet or cornet/trumpet?

I started on Bb cornet.

2. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

I believe the most important role is to provide color and class.

3. What is your favorite soprano cornet solo or what is your favorite band piece from soprano cornet point of view?

Peter Graham's Pastorale is a solo I enjoy very much. It's in a good range and is based on words that are meaningful to me. The band piece I have enjoyed the most is Leslie Condon's The Call of the Righteous, which has an important exposed technical solo for soprano within the piece.

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists? Is there any other inspiration other than soprano cornet players?

See other set of questions for soprano players. I have a very eclectic taste in enjoying both serious and pop music. All good musicians are an inspiration. I try not to listen too critically to people but learn from the good aspects of their performance.

5. Have you had any specific/significant challenges with the instrument, how did you overcome them?

When I first played soprano cornet in the 1960s, intonation, sound and range were problems. Those problems were sorted out by obtaining a first class instrument.

6. What advice would you pass on to someone who is beginning to play the soprano cornet?

First of all, practice in short spurts. Practice with a tuner and a metronome. Listen to recordings of good soprano players. Leave behind “trumpet” concepts, as the soprano cornet is unique. Don’t give up too soon (you will be tempted).

7. What equipment (cornet and mouthpiece) do you use? Have you ever used piccolo or E-flat trumpet to play the soprano cornet part?

I play a Schilke soprano cornet and a “no name” mouthpiece supplied to me by a friend that I have stayed with for many years (if I lose it I’ll be in trouble).

I am against soprano cornetists using piccolo trumpet. It is not the proper sound in a brass band.

Christopher Ward

Former Soprano Cornet of the New York Staff Band

1. Did you start immediately on soprano cornet or cornet/trumpet?

Bb Cornet & then trumpet. My father wouldn't let me play the soprano cornet until could play my Bb Cornet properly.

2. In your opinion, what is the role of the soprano cornet in a brass band?

Soprano Cornet, Flugel Horn and Bass Trombone are the three main color instruments in the band. The Soprano Cornet should sound like a "high cornet". There are many times where a soprano player is asked to blend I into the rest of the section, and should be able to do so. Often, especially in a lyrical piece, the soprano should be the "icing on the cake". In other moments, particularly in today's repertoire, the soprano cornet needs to provide that "Brilliance" on top of the band and even drive the upper end of the band at times.

3. What is your favorite soprano cornet solo or what is your favorite band piece from soprano cornet point of view?

Favorite Soprano Solo- Flowerdale (Sparke)

Favorite Band Piece for Soprano- Music of the Spheres (Sparke)

4. Who are some of your favorite soprano cornetists? Is there any other inspiration other than soprano cornet players?

Soprano- Peter Roberts, Kevin Crockford, Gordon Ward

Others- Derek Smith, Philip Smith, Chris Gekker, Richard Marshall, Jon Faddis

5. Have you had any specific/significant challenges with the instrument, how did you overcome them?

I've always loved playing the soprano cornet. The biggest challenge for me is whether or not you have a good Repiano Cornet next to you. If the person next to you has a good ear and plays in tune, your life as a soprano cornetist will be so much easier and much more enjoyable.

6. What advice would you pass on to someone who is beginning to play the soprano cornet?

Never sacrifice sound quality for squeaking out high notes. Far too many Soprano players out there play on these tiny mouthpieces in order to squeak out high notes, but their tone quality suffers tremendously. Play on as big a mouthpiece set up as you can handle. You will have to work harder, but the end result is worth it.

7. What equipment (cornet and mouthpiece) do you use? Have you ever used piccolo trumpet to play the soprano cornet part?

I use a Yamaha Neo Soprano Cornet with a Warburton 3md/ 9 backbore. I would never use a piccolo trumpet to play soprano in a brass band. The piccolo has a totally different sound.*