

# American Brass Quintet

F O R T Y - S E C O N D S E A S O N

Volume 10, Number 1  
New York, October 2002

Newsletter

## ABQ Residencies

by Raymond Mase



A life-long career as a chamber musician can be very gratifying and fruitful, but also physically demanding and stressful. Life on the road has led many fine, successful chamber music players away from the field for the sake of their families and health. Consequently many chamber groups come and go over the years, or suffer through all-too-frequent personnel changes, but the American Brass

Quintet has enjoyed remarkable consistency over its history. I am now starting my thirtieth year as ABQ trumpeter, and my quintet colleagues Dave Wakefield and Mike Powell are not far behind me with twenty-seven and twenty years respectively. Bob Biddlecome retired from the ABQ in 1990 after twenty-nine years and Chris Gekker in 1997 with eighteen years. How has the ABQ managed such stability over its forty-two years? Part of the answer may lie with the Aspen and Juilliard residencies and what they provide our group.

While concert touring is the base of operations for most chamber groups, the ABQ has been very fortunate to have established solid academic affiliations over these years. We continue to tour for weeks every fall and spring, but our residencies provide us with collective focus while we work during the year in the New York area, and while we work (and play) in the summer paradise of Aspen. The Aspen residency began in 1970 as a three-year grant from the Martha Baird Rockefeller Foundation, and integrates our brass chamber music program of coaching and performance into the already smooth-running Aspen program of private lessons, classes and orchestral playing. Rather than being overwhelmed by too many commitments, students get a healthy exposure to chamber music while having adequate time to take full advantage of other opportunities. For us, the relationship with the Aspen Festival and School is a match made in heaven. We bring our chamber music skills to the Festival and in return we have nine weeks of rehearsing and performing together in the normally slower summer booking period. The residency also provides us quality time with composers, performers, and students from around the world in an incredibly beautiful and relaxed environment. Many new ABQ compositions have been realized from our relationships with the composers that we've worked with in Aspen. And after a summer of study . . . *Continued on page 2*



## Recording News

■ The ABQ's most recent recording, *A Storm in the Land*, was released this past April on New World Records (NW 806082). This eagerly awaited compact disc features the ABQ Brass Band (10 brass and 2 drummers playing period instruments) performing the music of the 26th North Carolina Regimental Band from the Civil War. The music has been preserved in the archives of the Moravian Music Foundation in Winston-Salem, NC, and was prepared for this recording by the Foundation's director Nola Reed Knouse. The ABQ Brass Band's first recording for New World Records was the popular 1981 release *The Yankee Brass Band* (NW 80312-2).

■ The ABQ will soon finish a recording of works written for the group by well-known American composers **Samuel Adler**, **Robert Beaser**, **William Schuman**, **Andrew Thomas**, and **Melinda Wagner**. Also included on the disc is **Joan Tower's** *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman No. 5*, written for the dedication of the Joan & Irving Harris Concert Hall at the Aspen Music Festival. Consistently acknowledged for its excellent acoustics, Harris Hall is the location of many ABQ Aspen performances and was also used for two ABQ recordings: *Fyre & Lightning* (Summit DCD 181), and *American Brass Quintessence* (Summit DCD 263).

■ **Crystal Records** recently reissued a 1984 ABQ recording in the compact disc format. The recording is titled *American Brass Quintet* (Crystal CD214) and includes works by **Gilbert Amy**, **J. S. Bach**, **Antonio Bertali**, **Victor Ewald**, and **William Lovelock**.

■ Composer **David Sampson** will release a new recording of his brass chamber music later this year that will include his brass quintet *Strata*, (written for, and recorded by the ABQ). The disc will also include his *Serenade for Flugelhorn and Strings* with Ray Mase on flugelhorn.

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## American Brass Quintet

in recital at  
The Juilliard School Theater

65th Street between Amsterdam and Broadway

NY Premiere of *Brass Quintet* by Daniel Asia, Music from the 26th North Carolina Regimental Band, C.S.A. and works by Eric Ewazen, David Sampson, Samuel Scheidt

Monday, October 14, 2002 at 8pm

### ABQ Residencies

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with us in Aspen, students often return home encouraging their teachers to invite the ABQ to their campus for concerts and master classes.

The Aspen residency trained the ABQ in administrating a chamber music program that works nicely inside the framework of a larger festival. It's no surprise that with the kind of experience we had with our Aspen program, we were quite well qualified for revamping the brass chamber music program at Juilliard in 1987. The Juilliard residency, modeled after our Aspen work, was designed to provide the highest-level chamber music training, but also be well integrated into the excellent, preexisting curriculum. Our presence at Juilliard includes not only traditional brass quin-



Ray Mase coaching a student brass quintet in a master class in Aspen

tet coaching and performances, but also biweekly seminars where we meet with all of the student groups together for several hours. In these seminars we perform for the students, bring in guest ensembles, and have student groups perform for us and each other. It may go without saying, but an ongoing affiliation with one of the finest performing-arts schools in the world brings a good amount of prestige and exposure to the ABQ in the field. The Juilliard residency continues to keep the group remarkably focused and active from our homes in the NY area, and not forced to be overly dependent on weeks of touring as our only quintet outlet.

Several years ago it became apparent to us that while the ABQ had compiled an impressive list of accomplishments over the years—performances worldwide, many new works, nearly fifty recordings—we also had developed certain skills important to the brass world that we

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## Rojak on the Road

by John Rojak

After the incredible events of September 11 last year, the ABQ embarked on what turned out to be a couple of remarkable tours. One of our greatest challenges is getting from one concert venue to another, and last September provided some added concerns for our travels. We had a concert scheduled in Greenville, NC on the 20th, followed two days later with one in Greenville, SC. We had planned to fly to Atlanta in between as a midway point for convenience and have a day off in a nice city. With all the extra security measures taken at airports, we were asked to arrive at LaGuardia 3 hours before departure which meant 6am—not a good hour for me. Then it was a 2-hour flight to NC, pick up a rental car and drive 2 hours to Greenville. Looking at an atlas, I realized that for the same amount of time we could simply drive from NY and not worry about checking our instruments or anything else. So, with the airlines being cooperative in an unprecedented way, we cancelled all but our return flight and skipped Atlanta, instead having an informal second day of open rehearsals and discussions with faculty and students at East Carolina U. Driving across the Carolinas, I had ferreted a famous barbecue restaurant half way through the trip to make a lunch stop. This bare bones (especially after we finished!) pit stop was perfect—5 miles off the main road and as low key and homey as imaginable. As we were leaving, the owner came over to chat with us and express his sympathy for the recent events in NY. It was very touching and gave us a real feeling of how connected our country can be.

The last stop of that trip was a mini-residency arranged by our good friend Rich Rulli, who was a long time member of the Wisconsin Brass Quintet. His school, Columbus State U., has brand new facilities, and it was an honor and pleasure for us to be among the first performers there. As it turned out, we didn't miss the airports or flying at all. It was far less stressful to tour that way—we saw the scenery of the Carolinas, discussing ABQ business and other important issues, like the Yankees, along the way.

Meanwhile, looming before us was our first European trip in many years. This tour was very significant for the ABQ, as our previous time abroad was a concert and class in Rome in 1992. Fear and uncertainty were in our minds, as well as our families' and friends', and every day we had serious discussions about whether or not we would depart as scheduled on September 28th. Since the US State Department was partially funding the tour, Ray called and asked for their opinion of the safety of foreign travel for American artists. He was assured we would be absolutely safe—nothing to worry about, so off we went to Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Once we were there, the only irony came when Mike came to breakfast one morning, told us he had been watching CNN International and the strip at the bottom of the screen said, "US State Department warns American citizens to avoid foreign travel." (!!!).

Our flight was to Vienna, where we were met by Lubomir Herza, our host, translator and manager for the tour, and Milan, our driver who spoke a few words of English (most of which were "okay"). The first engagement was in Bratislava, Slovakia, and the drive through eastern Austria was gorgeous. Bratislava is a recently ex-Communist city and is in the midst of renewing its past glory. The Old Town section is beautiful, filled with walking streets and grand architecture, but our hotel was the non-gentrified Hotel Kyjev, definitely a hotel for the People. Still, after our journey, it did the trick and we rested for the upcoming concerts. A recurring theme for the tour appeared at breakfast, where there was no shortage of protein. We got a kick out of the buffet tables—a tray of cold cuts next to a tray of hot meat next to a tray of sausages, then some cheeses next

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## ABQ Residencies

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wanted to make more available. Our way of working together, our rehearsal techniques, and our coaching of young ensembles were consistently being praised through our residencies and we needed ways to share them outside of Juilliard and Aspen. The ABQ's two-day mini-residency program, now in its second year, was developed so that we can offer much more to a school or community than simply playing a fine concert. With scheduling over two days, we can customize classes and events to make best use of the expertise of the ABQ while serving the specific needs of the host. Typical events offered in these residencies have been classes on basic ensemble skills, the business of music for brass players, classes on brass quintet repertoire, and of course, master classes listening to ensembles and individuals. Last season's mini-residencies received comments from brass faculty around the country like, "In short the ABQ mini-residency was a phenomenal experience for the conservatory", and "I can honestly say that it was the most enjoyable and informative brass master class in recent memory." These new residencies have also brought us many rewards. Naturally playing ABQ recitals is a great joy for us, but sharing our commitment to brass music by close interaction with people may be an even greater joy. Over several days we get to know the students and faculty, and more importantly, they get to know us. Knowing us leads to better, more open, communication, and to a deeper understanding of our music, performance, and purpose.

I suppose it is hard to really know whether the ABQ residencies are truly a deciding factor in the longevity and consistency of the ABQ membership. I suspect that even without them I would likely still be an ABQ member today and writing for our newsletter. But there is no question in my mind that the exposure and personal contact we have had with brass players through our residencies has made our contribution to the brass chamber music world that much more significant. ■



ABQ with Lubomir Herza, our host, at hotel near Prague

## Rojak on the Road

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to another tray of meats, and some bread. We prepared to come back home with another notch on our belts.

Of course, we did play several concerts. After Bratislava came cities in the Czech Republic—Brno, Prague, and Olomouc—and it was thrilling to have sold out halls each time. We were received with great enthusiasm, and were called back for two encores at every show. (Good thing we brought some extra music!) The halls were wonderful and a sense of history enveloped us as we played in ornate surroundings. Some of our



ABQ on the Charles Bridge in Prague

audience crowded around backstage afterwards while we struggled to find common language other than music, and as we went to find a pub later it was gratifying to be complimented frequently by other patrons who had been to our concert.

In Prague, we stayed in a well-known resort hotel outside the city (see the photo to the left) that thrust us into the lap of luxury for a couple of nights. It had been a palace and had beautiful grounds and rooms that were hard to leave. We also had some of the best meals of the trip there—the typical pork cutlet dishes we had grown accustomed to were suddenly succulent delicacies, and for the first time there were greens! From here we made our way into Prague for a concert at Bethlehem Chapel, an inspiring church with ancient frescoes and generous acoustics, as well as for a master class at the Akademie of Musik, one of the most prestigious conservatories in Europe. At the Akademie, we were greatly venerated by the school by being awarded diplomas of Honorary Rector. (Could the ABQ now be called a Rector Set?)

Finishing the tour in Olomouc, a Moravian city with incredible charm and warmth, we were getting spoiled from the attention. Here the venue was in an Army hospital, and we had no idea what to expect. After passing through security, we went to a dressing room and were ordered by a strict nurse to lock the door when we left, which we of course forgot to do the first time out. Entering the concert hall, we were amazed to encounter a room with a beautiful painted ceiling and marble carved walls, as well as really good acoustics. Again the house was full and again we played two encores. After the concert we had our last Czech meal, this time at a lovely Moravian restaurant where we treated Milan and forced him to reveal more of his English skills.

Leaving Europe from Vienna, we wound up arriving at the airport a few hours before departure time. As we found out last fall, the security requirements at airports were a bit exaggerated and our check-ins were much faster than we expected. So, having never been in Vienna before—even though it's the city my father grew up in—I decided to go to the city center. Dave was the only one who accepted my invitation and we hopped on a bus, arriving downtown in 20 minutes. Of the hour and a half we had, it seemed very appropriate that we spent 45 minutes having cakes and coffee in Cafe Heiner. Otherwise, we did a little sightseeing, and I think I found a great little hotel for when the quintet plays in Vienna. Hopefully soon—I liked that cake! ■

## Keeping the Faith

by Kevin Cobb

What would be your first impression if a friend came up to you and told you that he attended a brass quintet concert last night? What kind of an ensemble do you think he saw? I think it's common for the majority of classical music aficionados and novices alike to think of the brass quintet as an ensemble that is full of humor and easy listening music—perhaps like the notion that all fat men are jolly or that all women are bad drivers. Are all brass quintets full of fluff? My last two newsletter articles have been rather lighthearted and anecdotal and while sincere, have been innocuous. They were what professional writers might deem "filler". This year, I have put that aside (along with my attempts at humor) to write to you about something serious and that affects all of us who love chamber music. I want to use my space this year to talk about the future of the brass quintet and what it means to you and me.

When the ABQ started back in 1960, there was a simple goal: introduce the brass quintet into mainstream chamber music venues. At that time, the brass quintet was just finding its legs with the emergence of serious brass music through the commissioning of new works and the adaptation of early music. While in the early years this repertoire exposed many chamber music enthusiasts to the brass quintet as an ensemble, it wasn't until brass groups began presenting concerts in a more entertaining and humorous manner that they achieved widespread popularity. Later, some brass quintets became well known by presenting dazzling playing via arrangements of orchestral and/or piano music. From that point on, the abundance of this repertoire combined with the obvious popularity of the concerts proved to be a daunting combination. Generations of young brass players and audiences of all ages associated the brass quintet with an ensemble only serious about having fun. Today, the ABQ is still striving to overcome the characterization of brass quintets being strictly for amusement and is working to gain credence with the more serious chamber music series.

If you are receiving this newsletter then you probably already know about the ABQ and what we do. The role for us now is to spread the word, and every one of us has a part to play! Those of us involved with performing must try to counteract the preconceived notion of the brass quintet being a novelty. It is especially difficult for younger and newer groups to find work without including an arrangement of a Beatles medley. This should be a healthy warning sign to us all. The way to combat this is to include at least include some serious music on the program; anything written for a brass quintet is valid. It doesn't have to be the hardest quintet written today, but perhaps some early music or a lighter, yet original brass work. This is one way to expose more people to real brass quintet music. For example, if your group is hired to play background music at a party, throw in some Renaissance editions or perhaps even something like Collier Jones. If you are lucky enough to have a full recital, program one or two challenging works. I think you'll find it's enjoyable for audiences and performers alike. To help with this, we will be posting a comprehensive list of non-transcription repertoire on our website. Of course, you can always email us with questions and we will be happy to provide suggestions.

Those of you who are advocates, patrons and loyal listeners must realize that you too have a voice. How many times have you heard your local public radio station play a selection or

even fade to station break with something from one of the more "popular" brass quintets? How about calling the station and asking them to represent the brass quintet literature by playing one of our CDs instead? The more audiences associate brass quintet with arrangements of "West Side Story" and "Porgy and Bess", the harder our road becomes. It may seem like a small thing, but every little bit helps. People are listening!

Now the question becomes, what is the ABQ doing to redefine our image for the future? With the help of our manager, Todd Stanton, the ABQ has been fortunate to receive grant funding to support some of our recording projects. Along with that, we are grateful to have companies like Summit Records and New World Records to promote and produce our recordings despite a market that is increasingly looking for the latest, sexiest selling fad. The ABQ is neither sexy, nor young and different, but what we have brought forth with every recent CD is not only a look back to our heritage but also the latest and greatest in brass composition. So in many ways, we must continue to stay the course,

but I feel that the time is ripe to reaffirm the original commitment and expand the current boundaries. Three areas for us to renew our focus on will be commissions, education, and of course, concertizing.

Without question, we need to continue soliciting commissions

from the best possible composers. Since its inception, the ABQ has been a pioneer in the commissioning of works from leading American composers. I would like to see us have commissions from some of the *world's* leading composers. This may mean that we will not have grant money for the support of this endeavor. Consequently, we may have to rely more on private funds than we have in the past. I believe this is a necessary effort if we are to secure the best international composers as well as gain recognition outside the United States.

With regard to education, the ABQ is fortunate to have two key residencies—one at The Juilliard School in the winter and the other at the Aspen Music Festival and School during the summer. With a combination of these, along with the growing popularity of our new mini-residency programs, we feel very good about our role with young people (see Ray's article on "Residencies"). However, there is potential for more. Through the New Horizons fellowship program, our last three years at Aspen have given us a wonderful opportunity to have a developing quintet there on full stipend. Unfortunately, this past summer was the last year for this program. We have talked with the

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**"Will the music world be a richer place in one hundred years with the addition of pseudo-ragtime arrangements and operas that are adapted for brass?"**

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### American Brass Quintet

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

**Administrative Offices:** 212-977-4787  
Robert Biddlecome, Executive Director  
<http://www.AmericanBrassQuintet.com>

Touring management & inquiries, please contact:

#### Stanton Management

45-05 Newtown Road  
Astoria, NY 11103

TEL.: 718-956-6092 • FAX: 718-956-5385

**Keeping the Faith**

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Festival administration about continuing this successful program by incorporating it into the annual budget—similar to what is done now for string quartets. If the funds prove not to be available, we will have to try to secure them in other creative ways—perhaps grants and perhaps private funds. Any and all help will be sought.

Finally, with regard to our concerts, getting the quintet into currently closed venues will be an effort that starts with the simplicity of positive preaching. Any of you reading this newsletter thinking, "When was the last time ABQ played in our city?" can get in touch with the presenter in that community and put in a request. For those places we've played, how about a return performance? There are plenty of series we have not been able to crack because of the unfortunate perception of what a brass quintet does. Either they perceive the quintet as something goofy, or as group that plays bizarre and offensive music. You and I know better and we must bring it to light. I will challenge anyone who has heard our concerts to tell me that the programming is just too difficult to listen to for a full concert. We certainly don't shy away from challenging works, but we do spend a lot of time thinking about what engages our audience.

Let me reiterate why all this is important. The future is not predetermined and there is plenty more yet to be told about this relatively young ensemble. However, it often feels like we are increasingly alone in our quest. In the last few years, we have played some concerts where there have been more seats than people in the audience, and I've encountered many students who ask, "What's so wrong with being entertaining?" These two facts are both depressing and inspiring because I realize what work there is to be done and how important it is for that work to continue. There is a time and a place for more popular music, even using brass instruments, but not right now, not using brass quintet. Think of the brass quintet like an endangered species that in the not too distant future might only be remembered as a bunch of guys wearing wigs. That is why we all share the burden. Just like environmental concerns, all of our choices have consequences for what we leave to the next generation. Our goal should not be to seek the demise of anyone, but to bring about the due recognition of what certainly should be considered the real future of our art form. The road ahead will not be an easy trip. We must continue to ask ourselves: Will the music world be a richer place in one hundred years with the addition of pseudo-ragtime arrangements and operas that are adapted for brass? Or will the art form be judged by the music that was written and performed with the idea of advancing and promoting the art? We hope that you empathize with our mission, and we invite you to join us in a renewed commitment to the brass quintet's role as a true chamber music ensemble. ■

**News Nuggets**



Composer Daniel Asia

■ The ABQ gave the world premiere of **Daniel Asia's Brass Quintet** on August 6th at the Harris Concert Hall in Aspen. The work was written for the ABQ on a grant from the Fromme Foundation and will receive its New York premiere on Oct. 14th on the ABQ's annual faculty recital at the Juilliard School.

■ **Cinco de Brasso** was the recipient of the 2002 New Horizon Fellowships to the Aspen Music Festival. The group was formed in 1998 at Northwestern University and has been active in the Houston area and at Rice University for the last year. This summer, in addition to their own recitals and performing on Aspen's Music on the Mountain series, **Cinco de Brasso** performed with the ABQ in Harris Hall and on the Salida/Aspen concert series.

■ ABQ trumpeter **Ray Mase** was recently elected to the Board of Directors of Chamber Music America. Former ABQ bass trombonist **Robert Biddlecome** (ABQ member from 1961-1990) who currently serves as Executive Director of the American Brass Chamber Music Association Inc, served on the board of CMA from 1983 to 1987.

■ In March, 2003, the ABQ will visit Turkey for performances of **Eric Ewazen's Shadowcatcher** with the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra. The work is available on a recording in its wind ensemble version by the ABQ with the Juilliard Wind Ensemble (New World 80587-2)

**Comments, Questions, Ideas? Contact the ABQ via [www.americanbrassquintet.com/feedback.htm](http://www.americanbrassquintet.com/feedback.htm)**

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As in the past, we are pleased to report that nearly 80% of our operating budget comes from earned revenue. But in order to continue our efforts we also rely upon the support of individuals. Please consider making a contribution to the American Brass Chamber Music Assoc, Inc. Your help at any level is appreciated. Please check the appropriate box to the right, and return this section of the newsletter with check or money order made out to:

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## The Three Latest ABQ Recordings

**A Storm in the Land: Music of the 26th N. C. Regimental Band, CSA**



Twenty-three pieces from the repertoire of the 26th North Carolina Regimental Band (New World 80608)

**Classic American Brass: Masterworks by Carter, Dahl, Sanders, Whittenberg**



(Summit DCD 275)

**Shadowcatcher by Eric Ewazen for Wind Ensemble and Brass Quintet**



The Juillard Wind Ensemble  
Mark Gould, conductor  
(New World 80587-2)

**Other ABQ Recordings on Summit:**

**Amerin Brass Quintessence**  
Works by Ingolf Dahl, Robert Sanders, Elliott Carter, Charles Whittenberg  
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Works by Jan Bach, Sampson, Schuller, Welcher (Summit DCD 187)  
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**Fyre & Lightning: Consort Music of the 1600's** (Summit DCD 181)  
No. of CDs @ \$16

**New American Brass:**  
Works by Adolphe, Dennis, Ewazen, Sampson, Snow (Summit DCD 133)  
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