

The Emancipation of the Trumpet: Louis Armstrong, and the influence of jazz on 20th Century Trumpet Performance and Composition

Changing the course of history

John Wallace

Principal of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama

Abstract

This article argues that the renewed vigour of the trumpet's solo repertory in the twentieth century is directly related to its prominence in jazz, and in particular the pioneering performance style of Louis Armstrong. Following a brief scene-setting section on issues of stylistic dissemination across different historical periods, the following sections analyse Armstrong's influence, particularly in seminal recordings on both trumpet and cornet from the mid to late twenties.

...and the dead shall be raised incorruptible¹...

From around 1925, Louis Armstrong's improvised solos with the *Hot Five* and the *Hot Seven* changed the course of trumpet history. A tipping point had been reached. Relative to the slower rate of change recorded throughout most of the rest of trumpet history - *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye²* - an improvising genius unlocked the musical potential of a family of treble brass instruments whose players had been accruing technique since the Industrial Revolution. The new, extended, expressive capabilities of valved cornet and trumpet fused in one individual voice and were rapidly transmitted to every corner of the earth by the recording and broadcasting industries. The history of the trumpet has many discontinuities, and the trumpet itself has many extinct subspecies, distant cousins, and aboriginal survivors in its family tree. Nevertheless, it could be said of composers long dead, like Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), or more recently deceased, like Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), or of players who had extended the expressive powers of their instrument, from Anton Weidinger (1767-1852) onwards, that their contributions towards the evolution of the trumpet and its idiom were *raised incorruptible* in the trumpet playing of Louis Armstrong (1901-1971). Haydn's contributions towards an extended language for trumpet, in his *Trumpet Concerto in Eb* (Hoboken VIIe: 1, 1796), were long forgotten. Mahler's music did not become generally appreciated or widely known until after the advent of the long-playing record some thirty years later. The trumpet had little solo tradition outside Handel's oratorios. The gramophone

1 I Corinthians 15. 52-53, as used in *Messiah* (HWV 56), George Frideric Handel, libretto compiled by Charles Jennens. From the aria, No. 48, with trumpet obligato, 'The trumpet shall sound'. The words immediately follow the first words of the aria, 'The trumpet shall sound'.

2 I Corinthians 15. 51-52, as used in *Messiah* (HWV 56), George Frideric Handel, libretto compiled by Charles Jennens. From the recitative, No. 47, 'Behold, I tell you a mystery', preceding the aria with trumpet obligato, 'The trumpet shall sound'.

record was to popularise the old music for trumpet, just as it was popularising its new solo voice in the work of Louis Armstrong.

This article argues that the renewed vigour of the trumpet's solo repertory in the twentieth century is directly related to its prominence in jazz, and in particular the pioneering performance style of Louis Armstrong. Following a brief scene-setting section on issues of stylistic dissemination across different historical periods, the following sections analyse Armstrong's influence, particularly in performances in seminal recordings on both trumpet and cornet from the mid to late twenties.

Catching up with the present

During the course of the twentieth century the older repertory of the trumpet has been re-discovered, embracing every period of music, and this rediscovery has kept in step with a rapid forward evolution in the trumpet, its players, playing technique and its music. In the twentieth century, the trumpet's past caught up with its present.

As Louis Armstrong and a wealth of talented virtuosos were inventing the trumpet anew in jazz, players working within traditional art-music confines of the symphony orchestra and opera house, like Helmut Wobisch (1912-1980) in Vienna, or Ernest Hall (1890-1984) in London, felt emboldened to step outside their normal orchestral role to rediscover the lost solo voice of the trumpet in classical music. The first modern public performances of what is generally acknowledged to be the trumpet's finest concerto by Joseph Haydn, outside of some isolated use from around 1907 as an examination piece in the conservatoires of Brussels and Liège, date only from the late 1920s, exactly contemporaneous with the rapid ascendance of the trumpet as a solo voice in jazz.³

Armstrong's imitators and successors, from Roy Eldridge (1911-89) through Dizzy Gillespie (1917-93), Miles Davis (1926-91) to Wynton Marsalis (b.1961) and beyond, extended the range and expressiveness of the trumpet. In direct correlation, its use as a solo instrument in art music increased with each passing decade of the twentieth century. Many serious composers were attracted to the trumpet through the extended, sometimes transcendental techniques of its players in the medium of jazz. The technique required to play the trumpet in jazz is very different from the conventional methods of 'straight' classical music and this new and extended technique seems to have migrated initially from jazz player to jazz player aurally. Systematic methodology in prerequisite skills acquisition was not long in coming, however, and

3 Reine Dahlqvist, in *The Keyed Trumpet and Its Greatest Virtuoso, Anton Weidinger* (Nashville: The Brass Press, 1975), p.20, states: 'A copy of the work exists in the library of the Brussels conservatory (Bruxelles, Bibliothèque du Conservatoire royal de musique, Littera S. h=16 926) and from this the conservatory pupils played the concerto around 1907. (*Annuaire du Conservatoire royal de musique de Bruxelles 1908-09*, p.81)

Berklee College of Music, one of the most successful jazz and popular music-based schools, was founded in 1945.

Differences between the way jazz and classical trumpeters learn, however, have never been clear cut, and have become increasingly blurred over the past half-century, as more traditional conservatoires worldwide encompass their own jazz departments. Miles Davis and Wynton Marsalis both studied trumpet at the Juilliard School with William Vacchiano, former first trumpet of the New York Philharmonic. The Juilliard itself has only had a dedicated jazz department since 2001. Players themselves, throughout the present author's playing career, talked about 'legit' technique, when talking about playing the trumpet in a classical context and 'screaming' and 'freak' effects when talking about common elements of jazz trumpet playing, as though somehow these were more ephemeral, and less 'legitimate'. Nevertheless, jazz techniques are there to be learnt through practice and use, the same as any other techniques, and the sounds that the trumpet made in jazz proved to be irresistible to composers. Composers began to write ever more adventurously for the trumpet and the physical demands on the player's range and stamina became much greater, until by the 1980s and 90s, composers like Harrison Birtwistle (b.1934), Maxwell Davies (b.1934), and James Macmillan (b.1959) took for granted that players of their solo concerto-style pieces for trumpet would rise, Armstrong-like, to any challenge.⁴

A tendency towards virtuosic brass, influenced by band writing, was already widespread in Europe by the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and especially prominent in influential composers like Richard Strauss (1864-1949), and Mahler. Jazz exposed, and made commonplace, this virtuosity in the most intimate small group settings - Louis Armstrong's recorded performance of *Weather Bird*, in duo with Earl Hines on 5 December 1928, is perhaps the first trumpet and keyboard music of any substance since the two sonatas from Giovanni Buonaventura Viviani's Op. 4, of 1678. Apart from three chorale preludes of Johann Ludwig Krebs (1713 - 80), and George Enescu's (1881- 1955) *Légende* of 1906, little other duo music for trumpet and keyboard existed. This sparseness suggests that it cannot hitherto have been considered a viable combination.

Armstrong and Hines are not inhibited by the lack of precedence and improvise a timeless miniature, which, despite its brevity, can hold claim to be a turning point in the history of the trumpet. It proved that trumpet and keyboard could be made to work as a medium, and during the rest of the twentieth century composers like Hindemith (1939), Skalkottas (1943), Maxwell Davies (1955), Richard Rodney Bennett (1955), Cornelius Cardew (1955), Martinu (1955), Iain Hamilton (1966), Wuorinen (1969) composed their own essays in the medium.⁵

4 *Endless Parade* (1986), Harrison Birtwistle; *Concerto* (1988), Peter Maxwell Davies; *Epiclisis* (1993), James MacMillan.

5 Paul Hindemith: *Sonata*; Skalkottas: *Concertino*; Peter Maxwell Davies: *Sonata Op. 1*; Richard Rodney Bennett: *Parallels*; Cornelius Cardew: *Three Movements*; Bohuslav Martinu: *Sonatina*; Iain Hamilton: *Five Scenes*; Charles Wuorinen: *Nature's Concord*.

The present author was one of the first to do full-length serious trumpet and piano recitals at the Purcell Room, London, as recently as the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time it was still an uncommon phenomenon. Since then, the medium of trumpet and piano has become commonplace, as has the wedding-day ensemble of trumpet and organ, with major original works like *Okna na Marca Chagalla* (1976) by Petr Eben (b. 1929) becoming part of every trumpeter's repertory.

Comparison with an earlier turning point in trumpet history produces interesting parallels. In 1634 or 1635, Italian trumpet innovator Girolamo Fantini (1600-c. 1675), composer of eight sonatas for trumpet and organ, and author of *Modo per imparare a sonare di Tromba* (1638), gave a trumpet and organ performance for Cardinal Borghese at Rome's St Peter's Basilica with Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643).⁶ The evidence of Fantini's sonatas points to his having achieved mastery of the trumpet to an hitherto unprecedented degree, with the ability to play notes in between the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th harmonics in the low register, as well as the ability to play up to the 18th harmonic, on the natural trumpet in C. French trumpeters present in the audience at the Rome recital, however, declared his ability to 'lip' the natural harmonics flat and sharp so that they could be used to provide stepwise melody in the middle register, 'spurious' and 'disordered'. Fantini, like Armstrong 300 years later, had obviously acquired the art of lipping the trumpet's melody into any shape he wanted, playing in around, and between the notes.⁷ Many expert trumpet players develop very strong muscles around the mouth – in particular the *Orbicularis oris* – which facilitate the feeling of 'grip' on the mouthpiece and the ability to play the trumpet virtually like a kazoo – Fantini and Armstrong were probably kindred spirits who had arrived at this 'lipping' technique through different routes, and separated by three centuries.

The twenties onwards signal a period of liberation for the trumpet and its players from the limiting confines of its roles and responsibilities in the conventional orchestra. The new jazz music coming out of the United States seemed to herald the coming of a new era. It was assertive, self-confident, and the trumpet played a prominent role within it. Progressive composers and young composers in Europe latched onto this music, partly because it was subversive of traditional art-music values.

In Britain, William Walton (1902-83) rapidly became a celebrity because of his early, jazz-inflected *Façade* (1921), which has a spectacular trumpet part. In France, Parisians especially took jazz to their heart, Darius Milhaud (1892-1974), composing his jazz parody *La Création du Monde* in 1923, and *Le Hot Club de France* opening its doors in 1932.

The trumpet plays a leading role in both *Façade* and *La Création du Monde* and was an essential member of chamber ensembles chosen by other composers at this time because of its ubiquitous

6 Edward Tarr, *The Trumpet* (London: Batsford, 1988), p. 122.

7 *ibid.*, pp. 122-3.

presence in jazz. The entire nineteenth century throws up only two minor works still regularly played, in which the trumpet participates in small mixed chamber ensembles: the *Septet* (1881) by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921), and the *Military Septet* (1829) by Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837). From the 1920s, there is a steady stream, stemming directly from the emancipation of the trumpet in jazz, and the influence of jazz on serious composers, even though the language may be far removed from jazz – e.g. the *Octet* (1922-23) by Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) - or may be a parody of jazz, such as in *Kuchyňská revue* (1927) by Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959).

Another influence on the changing working patterns of many musicians, not only trumpet players, from the late 1920s and early 1930s, was the great economic Depression. This coincided with a change of entertainment patterns, when many had no option but to diversify and take any work they could get. The ‘talking picture’ was only one manifestation of the great change in communication patterns sweeping much of the then developed world. Through expedience, many trumpet players learned to play in any context and any style. Many actually enjoyed and preferred the liberation of the exuberant side of their instruments in dance-bands, in contrast to the tight rein most symphony orchestra conductors kept on their brass. The trumpeter Philip Jones (1928-2000), at the outset of his career in post-war London, would record with the Philharmonia Orchestra in the morning, and, as a matter of course, play two variety shows at a West End theatre afternoon and evening.⁸ Roy Copestake (1912 - 1979), his uncle, for many years second trumpet of the Philharmonia Orchestra, had started his career in the Bath Spa Orchestra in 1926. After a period spent playing everything from Rossini to ragtime in a silent cinema orchestra in Peckham, South London through to the early thirties, he played with Henry Hall’s dance band before the war interrupted his career. He demobbed into the Covent Garden orchestra and thence into a symphonic career.⁹

This lack of prejudice regarding musical style, idiom, and context, endures to this day amongst many symphonic brass players, and not only in Britain. It is demonstrated by the likes of Rudi Josl (b.1939), the former long-standing principal trombone of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, who for many years ran his own big bands, and Hans Gansch (b.1953), erstwhile principal trumpet of the VPO, who liked to regale customers, and infuriate managements, at the Staatsoper with a few jazz ‘licks’ before the curtain came up.¹⁰ Nevertheless, demarcation lines of style and taste between jazz and classical art music do exist in the minds of many commentators on music, and when Wynton Marsalis demonstrated he could play the trumpet in both classical and jazz contexts during his tours of the early eighties, some music critics from the classical side of the business in the German states acted as though the end of their world was nigh. Their adverse and negative attitudes were a contributing factor to his abandonment of playing the classical repertoire in public shortly afterwards.¹¹

8 Conversations with the author.

9 Conversations with the author.

10 Conversations with the author.

11 Conversations with the author.

Louis Armstrong at the turning point – the re-invention of the trumpet as a solo instrument.

Louis Armstrong started the train of events on which later players like Marsalis built. He was not alone, but he was the most prominent, the first trumpeter of the modern era to become a household name on the international stage - so much so that twenty-five years after his death his photographic image was being used in an advertising campaign selling a British government savings scheme on the London Underground. He was still instantly recognisable, a measure of his lasting historical importance. His late career as an unlikely million-selling pop star in the 'Swinging Sixties', served to draw attention to his contribution to the evolution of jazz some forty years earlier. Although he was an innovative vocalist and composer, he was always thought of primarily as a trumpet player, albeit with a larger-than-life personality.

Armstrong, sometimes known by the nicknames, *Dippermouth*, *Satchelmouth*, *Pops* and, from his 1932 visit to London, *Satchmo*, was born in poverty.¹² But he was not deprived musically. The slums of New Orleans he grew up in pulsated with music - the blues, ragtime, and an emerging music that came to be described as 'jass', before it achieved its final form, jazz. Whilst still aged in single figures, the young Louis Armstrong played every day the tin horn, a sort of bugle, to attract custom for his Jewish employer's rag-and-bone cart in the New Orleans red-light district of Storyville, between somewhat irregular bouts of school attendance. Child labour was ubiquitous amongst the African American population in the period of his upbringing. Soon he owned his own cornet, and was in thrall to the likes of King Oliver (1885-1938) and, possibly, Buddy Bolden (1877-1931). Just before entering his teens, however, the young Louis got into trouble with the law, and was dispatched to a 'Home for Colored Waifs'. During his two years in the home, his earlier dabbling on the cornet became more focused, and he joined the institution's band, eventually becoming its leader and star solo turn. His early instrumental diet consisted of marches and rags; his vocal repertoire, barbershop quartets.

Armstrong reached his prime as a musician in his early twenties and his greatest creative surge was compressed into an incredibly fertile period of about five years in his late twenties and early thirties. To the world of the mid-1920s, he and his music came from nowhere. But soon his music, of the people, was manufactured into music, for the people, by the moguls of the music industry, and his style of 'hot' jazz was heard everywhere. From around 1930 onwards his career was dictated by the vagaries of the music industry, and despite seemingly insurmountable racial prejudice, his talents as an entertainer led to his becoming one of the biggest stars in show business. His celebrity, by the end, totally overshadowed his music, but whether his earlier music would seem so central without his later elevation to celebrity is open to question. He appeared in over fifty films, relegated to a minor role in most because of a rigidly enforced colour bar. In the later films in which he appeared, like *The Glenn Miller*

12 On August 4, 1901 (and not July 4 1900, as he himself believed). See 'Louis Armstrong', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, ed. by Barry Kernfeld (London: Macmillan, 1994).

Story (with James Stewart, US 1954), *High Society* (with Bing Crosby, US 1956) and *Hello Dolly* (with Barbra Streisand, US 1969), he played himself, thereby giving his late career a boost, and drawing attention to the survival of an all-time jazz great. Though denigrated by intellectuals from the thirties on, as the ‘clown prince of jazz’, for supposedly selling out to showbiz, Armstrong was one of the standard bearers of a social, as well as a musical, revolution.¹³ His swinging, hot jazz acted as a catalyst and an example to others, not only African Americans. In similar fashion, for Italians eighty years earlier, the music of Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) had acted as a rallying point for the *Risorgimento*. Satchmo met lifelong racial prejudice, but his trumpet and the music that came out of it were his vehicle in the unending struggle against bigotry. He put his own case beautifully: ‘that horn, you see that horn? That horn ain’t prejudiced. A note’s a note in any language’.¹⁴

In the beginning, what made Armstrong different from other trumpet players was that he made up his own music, or played other people’s music in a radically different way. Starting with paraphrases of standard tunes, he improvised with a wild inventiveness and an insight entirely his own, which left the original far behind. Brass players had improvised before. Cornetist Herbert Clarke (1867-1945) was purported to have stood and improvised on the refrains to keep the particular number being played going for longer when the Sousa Band played for dancing.¹⁵ But this had a fairly limited impact compared to what Armstrong achieved. When Armstrong was at his most inventive peak, he became one of the main progenitors of one of the most influential styles of the twentieth century. He became a model for other musicians, not only trumpeters. His influence spread very quickly because of the rapid growth at this time of new factors in the dissemination of music – the radio broadcast and the gramophone record.

Trumpet players had composed before and there were traditions of improvising in the renaissance and baroque periods. In fact, the first printed trumpet music, the toccata preceding *Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), is most probably a written-down improvisation.¹⁶ The extant compositions of trumpeter Cesar Bendinelli (c.1542 - 1617) are mainly skeletons for improvisation. Girolamo Fantini wrote and played Sonatas for trumpet and basso continuo. Pavel Josef Vejvanovský (c.1633 or 1639-1693) was a trumpeter and a significant composer.¹⁷ But during the eighteenth century, there seems to have been a growing demarcation between the trumpet player and the composers writing for the instrument. Although Bach’s great interpreter, the *stadtfeifer* Gottfried Reiche (1667-1734), left a substantial body of tower music, by the end of the century, Haydn and Hummel (1778-1837) composed and Anton Weidinger (1766-1852) played. The ‘Concerto for 7 trumpets and timpani’ included as an appendix to

13 Laurence Bergreen, *Louis Armstrong, An extravagant life* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).

14 *ibid.*

15 Glenn Bridges, *Pioneers in Brass* (Detroit: Sherwood Publications, 1965).

16 Tarr, *The Trumpet*, p.120.

17 *ibid* p.72.

Johann Ernst Altenburg's 1795 treatise, but perhaps composed by someone else in Dresden in the 1760s, could even be a written-down version of what was originally a sophisticated group improvisation.

In the nineteenth century a string of cornetist/composers including Jean-Baptiste Arban (1825-89), Louis Antoine Saint-Jacome (1830-98), Jules Levy (1838-1903), and Herbert Clarke took valved brass technique to new levels of virtuosity, inspired by the example of Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840), whose twenty variations on *The Carnival of Venice* Op.10, (1829) was a seminal and widely imitated work in theme and variation form. The works of these cornet virtuoso performer/composers, in this *air varié* –theme and variation - form, paraphrase the same tune several times, ringing the changes over the same chord progression, with a strong element of quasi-extempore virtuosity. Armstrong called his own improvisations variations, and it is tempting to deduce that these formulaic compositions provided a departure point for Armstrong. Arban's *Grande Méthode*, first published in 1864, and containing his 'fourteen celebrated airs variés' was published by J.W. Pepper in Philadelphia in 1879, and was a ubiquitous part of the learning experience of every subsequent aspiring cornetist. It would be surprising if Armstrong had not encountered it as part of his instruction in the band of the 'Home for Colored Waifs'.

Further steps in loosening the rhythmic conformity of existing instrumental formulas deriving from marches and two-steps were taken by early ragtime and jazz pioneers like Buddy Bolden and Freddy Keppard (1890-1933). But Armstrong's imagination was in another league – he transformed the idea of variation till any influence was unrecognisable. Whether this was a conscious or unconscious deconstruction in order to reconstruct is an area worthy of further research.

Armstrong's example, followed by subsequent jazz trumpeters, made the trumpet a vehicle for primary musical creativity, a position it had rarely occupied at any point in musical history, and put the trumpet at the forefront of developments in jazz. Other jazz musicians were influenced by this inventiveness, integrating Armstrong's trumpet style into the technique of their own instruments (in jazz argot, every instrument, even keyboard, became a 'horn'). Armstrong's early collaborator, Earl Hines (1903-83), was one in whom the influence was discernible, as were pianists of the following generation, like Bud Powell (1924-66).

This creative prominence was another crucial factor in re-establishing the trumpet as a solo instrument. Since the baroque period the trumpet had suffered a decline in status. It had become an instrument simply not capable of providing the range of expression required by a great composer to justify the sort of extended solo use required in a concerto or sonata. There was (and it persists into the 21st century) a perceived hierarchy in 'cultivated' musical circles, which considered (and will always consider) themselves arbiters of taste regarding instruments and their players. The trumpet, unlike the violin, was not regarded as a 'highbrow' instrument for soloists. The cornet was lower still down the social scale than the trumpet, without any substantial art-music pedigree. And there were no great trumpeter/composers

- creative geniuses who could reinvent the idiom of the trumpet - until Armstrong. From his humble background, with little formal training, Armstrong put an enquiring mind to good use, and was not ignorant of classical repertoire. Reminiscing of the period c.1922, he talked simply of sessions with Lil, his future wife:

She would play on the piano and I, of course, on my trumpet. We used to play classical music together sometimes. We bought classical trumpet music. Through this, later on, we played in churches once in a while. All of this was giving me more and more knowledge of my music.¹⁸

Armstrong played both cornet and trumpet. The cornet was beginning to suffer from an identity crisis by Armstrong's time. The Bb trumpet was becoming increasingly popular, mass production of the new, easier-to-play French Besson design in various imitations by different manufacturers was making the trumpet cheaper and more accessible, and soon the cornet was considered interchangeable with trumpet; by the third decade of the century there is considerable confusion between the two instruments. In Armstrong's own words regarding the situation c. 1921:

Of course in those early days we did not know very much about trumpets. We all played cornets. Only the big orchestras in the theatres had trumpet players in their brass sections [...] at that time we all thought you had to be a music conservatory man or some kind of a big muckity-muck to play the trumpet. For years I would not even try to play the instrument.¹⁹

Concentrated listening to Armstrong's *Hot Five* and *Hot Seven* Chicago recordings on cornet and trumpet in the period from 12 November 1925 to 12 December 1928 reveals the reasons for the demise of the cornet in Armstrong's work. The cornet as played by Louis in the 12 November 1925 *Yes, I'm in the Barrel* blends beautifully with the other instrumentalists in the group: Kid Ory (c.1890-1973), trombone, Johnny Dodds (1892-1940), clarinet, Lil Hardin (later, Armstrong, 1898-1971), piano, Johnny St. Cyr (1890-1966), banjo. The music created is high-level, New Orleans ensemble jazz. Armstrong's contribution is always evident through a highly individual cornet sound, but it does not dominate the ensemble. The cornet's capacity for melancholy is exploited in the menacing opening few bars, and one year later in the heavy, sad opening of *Skid-Dat-De-Dat*, recorded 16 November 1926. In recordings of 26 February 1926, *Cornet Chop Suey*, *Muskrat Ramble*, *Heebie Jeebies*, the cornet sounds amiable, friendly, and benign, not challenging or threatening, and is a perfect foil to his scat singing in the last number - like an alternating obbligato. More surprise tricks, like the unexpected and disorienting opening glissando of *Heebie Jeebies*, start to creep in. By the 16 November recordings, Armstrong is taking his cornet

18 Louis Armstrong, *Swing That Music* (London, 1937), p. 71.

19 Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (London, 1955), p.190 [account of his life up to 1922].

playing to its limits. *Jazzlips* is full of ‘rips’ – exuberant, quick, harmonic series glissandi through to the main melodic notes – and in general has an impromptu, exploratory feel. *Big Butter and Egg Man* again demonstrates ensemble cornet playing, but his ego is becoming uncontrollable, and he bursts into a brilliant, squeezed-sound solo. Six months later, on the *Hot Seven* recordings of 7 May 1927, he takes wing, and begins to soar. *Wildman Blues* demonstrates the irrepressible ego lying beneath Louis Armstrong’s early shy persona. Immediately, there is a ‘bigger’ sound and greater use of a more powerful high register. The instrument used – perhaps initially because of the larger ensemble – was the trumpet.

Lip trills and shakes in the upper register now become a permanent feature of his playing. In *Willie the Weeper*, recorded the same day, Louis rides the ensemble, dominating through an exuberance of decibels and brilliance of timbre, in a way that would be impossible to sustain on a true cornet. By *Alligator Crawl*, three days later, every time Louis plays, it is as leading voice, and by 11 May, *Melancholy Blues*, he seems to have the trumpet really ‘blown in’, with a solo full of tricks, slides, squeezed sudden top notes with lip trills, and surprising bursts of double-tempo. By 13 May, Louis’s trumpet demonstrates the trumpet’s potential to energise an ensemble. *S.O.L. Blues* swings right from the start.²⁰ *Gully Low Blues* is uproarious. Beneath the surface exuberance, there are enough subtle touches to show that Armstrong has not lost the capacity for the ‘sadness’ of the cornet, although now playing trumpet. Four months later, the numbers are reduced again, and, with the *Hot Five* on 2 September 1927, although credited in discographies with playing trumpet, he manages to make it sound like a cornet, in *Ory’s Creole Trombone*, and *Put ‘Em Down Blues*.²¹ Although commentators have reached a broad consensus on the topic of Armstrong’s change from cornet to trumpet, it is not totally clear-cut. Later that year, from 9 to 13 December 1927, some sources say cornet, others say trumpet, but this time *Struttin’ With Some Barbecue*, *Once in a While*, *I’m not Rough*, *Hotter Than That* sound like a cornet played trumpet-style. The ‘rooty-tooty’ cornet sound permeates *Struttin’ With Some Barbecue*, but the far ranging line – played all over the compass, with high lip trills – is pure trumpet. But the overall effect is less dominating, and more blending. *Once in a While*, is full of cornet pyrotechnics from within the ensemble. The solo is full of tricks, and invention. The timing of silences is exquisite, and the ending beautiful. By *I’m not Rough*, there is a feeling that Louis is working much harder physically than he would have to on trumpet, although the end-tag is pure cheeky cornet, and sounds like a moment of minimalism. In the wonderful number, *Hotter Than That*, he takes his cornet very high, into his favourite trumpet register, but with thinner sound in comparison.

Six months later, on 27 June 1928, playing *A Monday Date*, Armstrong was back on trumpet, although the use of a mute adds a thinner, vocal quality very similar to open jazz cornet. The

20 S.O.L. is an acronym for ‘shit out of luck’.

21 The following three jazz discographies credit LA with cornet up to and including the Chicago session of 13 December 1927 (*Hot Five*), then switch to trumpet from the Chicago session of 27 June 1928 (*Hot Five*). Cornet does not reappear in any of the discographies: a) *Jazz Records, 1897-1942*, Brian Rust, (1978); b) *The Jazz Discography, Vol. 1*, Tom Lord, (1992); c) *Swing Discography, Vol. 1*, W. Bruyhinckx (no date).

addition of percussion to the *Five* makes for a more driving style, and the presence of Earl Hines on piano gives more unexpected twists and more direction to the harmonic movement. Yet, Armstrong must have still been feeling his way amongst the myriad directions opened by Hines. *Skip the Gutter* sounds experimental. All Armstrong's solos are disjointed, avant-garde sounding, unpredictable, even impressionistic. By the following day, the 28 June 1928, the exuberant solo voice of the trumpet reaches an early milestone with *West End Blues*. Additionally, Armstrong's restrained, crooning vocals in this give this whole miniature form, albeit constrained by one side of a 78 rpm gramophone record, a perfectly balanced, but very wide emotional and dynamic range. By the end of 1928, the cornet fades from view, and Armstrong wholeheartedly embraces the trumpet. He reaches a high point, indicative of his fully mature style, in the harmonically inventive, wide-ranging duo, *Weatherbird*, recorded with Hines on 5 December 1928. *Beau Koo Jack*, recorded the same day, shows that the trumpet is able, in the hands of a player possessing the stamina of a Louis Armstrong, to lead and inspire an ensemble in searingly hot jazz, blowing throughout, right from note one. One week later, on December 12, Louis demonstrates that his trumpet playing has fully assimilated all the more intimate subtleties of cornet, in the creepy, very bluesy, recessed sonorities of *St. James' Infirmary*. That he has consummate control over his high-energy instrument is shown in the final recording, *Tight Like This*, which starts sparse but becomes more and more intense, working up almost unbearable tension. With all of this power and range, he was now ready to start his fully-fledged solo career fronting big bands.

The context for the trumpet renaissance

Armstrong's eventual switch to trumpet arose in all probability because the recent developments in the technology of the contemporary instrument had given him a better vehicle with which to express himself. Technology is often a driver of musical change. The modern trumpet gave him the technical variety and width to express the entire complexity of his personality better than the cornet. The trumpet was now brought to increasing prominence outside the confines of its hitherto limited role in solo performance, by succeeding generations of irreverent upstarts in a new style of jazz music from the other side of the tracks.

But it had been so nearly the cornet, and not the trumpet, which had taken pole position in treble brass. All through the nineteenth century, from its first appearance in the 1830s, the cornet had set the pace in technological advance, and in the technical capabilities of its players. Its idiom was lyrical, virtuosic, and vulgar. The valve trumpet was in fact older than the cornet. Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830), often cited as the first orchestral use of the cornet, was originally scored for valve trumpet.²² Indeed Berlioz was ambivalent about the

22 Hugh MacDonald, 'Berlioz and the cornet', dissertation to the Historic Brass Society Symposium, Royal Academy of Music, London, 13 August 1997. Also Edward Tarr, 'The Romantic Trumpet', *HBS Journal* 5 (1993), pp. 235-6.

cornet, and talked of 'its tone quality with neither the nobility of the horn nor the swagger of the trumpet'.²³ But trumpet players, and initially the composers who wrote for valve trumpet in art music, were conservatives in instrumental terms and clung to the ideals of the natural trumpet, with its idioms of war, triumph, heroism and nobility. The trumpet was an aristocrat, the cornet a proletarian.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the trumpet evolved in design. The process really was one of adaptation by manufacturers, as they grafted on to the trumpet design features associated with the cornet. The most important change was that the trumpet in general use lost a third of its length, and shortened from 6 foot F to 4½ foot Bb. These changes did not really take hold fully until after the very end of the century, and it took World War I to kill off the use of the old 'long Fs' completely. The British slide trumpet popularised by the Thomas Harpers, father and son, who taught in succession at the London Royal Academy of Music from around 1822 till the younger's death in 1898, became obsolete around the same time.²⁴ The conservatism of trumpet players was tied to the concept of an ideal of true beauty and true nobility of sound – an aristocratic sound that only a long trumpet could provide. Ernest Hall used to tell amusing anecdotes of his lessons on F trumpet with Walter Morrow (1850-1937) at the Royal College of Music in the early 1900s. After the lesson, which was spent struggling with the difficult high harmonics of the long trumpet, he would steal off to a 'gig' – but made much easier by the Bb trumpet, which he used to keep hidden in a doctor's bag.²⁵ Hall, known with affection as 'Ernie' by generations of students at the Royal College of Music, had started work aged 12 as a theatre cornet player with his father A.E. Hall, in Liverpool, before he won a scholarship to study in London. There he came to the notice of John Solomon (1856-1953), who had also gravitated towards the Bb trumpet. Solomon was the principal trumpet and a founding board member (1904) of the London Symphony Orchestra. Hall was booked on the Titanic with the LSO as an extra on their 1912 USA tour. Luckily, the boat train broke down. Hall, in his turn, a conservative preserver of pure and noble trumpet sound, went on to be one of the most influential players and teachers of twentieth-century Britain.

A crucial development in the evolution of the Bb trumpet came when conical bore, which was the factor that gave the cornet its flexibility, was introduced into the leadpipe of the trumpet. This pipe leads from the mouthpiece receiver to the valve section. Instead of a short pipe with no taper going straight into the first valve, by the end of the century, under the influence of innovators like the Belgian trumpet player, Théo Charlier (1868-1944), this pipe, incorporating a long taper, circumscribed a long loop incorporating a tuning slide, which ended up entering the third valve. The instrument thus became more flexible,

23 Stated in an 1842 article for the *Revue et Gazette musicale* and referred to in McDonald, 'Berlioz and the cornet'.

24 Thomas Harper Senior (1786-1853), Thomas Harper Junior (1816-98).

25 Anecdote told by Ernest Hall when coaching successive brass sections of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain in the 1950s and 60s.

grafting on much of the woodwind dexterity associated with the cornet. A possibly unforeseen side effect of this innovation was that the sound became more brilliant in the upper tessitura, and the high register easier. The bell section also became wider on many trumpets, giving a fatter sound in the middle register, better for playing music of a lyrical nature. Trumpet designers, in fact, shamelessly gobbled up many of the best design attributes from the cornet, and turned the instrument more and more into a hybrid. And trumpet design has indeed continued to evolve by increments in this direction ever since. By comparison, the cornet began a rapid decline everywhere – even in Britain and places influenced by Salvationist and brass band traditions, where the decline was still very evident, but at a slower pace. By the end of the twentieth century, there were only 500 brass bands and 17,000 brass players (of whom approximately 5000 are cornet players), registered with the British Brass Band Registry. This compares with an estimated total throughout Britain of 30,000 brass bands, and by extrapolation, close to 300,000 cornet players at the close of the nineteenth century – at the very height of the instrument’s popularity.²⁶

Louis Armstrong marks a watershed in the comparative development of both trumpet and cornet. When he finally switched from trumpet to cornet, he relinquished an instrument with considerable blending ability - and the pleasing personality of being able to perform in an ensemble as one among equals - for an instrument, which, when given its head in the hands of a capable player, could and would dominate any ensemble, no matter how large.

The cornet’s great advocate in early jazz was Bix Beiderbecke (1903-1931), whose genius in communicating infectious exuberance is well demonstrated by recordings he made in New York with Frankie Trumbauer and his Orchestra, like *Clarinet Marmalade* (4 February 1927), or *Mississippi Mud* (9 January 1928). The cornet’s idiom never developed in a sufficiently separate way to differentiate it markedly enough from the trumpet in the popular consciousness. By the advent of ‘cool’ jazz, played by the likes of Miles Davis, and the ‘supercool’ Chet Baker (1929-88), to whom, arguably, the cornet would have been ideally suited, it was a curiosity played in trad jazz. The warm, rich, mellow side of the cornet, a characteristic fostered in the British brass band scene was not its most featured facet in jazz, where its character tended to be chirrupy, smiley, and boisterous. When, in the fifties, players needed a warmer-sounding instrument, they turned to the flugel horn, following the example of Miles Davis (1926-91). In the hands of artists like Shorty Rogers (1929-92), the flugel horn became so suddenly prominent that even the great Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) was moved to include a solo part for it in his cantata, *Threni* (1957-58).

26 Algernon S. Rose, *Talks with bandmen* (London, 1895), reviewed in *British Musician*, vol. 8 (1895), pp 210-211.

Parallels in the Classical music world

The success of the trumpet in jazz was paralleled by the increasing prominence of solo concerto playing in the orchestral world. In London, Ernest Hall, a wonderful orchestral player who impressed all who heard him, and, (as mentioned above) an early devotee of the Bb trumpet, edited in 1945 a widely disseminated edition of the Haydn Concerto (Boosey & Hawkes), and gave the first British public performances. George Eskdale (1897-1960) in 1939, and Harry Mortimer (1902-1992) in 1945, both cornet players turned trumpeters, were the first to record the work, and the Haydn Trumpet Concerto, with its beautifully tranquil second movement and catchy Rondo, became, in the opinion of Haydn's biographer, Robbins Landon, the first piece of music to be popularised by the gramophone record.²⁷

Other major musical centres had their equivalent prominent classical trumpet players. In New York, it was William Vacchiano (b. 1912); in Paris, Ernest Foveau (1886-1957) and Eugene Sabarich (1909-66); in Vienna, Helmut Wobisch (who made the first LP of the Haydn Concerto in 1952). Adolf Scherbaum, from 1943-45 first trumpet of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, was the first classical player to make a real speciality of the high register of the trumpet, which was ubiquitous in jazz. He performed on the piccolo Bb trumpet, an instrument that was very tiring to play, but which he showed was capable of pinpoint accuracy in the right hands. He performed Bach's exceptionally difficult, and at that point, rarely performed Brandenburg Concerto no. 2, over 400 times, and recorded it at least a dozen times. Maurice André, the first classical trumpet player in the twentieth century to make a career entirely out of solo appearances, appeared on the scene after winning the 1955 Munich trumpet competition, at the same time as the genius of Miles Davis was coming to the fore in jazz.

Their careers were made possible by the groundwork of Louis Armstrong thirty years before. In the twentieth century, the renewed vigour of the trumpet's solo repertory demonstrably comes from its prominence in jazz and the primary stimulus in the talent of Louis Armstrong. The theme and subject matter of the first substantial trumpet concerto by a seriously heavy-weight composer in the twentieth century: *Nobody knows de trouble I see* (1954) by Berndt Alois Zimmermann (1918-1970), is directly parallel to Armstrong's performance practice, complete with shakes, trills and terminal vibrato. Direct aural evidence for this survives in Armstrong's recording of the same spiritual from the same period, the 1950s, with the Sy Oliver Choir.²⁸

Most of the world had never heard a trumpet played like this until they heard Louis Armstrong or one of his many imitators. His influence was singular and all pervasive. With one burst of creative energy lasting five years in the 1920s, he helped to emancipate the trumpet and liberate its players towards an unprecedented freedom of expression.

27 Robbins Landon, H.C., *Haydn: Chronicle and Works – 'The Years of 'The Creation' 1796-1800* (London, 1977).

28 Recorded in the 1950s with the Sy Oliver Choir on the album, *Louis and the Good Book*. Re-released on 30 July 2001 on Universal Classics & Jazz.

John Wallace has been Principal of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama since 2002. Previously he was a professional trumpet player, beginning his career as second trumpet with the Northern Sinfonia and Festival Ballet in the early 1970s, moving from the Royal Philharmonic to the London Symphony and then the Philharmonia Orchestras and finally to the London Sinfonietta. He has played the first performance of many concertos, by Malcolm Arnold, Rutland Boughton, Maxwell Davies, James Macmillan, Tim Souster, Robert Saxton, Stuart Macrae, Dominic Muldowney and the first performances of many new works with the London Sinfonietta. He co-edited *The Cambridge Companion to Brass Instruments* with Trevor Herbert. The inaugural lecture of his London University professorship at the Dukes Hall, Royal Academy of Music in 2001, was on the subject of Louis Armstrong. He is presently working on a History of the trumpet for Yale University Press.