

# American Brass Quintet

F O R T Y - F I R S T S E A S O N

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## Newsletter

### ABQ Brass Band Revisited

by Raymond Mase



The celebration of the American Bicentennial in 1976 led many musical ensembles to exploring America's musical past. The American Brass Quintet was no exception, and our research unearthed a wealth of brass band music from the mid-19th century--not only the published works of well-known professional ensembles like the American Brass Band of Providence, Rhode Island--but many

unpublished scores of military and amateur bands as well. The music of these all-brass bands was widely diverse, including marches, quick-steps, waltzes and arrangements of the popular music of the day, and shows a charming side of American musical history.

The ABQ's interest in 19th-century brass music continued after 1976, but took on another dimension. Through the generosity of Dr. Robert Rosenbaum, a private musical instrument collector, we began playing this repertoire on historical instruments and performed for the opening of the New American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the spring of 1980. This project was preserved on a recording for Titanic Records, but unfortunately never released on compact disc. But with this performance and recording, the seeds of the American Brass Quintet Brass Band had been sown. Shortly thereafter New World Records proposed a recording of the music of the brass bands of New England for a band of fourteen brass and two percussion--all on original instruments. The Yankee Brass Band (NW312-2) launched the ABQ Brass Band with flying colors.

Several years ago I was approached by Philip Dunigan, a colleague on the faculty of the North Carolina School of the Arts, to see if we might bring back the ABQ Brass Band for a recording of the works of the 26th North Carolina Regiment Band preserved by the Moravian Music Foundation in Winston-Salem NC. I was excited and intrigued, but my first step was to take a look at the original music. I knew immediately that playing from copies of these original parts would not work. We would spend most of our time just deciphering what notes to play. And many of the pieces were incomplete--for some reason often missing the first alto parts. When I questioned Phil on this, he matter-of-factly said, "Oh, he was captured." Incredibly, a diary of one of the musicians provides a detailed account of the band's daily activity during the Civil War--the members, where they traveled, what pieces were played, and their conditions. This remarkable account of the War through the eyes of a bandsman has given us a new perspective into the significance of the music we're recording. Our thanks to Nola Reed Knouse, musicologist and Director of the Moravian

Music Foundation, for her painstaking efforts in reconstructing and preparing the music for this project.

The use of historical instruments poses yet another challenge. For this recording we've used ten brass players and two drummers. The instruments include both modern copies of Civil War instruments made by Robb Stewart and historical instruments from our own collections and generously loaned to us by private collectors. Robert Sheldon, curator of the Musical Instruments Collections at the Library of Congress, joined us as resident musicologist and alto horn player. His knowledge and experience were essential to the success of the first ABQ Brass Band project twenty years ago, and were a welcome addition this time. He even lectured our Juilliard brass students on 19th-century brasses while he was here. We're confident that this recording by the ABQ Brass Band will be a welcome addition to our ABQ discography, and will bring back to life the music of the 26th North Carolina Regiment Band. ■

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Bb and Eb cornets, and Eb alto horns used on the recent recording sessions of the ABQ Brass Band

# ABQ 40th Anniversary Celebration, November 13 & 16, 2000



The ABQ in performance at the 40th Anniversary Seminar



Composer Melinda Wagner making final suggestions for her new piece before the November 16th premiere



Composer Robert Beaser with ABQ trumpeter Kevin Cobb



Ray Mase and Robert Biddlecome (past and present senior members of the ABQ)



Former New York Brass Quintet member John Swallow speaks at a panel discussion exploring the future of brass chamber music.

Photo credits: the Beaser/Cobb photo: Nan Melville, all others: Peter SchAAF

## 40th Anniversary - A Year of Celebration

by John Rojak

This concludes the 40th anniversary season of the American Brass Quintet. Being a milestone, particularly in the world of brass chamber music ensembles, we stretched the year to about 18 months. Beginning in May 2000 through the summer of 2001 we celebrated the ABQ entering the prime of life.

The International Trumpet Guild held their annual conference at SUNY Purchase in 2000 and ABQ was invited to be a featured ensemble. With the daunting aspect of performing for hundreds of trumpeters we decided to try an unusual program—three sets pairing a very old piece of music with one of our recent commissions, separated by short intermissions. We began with a set of *Madrigals* by Luca Marenzio and Tony Plog's *Mosaics*, a commission from 1997. The next set had *Chansons* of Josquin des Prez and David Sampson's *Quintet 99*. (So far the composers of the new pieces were, coincidentally, both trumpet players!) The final pairing was of Thomas Stoltzer's music from the 16th century and one of the ABQ's most venerated commissions, Elliott Carter's *Quintet* from 1974. We felt the concert was quite successful, and have been amazed at how many times while touring we've heard from trumpet teachers who heard that performance. Like all those people who say they were at Woodstock!

To coincide with the anniversary we recorded a couple of new CDs. The first to be released, in the spring of 2000, was *Quintessence*, the 40th anniversary disc which includes a range of repertoire that spans 500 years. This was also Kevin's first disc with ABQ and has been a hot selling item on tour. (Maybe it's that nice cover photo.) The following fall saw the release of *Classic American Brass*. This CD features new recordings of four of the most significant works for quintet from the 20th century—the Carter *Quintet*, Robert Sanders' *Quintet in Bb*, Ingolf Dahl's *Music for Brass Instruments*, and Charles Whittenberg's *Triptych*.

Our first tour of the 40th took us to the southeastern US, followed by a quick jaunt to northern NY. As is often the case, the tour was not without incident. As we started our concert in one college auditorium, we heard an impossibly loud sound like fire engine horns in rhythm. We suspended the concert in the middle of a piece until it subsided and learned later it was two trombones from the marching band practicing outside the theatre! Michael and I envied their lungs. Another hall had unstoppable blower fans that forced David to play one-handed while keeping his music from flight. Yet another had a stage with a motor underneath simulating Magic Fingers! The tour concluded peacefully in Potsdam, NY via Montreal with a wonderful mini-residency.

After another (incident-free) tour took us to Minnesota, we were back in NY to celebrate our anniversary and brass chamber music with a two-day event at Juilliard. We hosted a seminar called "The State of the Art" featuring Melinda Wagner to speak about her new quintet, and guests from the brass chamber music community. Members of the Meridian Arts Ensemble, Saturday Brass, Manhattan Brass Quintet, Extension Ensemble, and New York Brass Quintet gave their impressions and opinions of the current and future state of our business and art. The conclusions, although not rosy, had a note of reality and optimism.

The second event was our Alice Tully Hall concert. Along with the world premiere of the Wagner Brass Quintet No. 1, there were NY premieres of Robert Beaser's *Brass Quintet* and Kevin Cobb's arrangement for ten brass of William Schuman's *American Hymn*. The rest of the program included Cherubini *Marches*, Marenzio *Madrigals*, and a set of 16th Century Fancies, the latter two being editions of Ray Mase, and all of these were first performances for the ABQ. It was wonderful to play in Tully

Hall and to present such a variety of music, showing off the range of our repertoire.

Before heading to Aspen for the summer we had one very interesting tour which is described in great detail by Kevin elsewhere in this newsletter. At the Aspen Music Festival, we continued our anniversary with another world premiere—this by Samuel Adler. We also spent a week in Portland, Oregon at Chamber Music Northwest, where we had a fabulous week of chamber music performance (not to mention finding several feet of sheet music and eating in one of Gourmet magazine's 50 Best US Restaurants—Café Azul.) Perhaps the most significant part of the summer was working with a young brass quintet that was awarded a New Horizon fellowship to study with us. The Ilium Brass Quintet from Cleveland gave us a glimpse of the future of brass chamber music. They worked closely with us—coached by each ABQ member, sitting in on our rehearsals, performing on our concerts, and playing three of their own recitals, the Ilium guys worked hard, played great, and gave us a real incentive to share our knowledge and experience. The ABQ is strongly committed to education, and working with Ilium was truly satisfying.

Another CD, Eric Ewazen's monumental concerto for brass quintet and wind ensemble, *Shadowcatcher* was released at the end of summer. This was recorded with the Juilliard Wind Ensemble, conducted by Mark Gould, and is a marvelous example of Ewazen's beautiful brass writing. With the third disc released in a 15-month span, we feel the ABQ at 40 is pretty spry.

As we began our 41st season this fall, certainly everyone is aware of the difficulties that arose after the catastrophe of September 11. The quintet was scheduled to play a concert on September 14 at Concordia College in Bronxville, NY and it was with great trepidation that we decided to play this engagement. We chose to open with a Chorale Prelude of Brahms followed by a moment of silence, left the stage, then returned to play our regular program. On a tour to the Carolinas and Georgia the next week we were moved by outpourings of concern from so many people we met. Audiences were so appreciative and happy for a diversion that we felt like we were contributing to society the best way we could—bringing comfort through the beauty of music.

Now with trombones checked in baggage we continue to tour, playing our brass music around the world, as the ABQ's life isn't beginning, but continues at 40! ■

### American Brass Quintet

Raymond Mase & Kevin Cobb, trumpets  
David Wakefield, horn  
Michael Powell, trombone  
John D. Rojak, bass trombone

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## Just One Tour Day — by Kevin Cobb

"It's always like this," I heard Ray say to George with a smile and a good bit of sarcasm. We had just played a concert at Rice University and one of the patrons had graciously opened their house to us for a post concert reception. As we were ushered in past the Chagalls decorating the walls of the spacious and luxurious home, we were directed to eat at an exclusive table that was set up just for the quintet. In these situations we usually try and have our friends sit with us, and such was the case with George -- a friend from undergraduate days. Here we sat together and enjoyed three different kinds of lasagna, fresh salad, various desserts and something for everyone to wash it all down with. Considering we had just started the tour, it was looking pretty good, and at that moment we all liked to believe that it really was 'always like this'.

It was planned as a relatively easy travel day. We were to leave Dallas on a 10am flight for a two hour flight to Atlanta. We were to arrive at 1:03pm making a tight connection for a flight to Philadelphia at 1:40pm, but it looked feasible. From the Philly airport, we then had another 45 minutes to drive to Haverford College. We began the day in perfect form. It was a flawless morning as the sun was shining and there was little to no traffic. We returned the rental van in no time and Avis got us to the terminal in similar fashion. We checked in with no hassles and even got forward seats on the airplane to expedite our hurried connection in Atlanta. The flight left on time and the threatening bad weather seemed to be dispersing up North. Great. We were all smiles and feeling positive. Up in the air, we learned that in Atlanta, as if they were expecting our arrival, the connection was as effortless as one could hope; the arrival gate was B12 and the departing gate was B14. Perfect. Today, we would travel like you expect to travel with smooth, reliable service. We would travel like kings!

Arriving in Atlanta, as we pull into the gate, Ray was the first to notice that there was actually no plane at B14. Dismissing it simply as a probable gate change, our spirits remained high. Sure enough, as we exited the aircraft, we learned that the flight to Philadelphia had been delayed. Apparently, from our earlier observations and astute calculations, the delay was directly related to the fact that there was no plane! (Begin ominous music here) Originally, John is told that the absence of a plane is weather related. Some weather somewhere has confiscated our plane! But Delta soon confesses that the delay is due to a "technical problem". -- something to do with re-attaching the wings. But what could we do? There was still plenty of time to have a delay and make it to Haverford by 8pm. The connection was too tight anyway and maybe this would just add a little leisure time to the trip. Still, we had to wonder where the damn plane was! The delay has caused the departure to be set back to 2:00pm, then 2:30pm, then soon after 3:00pm. Seeing the masses grow unsettled, Delta provided us with a compensation package of sorts. This included a meal voucher for up to \$10, and a five-minute phone card.

Outside the gate, I saw Ray counseling Dave to try and sell his unused food voucher to someone in line. (Dave was contemplating trying to take back his receipt for his earlier lunch purchase and his voucher to get reimbursed, all \$5.26) Dave thought better of it, however and decided to keep his voucher. Ray then offers him \$5 just to see him try and sell it. No deal. Dave was just going to leave it behind on a seat, but decided to keep it "in case we get off the plane again." As we finally made our way onto the plane the passengers were ornery, but okay. We were still in

a position to make the show. Maybe not check into the hotel before the concert, but we would get there and be presentable with tuxedos on with all the proper accoutrements. We taxied for take off and made the turn onto the runway. As we began accelerating, we looked at each other as the take off speed doesn't seem to exceed 30-40 miles an hour. Sure enough, half way down the runway, the pilot announced that the hydraulics in the rudder is giving them a problem. Them and us! Back to the gate. Dave's unknowing premonition comes true and it is suspected that Dave is secretly happy, although he shows no signs of hunger. Dave considers lottery numbers.

Another hour passes by with more announcements of various problems with this and that and as we sit, the tension builds as the Ripken-like 40 year ABQ record of never a cancelled concert is in serious jeopardy of being broken. We are constantly calculating: actual flying time, time to get bags, how fast we can get away with driving once on the ground, etc. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, a replacement crew came to relieve the old one due to hours and shortly we have lift off at 5:30pm! (With or without those damned rudders.) Despite the smell of something burning that shouldn't be burning, we seem to be flying.

It is now 7:00pm and a "Holding pattern" is announced due to traffic on the ground. Good news, according to the Captain is we're only 30 miles away. Good news, I suppose if we had paramilitary training and could parachute down to Haverford. We had a restless flight and we were all nervous. I even had coffee spilled in my lap by the stewardess, but the end seemed near. Or so we hoped. Five minutes later, we began our descent down from the sunny skies and through the clouds into the rain below. Audience members begin to travel to concert and as we arrive at the gate, Marshall auditorium has opened to the public.

As John made an Olympic dash to get the rental car, we make our way with the herds of people to the baggage claim. The idea of waiting for our bags was quickly abandoned at ten minutes to 8pm and we meet John outside at the van at 7:55pm. Away we go! Up to this time, we had also been talking to the presenter via cell phone and giving her all the gory updates. We were told that the concert would be held for us, which was nice, since we were the only act at the show.

After driving the Ford Aerostar on the wet roadway like an Indy car, we finally arrive at Haverford and spare literally a couple minutes for warm-up time. We step onstage, in our street clothes, at 8:38pm. And while the record stayed intact - barely - we were ragged and tired and running on adrenaline. Needless to say, the concert was less than ideal, but the audience was understanding and appreciative.

After the show, our evening was still interesting as it meant going back to the airport to get our bags. To add to the already impossible day, at 11:14pm, we encountered a sobriety checkpoint. We were feeling understandably giddy and surely must have appeared punch drunk to the small town policeman. When asked if he had been drinking, John responded "no", but had to fight off the desire to make comments like, "not yet!" Mike's effort to show good will was to keep his empty hands raised to show there really was no alcohol involved in our behavior. "What's the matter with him," was the cop's final statement to us as we drove on to the airport. If he only knew.

We finally got our bags at 11:40pm and settled for dinner at 12:30am, which again gave us a short night before the 9am master class in the morning. Sitting in the fifties style diner surrounded by dozens of teenagers at what we guessed was their last stop after their prom, we were numb with exhaustion and dis-

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belief. Where were we this morning? What had just happened? Where are we now? As we began to finally let ourselves relax and take in the last seventeen hours, I remembered that seemingly distant night in Houston, sitting with George in that beautiful house. I wished that he could see us now and wondered if it would still seem sarcastic, but now ironically different, to say to him, "It's always like this!" ■

## ABQ's Mini-Residencies — by David Wakefield

Since 1970, a large part of the ABQ's activities have been teaching both as individuals and as a group. Our residencies at Juilliard and at the Aspen Music Festival and School during the summer give us opportunity to organize and teach in brass chamber music programs. Because of this experience and because we enjoy it so much, we have decided to offer mini-residencies to universities and colleges.

Our first engagement as a part of the new mini-residency program was at the Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia. Over two days we taught classes covering basic chamber music skills, the brass quintet repertoire, as well as a "career counseling" session. In addition, we individually taught master classes for our respective instruments. Other mini-residencies are scheduled for spring in Boise, Idaho and at Murray State University.



John Rojak coaching a brass trio in a master class in Boston.

At the sessions we demonstrated and performed as well as having student groups play for us in the traditional master class setting. At Columbus, we heard two groups who had accomplished a great deal since the beginning of the school year.

It was a real pleasure for us to remain on location for two days and get to know the local students and faculty in more depth. It made the performance at the end of the second day more meaningful than our normal tour concert where we might be in a city for less than 12 hours. ■

## News Nuggets

■ On August 1st, 2001, a new work by Juilliard colleague Samuel Adler was premiered at the Aspen Music Festival. The work received its New York premiere on October 15th at the ABQ's annual recital at The Juilliard School. Titled *Be Not Afraid: the Isle is Full of Noises*, it was written in 1999 and will soon be recorded by the ABQ.

■ In October, the Quintet's travels took them to the Czech and Slovak Republics. The ABQ performed and gave master classes in Prague, Bratislava, Brno, and Olomouc.

■ The Aspen Music Festival honored the American Brass Quintet in 2001, by designating them artist-teachers in the New Horizons Fellowship Program, founded by Matthew and Kay Bucksbaum. Mr. Bucksbaum is the Chairman of the Music Associates of Aspen Board of Trustees. These fellowships provide tuition and room and board to young artists attending Aspen for focused study with selected faculty. The ABQ was therefore able to award fellowships to an entire student brass quintet. After intense competition, The Ilium Brass was chosen as recipient. Its members are Stephen Chapdelaine and David Costello, trumpets, Christian Hansen, horn, Nathan Siler, trombone, and Owen Molloy, tuba. The Ilium Brass is based in Cleveland, where they have been students at the Cleveland Institute of Music. New Horizons Fellowships will be awarded to a different brass quintet for the summer of 2002 at Aspen.

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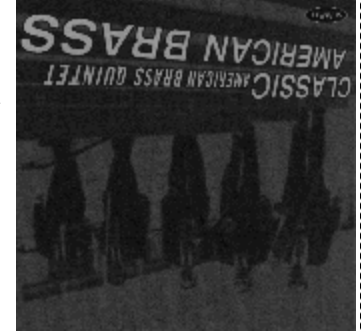
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