

American Brass Quintet

FIFTY - SECOND SEASON

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Newsletter

Rojak on the Road

By John Rojak



The fifty-first season of the ABQ while a little lighter on touring than the heavy fiftieth season brought some wonderful highlights. The mid-west was prominent, with a nice September visit to Chicago and April in Milwaukee. In between were trips to Yale, western Pennsylvania, and Hickory, North Carolina. Hickory is considered by many to be the furniture capitol of the country and where I was tempted to refurbish my house.

The trip to Chicago was facilitated by our friends of the Chicago Chamber Musicians. CCM was celebrating their 25th anniversary and the brass players were able to schedule a gala opening concert with a brass extravaganza. ABQ was a willing and excited collaborator as we shared the program with the great musicians of Chicago. Their players included trumpeters Barbara Butler and Charlie Geyer, hornists Gail Williams and Gabrielle Mulcahy, trombonist Michael Mulcahy, bass trombonist Randy Hawes, and tubist Matt Gaunt. Playing alongside each other was a mutual admiration club and almost too much fun! The two concerts were very well received and wonderful nights for brass aficionados.

Since our visits to Chicago are infrequent, I decided to head there a couple of days early. Walking the city, visiting museums and parks, and finding some of the best restaurants was serious business, as there is a huge amount to see in that "City of Broad Shoulders." I had some help from my cousin who is a volunteer guide to the architecture of Chicago, and from friends Helen and Buzzy Rubenstein. By the time I got to the first

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Upcoming ABQ Recordings

by Raymond Mase

The promotion of contemporary brass music through commissions and performance has always been the top priority for the American Brass Quintet. But our commitment to a new work is not complete until the documentation of our interpretation—a professional recording—is widely available. In the last two decades alone the ABQ has released the recordings of over twenty-five modern brass quintets. The ABQ's 50th anniversary release—*State of the Art: The ABQ at 50*—added eleven more new brass works to that ongoing list.

The 2010 release of *State of the Art: The ABQ at 50* pushed the ABQ discography past fifty-five recordings. But even before that recording was released, we began talking about repertoire for another project. New works by Shafer Mahoney and Trevor Gureckis—the second and third commissions from the American Brass Chamber Music Association's Emerging Composer Commissioning Program funded by The Jerome Foundation—had been premiered and made their way into our touring repertoire.

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The ABQ with baritone Christophoren Nomura following a performance of Anthony Plog's *Songs of War and Loss* at the Aspen Music Festival, July 2012.

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With the further refinement of both of these pieces through multiple performances, we knew the time was right for recording.

Since the last two ABQ releases, *Jewels* and *State of the Art*, were exclusively modern music, we decided on a mixed program for the repertoire along with the Gureckis and Mahoney. Also featured will be several of my most recent editions of Renaissance music from our tour programs—a set of pieces by Elizabethan composer Thomas Morley, two fantasies of John Ward, three canzons of Erasmus Widmann, and a duo and five part piece by Antonio Troilo. Linking these Renaissance gems to the present, will be a set of 19th century pieces of Ludwig Maurer, and fantasies on old masters done for the ABQ by Charles Whittenberg (based on Bach) and Elliott Carter (based on Purcell). Working with our longtime producer/engineer Judy Sherman, we are happy to announce that the sessions are done and editing is underway. Completing the master takes time, but we are planning for a release later this fall or this winter.

The second ABQ project is a recording of recent brass chamber music of David Sampson. Sampson's music is quite familiar to our ABQ followers as Sampson/ABQ collaborations date back over 25 years beginning with *Morning Music* in 1986, and continuing with *Distant Voices* (1992), *Strata* (1999), *Entrance* (2006), and *Chants and Flourishes* (2010). The works for this recording include *Breakaway* for two trumpets and electronics (2006), *Chesapeake* (2011), *Family Portrait* (2008), *Fanfare for Canterbury Cathedral* (1980), and three other new works for ABQ members in small chamber settings. Culminating this quarter century association with Sampson, the recording will be a fitting tribute to the wonderful contributions Sampson has made to the brass chamber repertoire.

As is always the case, the recording of new works remains an ongoing mission for the ABQ. Even while we are carving out time to prepare the master for the Gureckis/Mahoney CD and schedule time to record the remaining Sampson works, we have already started to talk about recording both the new Jay Greenberg *Quintet for Brass* premiered this past summer and Anthony Plog's *Songs of War and Loss* that we have been performing with baritone Christopheren Nomura. But being overextended with recording work is just the kind of challenge the ABQ will welcome time and time again. ■

Your contributions to the American Brass Chamber Music Association provide support for composer commissions, recordings, and more!

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Learning from Failure

by Kevin Cobb

In the previous newsletter, I wrote an article about practicing and how best to approach this fundamental part of being a musician. Now, I'd like to address an issue that has personally been one of my biggest challenges—learning from failure. Defining failure can be slightly different for every person, so referencing Merriam-Webster we can

apply the definition: lack of success. So, perhaps reframing the question we can ask what it means to be "unsuccessful." Is it a complete and utter absence of anything worthwhile, or is it simply missing the target of perfection?

Certainly we all understand the desire to be successful. As students, we revere the idols of our time and begin the time-honored process of dissecting these individuals in order to understand the basis for their success. This is a natural and healthy part of the learning process, especially during our formative years when we must challenge ourselves to achieve new heights. But

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Alex Irvin

Quo Vadis, the 2012 Fellowship Quintet, with the American Brass Quintet

(left to right) David Wakefield, Lauren Klein, Kevin Cobb, Rudi Hoehn, Raymond Mase, Nathanael Udell
John Rojak, Daniel Taubenheim, Adarsh Kumar, Michael Powell

Quo Vadis Brass Quintet was the ABQ/Aspen Music Festival fellowship brass quintet for 2012. The group appeared with the ABQ and also played several recitals of their own over the course of the eight weeks in Aspen.

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when results take precedence over the process, when we adopt a common sports mantra such as, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing!", we are setting ourselves up for disaster. Admittedly, when inevitable setbacks, losses, and perceived failures occurred in my own life, I often didn't handle them in a way that allowed for growth or ultimate success. From this, I write about my own struggle to learn from failure in the hope of helping others successfully negotiate the same difficult road.

**"The greatest mistake a man can make
is to be afraid of making one."
— Elbert Hubbard**

In our culture of sports heroes and worshipping those who've "made it", it's easy to get caught up in the mindset that you're either a success or a failure. I distinctly remember an argument with a college girlfriend who dared to suggest that perhaps I would never get that



The author in a lighter moment of contemplation on tour in Greenville, PA.

vaunted position like that of my current teacher. I remember feeling angry at her apparent disbelief in my abilities, and steeling myself with the resolve to prove her wrong, no matter what it took. What I didn't see at the time was the innocent question inviting an alternative view of what could be considered "successful".

At that time, and for years after, I only saw things in black

and white - all or nothing. You either made it or you didn't, and that very "all or nothing" way of thinking turned out to be not only my biggest nemesis in pursuit of a successful musical career but also a big obstacle in my overall ability to be happy.

What I would say now to that young student in college is this: be patient, keep an open mind and take time to learn. Learn especially from your mistakes, as they provide a great opportunity for growth. Don't let them be a reflection of you as a person or your natural ability. They are instead a representation of something you haven't learned yet. Remember that "trial and error" is a time honored way of problem solving so don't discount the "error" part of that admonition. Look at failures as opportunities - to learn, to improve, to grow. Trying to be perfect is the enemy. Not being perfect is not a true failure. And of

course, this is all easier said than done.

I see myself in many of my students - striving to be perfect, desiring validation from the title of a position. Not that it's a bad idea to strive for greatness, but it's more important to enjoy the process rather than to focus on the outcome. This approach, promoted by many wisdom traditions, is much more likely to bring happiness and personal success. In her book, *Mindset*, Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck introduces the idea that there are essentially two kinds of people: those who have what she terms a fixed mindset, and those who have a growth mindset. In her convincing analysis, she asserts that people who can accept challenges and difficulties (including their failures) as a part of the perpetual growing process are not only more successful, but considerably more happy. Those who avoid these challenges because they feel that failure reflects upon them personally - the all or nothing, fixed mindset - tend to be less successful and less happy.

**"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways
that won't work." — Thomas Edison**

Experiencing a sense of failure is inevitable. How we deal with it is of ultimate importance. Learn to fail, or fail to learn as the saying goes. As I frequently tell my students, we are all on the same path, just at different stages. Some people you know might be really good at taking their failures in stride. Personally, I'm only now beginning this approach at my age, and I write this article with the hope that you can start on this path at any time, regardless of what age you are. It takes practice like anything else, and I believe the practice of music is less about external competition, and more about one's own path and journey. Any journey takes patience and a willingness to constantly learn. To quote George Leonard from his book, *Mastery*: "For the master...there are no experts. There are only learners." ■

Recent Grants and Contributions

We wish to thank several of our recent major contributors who help make our endeavors possible:

- \$20,000 National Endowment for the Arts toward the mini-residency program on tour 2012-13.
- \$10,000 Aaron Copland Fund for Music toward the recording of works by Trevor Gureckis, Shafer Mahoney and Charles Whittenberg.
- \$3,760 New York State Council on the Arts toward performances in New York State/City during 2012-13.
- \$3,000 Aaron Copland Fund for Music toward the mini-residency program on tour 2011-12.

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Michael Powell with students at Le Domaine Forget where he, along with Ray Mase, taught in early June 2012. Each year Le Domaine Forget brings together internationally known brass artists with students from throughout North America on an idyllic estate north of Quebec City, Canada.

rehearsal, I was an exhausted tourist. Helen and Buzzy not only housed me in their landmark condo in the Palmolive Building, but also hosted a wonderful reception for all the musicians after our concert in Harris Hall.

One Chicago fact heard often is that the term "Windy City" does not refer to the startlingly frigid blasts of icy air in winter, but to the blowhard politicians of the 19th Century. We hope to have changed the meaning even more with our 12 brass players filling the air with sound.

A trip to Western Pennsylvania brought lots of consideration to how we travel. Our options were to fly to Pittsburgh or Cleveland and drive 90 minutes or more to our destination, or drive 6 1/2 hours from New York. Tallying the time either way came out to a long day! The airport formula includes leaving home, arriving more than an hour before flight time, flying an hour or two, renting a van, and driving to the venue. Figuring the stress of modern day commercial flight with the potential loss of luggage (or a trombone) we decided to drive ourselves the whole way. Our destination was Thiel College in Greenville, PA, making that at least the third Greenville for the ABQ.

Our motel was a mom and pop place that did their best to make us feel like we were home. One free morning we decided to go to a nearby mall for a little shopping and grab breakfast on the way. As we drove through Sharpsville, our road instincts kicked in. I steered us right to Breakfast at Tiffany's and we settled in at our table. Pancakes seemed to be featured on the menu and Kevin asked if he should order a couple. [See photo page 3] Our friendly waitress suggested mildly that he start with one, gently rebuking Kevin's claim of a big appetite. Sure enough, his granola pancake completely covered the dinner plate! Twelve inches across, two inches thick, and weighing at least 5 pounds, this was the biggest pancake we'd ever seen. It could have fed a family of 7, and we eagerly watched Kevin dig in. As he did, Mike's 2 pound bowl of oatmeal arrived--heart healthy! Well, Kevin made it about a third of the way through that beast and had to take it with him to keep in the spirit of not wasting food. We think he finally got it all down by the time we drove home three days later.

We wrapped up the spring season in Milwaukee, and before you draw conclusions about brass players in the beer capitol of the USA, rest assured that we were highly responsible before each master class and concert. When we did politely experience their culture, it was due to the peer pressure of the U of Milwaukee faculty. Our hosts, trumpet professor Kevin Hartman, hornist Greg Flynt, and bass trombonist Mark Hoelscher were great fun to hang around with and we were gratified to find they had very similar musical ideals to those we preach.

All in all, a successful touring year. No lost bags, no lost ABQ members, some great meals and stays, and new knowledge of the real meaning of a big breakfast. As always, see you on the road! ■



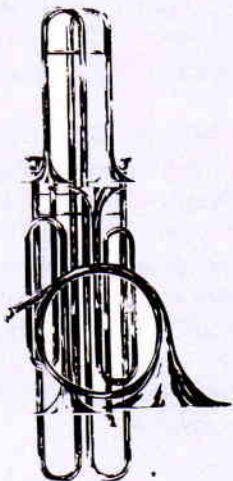
John Rojak coaching students during a three day mini-residency at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida.

Perspectives on
"State of the Art: The ABQ at 50"



"The fact that the American Brass Quintet has reached 50 years old is a bit mind-boggling. I remember sitting in rapt attention at their performances in Aspen when I was a student there—it didn't seem that long ago. This American icon in brass chamber music has chosen to celebrate their anniversary with a collection of all new works rather than a retrospective of past successes—how appropriate! This quintet has sustained a vision and a personnel list that few groups can boast about. They are a living example that purpose, vision, and passion are at the core of success and legacy creation."

~The Horn Call, Joan Watson



"This recording is moving, inspiring, and a must-have for brass lovers, enthusiasts, professionals, and students alike. It represents our history as brass musicians and the long road paved for us by the American Brass Quintet. It shines brightly on our future as brass musicians and will undoubtedly inspire many future generations of performers and composers."

~ITA Journal,
 Gretchen McNamara

Quick Notes

- The ABQ's Aspen Music Festival concert on July 18, 2012 featured new works by composers Jay Greenberg and Anthony Plog. Greenberg's *Quintet for Brass*, the fourth work in the ABQ's Emerging Composer Commissioning program supported by The Jerome Foundation, received its world premiere and will receive its New York premiere at the ABQ's Juilliard concert on October 22, 2012. Anthony Plog's *Songs of War and Loss*, commissioned for ABQ and baritone Christopher Nomura by a grant from Chamber Music America, will be performed again as part of the SoundScapes series in New York City on April 15, 2013.
- The ABQ is currently completing a new recording featuring brass chamber music of David Sampson. In addition to the brass quintets *Chesapeake* and *Family Portrait*, the recording will include his *Canterbury Cathedral* (with the Quo Vadis Brass Quintet), and various smaller works written for the members of ABQ.
- Composer Sebastian Currier has received a commission from The Juilliard School to compose a new work for the American Brass Quintet. The work will premiere at The Juilliard School in 2013.
- Michael Powell has been appointed Coordinator of Brass Chamber Music at Stony Brook University, where he and Kevin Cobb are on faculty. John Rojak has been appointed Director of Brass Studies at New York University and adjunct faculty at Montclair State University. Both David Wakefield and John Rojak have joined Kevin as faculty members at the Hartt School of Music.

American Brass Quintet

Raymond Mase & Kevin Cobb, trumpets

David Wakefield, horn

Michael Powell, trombone

John D. Rojak, bass trombone

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American Brass Quintet to Receive Chamber Music America's Highest Honor The Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award



Peter Schaaf

Clockwise from center: John D. Rojak, David Wakefield, Michael Powell, Raymond Mase, Kevin Cobb

In January 2013 at Chamber Music America's 35th National Conference in New York City, the organization will present its highest honor, The Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award, to the American Brass Quintet marking the first time the award has been given to a brass ensemble or performer.

Founded in 1960, the ABQ is the longest continuously performing brass quintet in North America. The quintet has performed worldwide, commissioned or premiered over 150 works, brought about dozens of critical editions of earlier works, and produced the largest body of serious brass chamber music ever recorded by an ensemble.