

American Brass Quintet

FOURTY FIFTH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

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Newsletter

Reflections on a most wonderful collaboration

By Stephen Sacco



I was delighted when Ray Mase asked me to write for the ABQ newsletter. This is my opportunity to publicly thank the ABQ for their dedication to my music and the music of my colleagues. With their kind, patient and generous comments, Ray, Kevin, Dave, Mike and John all made wonderful contributions to my *Quintet*. I am extremely grateful to them for all their efforts on behalf of my music. By

championing a new work, the ABQ makes a solid commitment to the composer and to the piece. I appreciate their dedication and their commitment to the highest artistic standards.

The First Contact

My collaboration with the ABQ came about through a recommendation by Eric Ewazen. This was to be my first piece ever for brass. I was excited. Ray sent me a stack of ABQ recordings, which I avidly devoured. We also discussed the programming needs of the ABQ as well as the physical needs of the individual players. Ray stressed how important these issues are for the members of the ABQ.

The Napkin, Yaddo & The First Feedback

I began writing the piece with what would become the second movement, the *Little Suite of Miniatures*. The opening theme of the *Air*, the first Miniature in the *Little Suite*, was actually composed on a napkin during a dinner break between students at Mannes, complete with all the meter changes. I left for Yaddo shortly after the end of the school year to begin work on the quintet in earnest. At the beginning of my Yaddo residency, I wrote the first three movements of the *Suite* rather fluidly. During the next two weeks I struggled with the *Largo*, having what some might call a "block" (which, almost never happens to me), but, eventually the *Largo* came, and I was satisfied.

While I was having "my block," I decided it was time to send the players some music. The ABQ was at Aspen, so I sent them those first three movements from the suite. They read them immediately, and Ray sent me an e-mail saying that the writing was good and they had enough rest to play it and so forth...and most importantly, to "keep going". So I did. Once I had finished that

... Continued on page 2

Inside Contents:

<i>Still on Course . . . Of course</i> by Kevin Cobb	4
<i>Rojak on the Road</i>	2
News Nuggets	3
ABQ Discography 1995-2005	7

Another milestone—the ABQ turns 45!

By Raymond Mase

There's nothing like another half-decade anniversary to get the ABQ reflecting on its past and prioritizing for the future. But before I tell you about the plans for this year, I thought it might be interesting to take a look back at the previous ABQ celebrations.

I hope it doesn't come as any surprise to anyone that I wasn't a member of the ABQ for the fifth or tenth year anniversaries. My first ABQ anniversary was the fifteenth in 1975, and to be perfectly honest, I don't remember any significant event to commemorate that year. Fifteen years was certainly an accomplishment, but the group's identity was still developing. It was pretty much business as usual. Beginning with the 20th year though, anniversaries began to carry a little more weight, not only to our supporters and us, but to the brass world in general. For the ABQ 20th we had a season long celebration with a series of three concerts here in New York City. Over the history of the ABQ, editions of early music done by ABQ members have been a mainstay of our concert repertoire, and the first concert of this series featured all early music in modern editions by Arnold Fromme, Gerard Schwarz, and me. The second concert was an all 19th-century program that included our new excursions into the performance of Civil War brass music on period instruments. The final concert was an incredible program of ABQ commissions by William Bolcom, Gilbert Amy, Charles Whittenberg, William Schuman and Elliott Carter. Nothing could have been more fitting at that time than to celebrate our anniversary with the performance of the repertoire on those three concerts.

As with any group, the early years of the ABQ were spent trying to establish a presence in the field and sort out how the group would function. The ABQ membership changed all too frequently in the early years—in fact in our first twenty-five years there were a total of nineteen personnel changes. (Since then there have been only two.) We had our share of growing pains, but as the group entered its third decade, our activities solidified and the membership became more consistent and secure. We sensed

... Continued on page 5

Released this past July, *In Gabrieli's Day* (Summit DCD 429) takes a fresh look at the music of Venice from around 1600. It is the ABQ's sixth recording for Summit Records



Reflections

(continued from page 1)

third miniature, I had, in my mind, an overall plan for the entire work. I imagined the piece as a *Suite* of five miniatures surrounded by two larger fantasy movements. I came up with a concept for a flexible piece, one that could be programmed in two ways, as a big brass quintet of about 20 minutes or as a shorter piece where the suite could be excerpted and played alone, about 10 minutes. Ray liked this idea very much.

Our first rehearsal - Little Suite of Miniatures

I had finished the *Suite* in August and thought it was time for some feedback. We had our first rehearsal, my first time hearing the suite movement, in NYC in September of 2003. The players were all very helpful and patient. They seemed to like the *Suite* very much. John kept urging me to write lower for the bass trombone; in fact, at one point he turned his music upside down and said "now that's more like it". I got a quick lesson on the low end of the bass trombone. With that newly acquired knowledge, I made some revisions to the suite movement and planned to write lower in the rest of the piece. At one point I was concerned about how agile the low end of the bass trombone part could be and I e-mailed John with my questions. His return e-mail shows clearly why composers love the ABQ. For the duration of writing the quintet, I posted his e-mail on the music desk of my piano. It went like this: "Write what you want. If it is too hard I will practice more." Are these guys a composer's dream?

In the *Largo* movement, the players warned me that the mute changes I notated would be too noisy for the character of the music and they didn't think I would like it. They played it as written and they were correct! The noise from the mute changes totally disrupted the continuity of the music. The problem was fixed with a simple and effective revision.

At the end of the rehearsal I mentioned I had with me the first 30 bars or so of the first movement, the *Prelude Fantasy*. They read it; it sounded fantastic, and on the first time through! I was totally amazed and knew I was in the presence of absolutely fabulous musicians. At about this same time, they had a lot of concerts in NYC which I attended. I kept hearing what they could do and it kept expanding my thinking about writing for them.

Our second rehearsal - An open rehearsal in the brass class at Juilliard

Our second rehearsal was semi-public. Ray asked me to participate in the brass class at Juilliard. This was our real meat and potatoes rehearsal, open for everyone to see. Ray emphasized to me that he wanted to show the collaborative process to the students. Of all the rehearsals we had together, this is the one where I talked the most. We worked through the *Suite* section by section, talking through the nuance, the phrasing, balance, dynamics, who leads and who follows etc., all in great detail. At the end of this rehearsal, they really had a sense of how I wanted the music to go. I was impressed with their ability to apply the changes instantaneously and permanently to the music.



The September 22nd recording session of Stephen Sacco's *Quintet* at the Academy of Arts and Letters, in NYC. Pictured are Cobb, Mase, Sacco, producer Judith Sherman, Rojak, assistant engineer Jeanne Velonis, Powell, and Wakefield.

Aspen, NPR and the Aspen Revisions

I arrived in Aspen 5 days before the premiere concert. Our first rehearsal was my first time hearing the piece in its entirety. A few days before my arrival, the ABQ played a preview performance of the piece in Salida, CO. The players felt that the ending of the *Suite* was perhaps too strong; members of the audience applauded thinking it was the end of the piece yet there was still a movement left to go. We discussed and tried different ideas, revising the ending right there in rehearsal, and settled on having two endings: the original which would be used when the suite is played alone, and the revised ending which would be used when the piece is played in its entirety. The two endings are not so different in notes as they are in character.

In this rehearsal, I also noticed that the upper parts in the *Mambo Fantasy* were over written. They didn't have enough rest built into them. The players didn't want to complain, so they tried to reassure me. But Dave's comment got to me. "By the time I get to my campana in aria, I have no lip left between my mouthpiece and my teeth. It's nothing but teeth!". I thought, how horrifying! I took it upon myself to fix this and spent the evening revising the horn and trumpet parts in the *Mambo Fantasy*. To their surprise, and perhaps relief, I show up to the next rehearsal with a new set of parts for the upper brass in the final movement. Ray smiled and said "someone's burning the midnight oil at Aspen".

The world premiere performance took place at Harris Hall on July 24, 2004. The performance was fabulous! I enjoyed hearing it very much and I think the audience did too. An added surprise was the feature on NPR hosted by Fred Childs. His show *Performance Today* covered a week's worth of concerts from Aspen and featured the ABQ and the first movement from my quintet. The interview with the ABQ players as well as the first movement in performance can be heard on the NPR site. The following URL will take you there: www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=3821631.

... Continued on page 7

Rojak on the Road - 2005

by John Rojak

The 2004-05 season was a busy one for the ABQ. We were on the road quite a bit, and even though we never used our passports, there were a few times we felt as if we were in foreign lands. Our first such trip was to Miami, Florida. We were excited to see our old friend Jerry Peel, the horn professor at the University of Miami, who had arranged our brief residency. An interesting note about Jerry—he took what is probably the longest sabbatical leave in history. He was horn professor at Miami, but left for New York to play studio dates and Broadway shows, which he did for about 15 years. He then became a high school teacher and administrator for a few years, and after more than a 20-year absence returned to Miami as horn professor! I think it wasn't a paid leave.

I've never quite understood South Florida. Is it South New York? Or North Havana? Or the land of oversize sedans cruising erratically down the highways with no apparent drivers? Regardless of my feelings, with its unusual vegetation, unusual languages, and delicious Cubano sandwiches, we intended to have a great time. Walking around the campus of the university, we realized how lovely a tropical climate can be. As we passed the heron and possibly alligator filled lagoon, we also thought we might have to amend our suggested dress code policy for our Aspen and Juilliard students. We have always told them to wear "school clothes" for the less than formal brass concerts, but after seeing what is worn at the U of Miami, we may wind up with a stage full of skin covered by little more than the curves of their instruments.

... Continued on page 3

Rojak on the Road

(continued from Page 2)

After working with some talented student quintets, we went with Jerry Peel and Craig Morris, the trumpet professor, to a trendy Coral Gables restaurant. Feeling less than cutting edge, we found a quieter table in the snazzy room so we could engage in that old, not-so-trendy activity called conversation. Even so, there were many distractions, with the beautiful people, fancy cars driving past our window, sleek music, and really good food at our table. We thought we had a chance at finally being seen in *People* magazine had we stayed there just a few hours longer.

Our next tour was a brief one to Tennessee. We had a mini-residency in Clarksville at Austin Peay University, then drove through Nashville to get to Cookeville, where we performed at Tennessee Tech. (There are a lot of "villes" in Tennessee!) We also had a post-concert stop at a Chili's, where our cute waitress' squeals of "Awe-some!" at our every request were somehow both alarming and amusing. She gave us something to talk about for the next van ride or two.

A couple of weeks later we had a tour that gave us one of the biggest contrasts of venues we've ever come across. First stop was Logan, Utah—pristine, snow-capped mountains, crisp air, and many blond people, where it can be an ordeal to find a cup of coffee, never mind a beer. We were to spend a couple of days at Utah State, and had a number of residency events that were timed to the second by our host, Todd Phallis, the trombone teacher. The first day was quite busy with a 2-hour chamber music master class, 3 hours of private lessons, ending with 2-hour individual instrument master classes. Todd had arranged for us to have dinner after all these events at a lovely Italian restaurant downtown. David Wakefield told us he was going to pass, as he was too tired for a meal that late. As we were about to leave the music building for the restaurant, I thought we should say goodnight to Dave, so we stopped by the room where he was giving his horn class. Opening the door, we were quite surprised to hear Dave demonstrating his first warm-up exercise, this being the 8th hour of teaching. We had a lot of fun at Dave's expense over wine at dinner, and cheerfully ignored his explanations the next morning.

We flew from Utah to our next destination, Reno, Nevada. It was as if we had gone through a science fiction machine to a new universe. As we exited the jet-way into the terminal, our first sight was a bank of slot machines, then a billboard that seemed to be advertising



The ABQ with conductor Gary Lewis after their performance of Ewazen's *Shadowcatcher* with the Midland-Odesa Symphony last April.

a sushi strip joint (!) Our next impression was of our hotel, which was one of those old school casino/ hotels. As we walked through the lobby to our room elevator, we passed many empty card tables and banks of slot machines, although some had people hanging onto the machine's arm, cigarettes dangling out of the corner of their mouths, looking like they just lost their last nickel. We piled into our elevator and wondered if our stay in Reno would be spent safely in our rooms. Fortunately, our contact, Diane Dragone, met us and whisked us up a hill to the University of Nevada-Reno campus, and our perspective changed dramatically.

It so happens that Reno is a very beautiful city with a great climate. Except for the yet-to-be-renovated casinos downtown, it's a lovely place to live, work and retire, as we found out from our old friend, Bob Heinrich. Bob is one of the founding trumpeters of the ABQ, and it was a great pleasure to see him in Reno, where he has retired. Bob filled in some historical details for us as we peppered him with ques-

News Nuggets

- In celebration of our 45th anniversary, the ABQ recently released a new cd called *In Gabrieli's Day* (Summit DCD 429). The recording features the music of Renaissance Venice, including Gabrieli's *Sonata XX* for twenty-two players organized into five choirs, with the ABQ joined by players from the ABQ Seminar at the Juilliard School.
- David Sampson's new recording *Dectet* was recently released on the Troy label (Troy 780). The recording includes his 1999 brass quintet, *Strata*, written for the ABQ and his *Serenade for Flugelhorn and Strings* with Ray Mase on flugelhorn. The ABQ also premiered two new pieces of Sampson's this past year—*Entrance*, written for the ABQ, received its first performance on April 17th at Louisiana State University. *Breakaway*, for two trumpets and electronics, was written for the ABQ trumpeters and was premiered at Aspen Music Festival on July 30th.
- The American Brass Quintet Brass Band was recently back at work for a second recording of the music of the 26th North Carolina Regimental Band for the Moravian Music Foundation. The first recording of the music of the 26th Regiment was the 2002 release on New World Records called *A Storm in the Land* (NW8060802) This new disc is scheduled for release next fall and will be called *Cheer Boys, Cheer!*
- The ABQ recently recorded Osvaldo Lacerda's *Quinteto Concertante* and Steven Sacco's *Quintet for Brass* for a cd that will also include works of Rieti and Lovelock.
- *The Three Tenses*, by composer Huang Ruo, received its world premiere on July 30th at the Aspen Music Festival. Written for the ABQ on a grant from the American Composers Forum, Huang Ruo's new brass quintet will get its New York premiere at the Juilliard School on November 30th.
- Organist Timothy J. Brumfield will be guest artist with the ABQ for a holiday concert in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania on December 2. Tim will join the ABQ on settings of *Divinum Mysterium*, Gigout's *Grand Choeur Dialogue*, canzoni of Giovanni Gabrieli, and his own arrangements of Christmas carols.
- The ABQ will perform at the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic on December 14th and 15th in Chicago. The ABQ appearance is being supported by funds from the Bach Musical Instruments and Summit Records.
- The ABQ will premiere *Cornopean Airs* a new work for brass and organ by Pulitzer Prize winning composer Paul Moravec, on December 18th at the Central Synagogue in New York City at 7 pm. The concert is part of the Prism Concerts series and will feature organist Colin Fowler with the ABQ.
- The ABQ, ensemble in residence at the Aspen Music Festival since 1970, will return to Aspen this winter to perform on the Festival's winter series in the Harris Concert Hall on March 17th.
- The ABQ's "official" 45th anniversary concert will take place on May 4, 2006 at the Juilliard School. In conjunction with the Juilliard's Centennial, the School has commissioned composer Joan Tower for a new brass quintet to be premiered on that concert. The program will also include the NY premiere of Sampson's *Breakaway* for two trumpets and electronics, and a performance of the first ABQ commissioned work from 1961--Charles Whittenberg's *Triptych*.
- The ABQ is happy to accept the invitation to appear at this year's ITG conference at Rowan University in Glassboro NJ, June 6-10, 2006. The group is tentatively scheduled for a performance on Thursday June 8.



tions about his time with ABQ. We also spent an evening with my friend Walter Katai, who is a vice-president of Smith-Barney and a great supporter of the Arts. Walter had us meet him for drinks at his fabulous house on a hill overlooking the city. The view was gorgeous in every direction—city lights one way, mountains another—and it was difficult to leave for dinner. Once again we were given an insight to the difference of real estate prices in the Northeast and the rest of the country; also the difference in the salaries of musicians and stockbrokers!

... continued on page 5

Still on Course . . . of course!

by Kevin Cobb

The 45th anniversary of the American Brass Quintet provides a moment for us to reflect on the beginnings of the ensemble and the mission statement that proposed to expand and disseminate serious brass chamber music. In the past few decades, the quintet has compiled a substantial record of achievements toward this goal, and we owe a debt of gratitude to all those who have contributed to this endeavor. Illustrated in this and other newsletters, one can see that the quintet has been quite active and successful with regard to recording, touring, residencies, new commissions, premiers, and with the education of young brass players. In the past decade alone, the ABQ has premiered more



Mike explaining musical phrasing to a young trombonist at a recent ABQ mini-residency.

than twenty new works for brass, averaged one major recording a year, and in conjunction with our formal concerts on tour, our mini-residency program reinforced the concepts of chamber music to music students nationwide. Each of these activities undoubtedly contributes to the ultimate mission of elevating and promoting brass chamber music. However, despite these successes, the all-too-familiar stereotypes about brass quintet seem to persist, especially in the rather limited focus of the chamber music lens. Typically, the brass quintet is not considered to be a serious ensemble. I spoke recently with our manager, Todd Stanton, who shed some light on this dilemma.

KC: *Todd, you have been the development person for ABQ since 1986 and your company has been the management for ABQ since 1991. As you know, the quintet plays many different types of venues while on tour. Can you describe how the ABQ fits with the traditional "chamber music society" series?*

TS: The ABQ has been readily programmed by general and chamber music series around the world, nearly since inception. The Quintet's recorded legacy is unparalleled. The ABQ offers a distinct survey of music from 1400 to 2005. Unlike the usual array of string quartets performing legions of moldering quartets heard for the 1000th time, the ABQ offers exciting new commissions coupled with new editions of earlier music. Of course, this is not to say that exciting renditions of older string works are unimportant.

KC: *How do you see the perception in the field for brass quintet?*

TS: The brass quintet perception in the market remains divided in the minds of some venues. The "pop culture" approach of some groups has been seriously devastating to the furthering of legitimate brass chamber music. In the 1980s and 1990s such groups nearly destroyed the legitimate brass chamber music market by convincing venues that "pop brass" for abnormal fees was the

way to go for brass and thus make box office receipts. This has been a serious disservice to the true art of brass chamber music

KC: *This makes an interesting commentary on the audience. Certainly most, if not all presenters are concerned with ticket sales, and it seems that a "legitimate" brass group, or shall we say, a more serious brass quintet, does not generate the audience that a more popular group does. You almost make it sound like those groups tricked the venues, but how can one argue with the bottom line?*

TS: Audiences basically trust what is offered to them by the venue. Only in major cities (and some interesting more suburban and rural enclaves) with very discerning audiences is that not the case. Venues sell more popular events to their audience solely considering box office (and some have little choice when the university designates them a profit center.) Managements sell such to venues considering only the dollar.

KC: *Do you think this began the trend toward the more common "all inclusive" series we know today? Most colleges that used to have a more complete chamber music series, now have a rather limited number of concerts that includes everything from jazz, to dance, to circus acts or Broadway shows. Serious classical music, not just chamber music, often gets cut back to only one of these performances. Am I correct in seeing this progression that way?*

TS: There have always been some all-inclusive series—generally in smaller communities and cities. I suspect that at one time these series were primarily music before the real proliferation of small touring theater and dance groups (the latter came along, generally, following a massive cash infusion in those areas by the NEA starting in the 70s). For those venues (mostly college/university) that once had multiple series, the condensing down to a single mixed series has almost always been the result of the budget cutting in the 80s that deemed art, philosophy and similar areas unworthy of financial support. Even if the budget issue was resolved, often the university arts series was not reinstated.

KC: *Many people point to the repertoire of the brass quintet and say that it just doesn't hold up to Beethoven, Mozart and the like. Was this shift—from serious to pop—inevitable as the brass quintet searched for its niche?*

. . . Continued on page 6

American Brass Quintet

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

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Another milestone

(continued from Page 1)

that we were entering a period of stability. For the 25th anniversary we wanted an event to tie together those early years by bringing together all the fine players who had contributed to the group even briefly. So we celebrated that anniversary with a single concert on Dec. 10th 1985—twenty-five years to the day after the official ABQ debut—with nine former ABQ members on stage with us. It was an unforgettable night. I still have the picture of the fourteen of us on stage here on the wall of my home office. We also printed a booklet about those twenty-five years with a wonderful history of the group written by our friend and board member Margaret Shakespeare.

Looking back on that 25th anniversary now, it is clear that it really was much more than just the celebration of a quarter century. It marked not only the end of those formative years of the ABQ, but the beginning of a new period in our history that would become our most productive, focused and meaningful. The group's commitment to new music intensified over the next years with an impressive list of new works by a younger generation of composers. It seemed completely natural for our 30th anniversary to once again focus on the growing body of ABQ commissions. And that's what we had in store for the Merkin Hall concert on Dec. 11, 1990. The concert not only took a close look at the growing importance of ABQ's contributions to the field with the performances of movements from nine ABQ works, but it also celebrated the remarkable twenty-nine year tenure of Robert Biddlecome as ABQ bass trombonist. Although Bob wasn't a founding member of the quintet back in 1960, over his years with the group he became our spokesman and was at the core of every quintet venture. I couldn't be happier in saying that Bob is still on board behind the scenes today as the executive director of the ABQ's parent organization, the American Brass Chamber Music Association, Inc. Another aspect of the Quintet's operation that began with that 30th anniversary season was our signing with Stanton Management. Todd Stanton, president of the firm, had already been doing grant writing and consulting for us prior to 1990, but by the 30th anniversary it became clear that with his keen understanding of the ABQ, Todd would be the ideal manager for us. You'll get a sense of his insight and dedication by reading Kevin Cobb's interview in this newsletter.

By the time of our 35th anniversary in 1995, the ABQ residency at Juilliard had really become the center of our New York activity. Our Juilliard seminars opened the eyes of many talented young brass players to the challenges and rewards of brass chamber music, and led them to pursue their own careers in the field. In addition to some of these players becoming members of already established groups like the ABQ (Kevin came up through the Juilliard ranks), the Canadian Brass and Empire Brass, groups like the Meridian Arts Ensemble, Manhattan

... Continued on page 7

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The Briefcase Brass Quintet-Aspen Fellowship Quintet 2005
Ryan Aubry, Mark D'Angelo, trumpets; Samir Abd-Elmessih, horn; David Dick, trombone; Seth Cook, tuba

Thank you for your donations that helped bring the Briefcase Brass Quintet to Aspen last summer. We also express our thanks to the Aspen Music Festival and School for its continuing support of this program.

Rojak on the Road

(continued from Page 3)

Our spring tours took us to Indiana, Texas, Louisiana, and Minneapolis, as well as a nice break from airports with mini-residencies in Storrs, Connecticut, and at Skidmore College in Saratoga, NY. We had a chance to see some good friends and explore new places, like West Texas, which is advertised as "The Middle of Somewhere." We learned that Wabash College in Indiana is one of 3 remaining all male colleges in the country (I keep forgetting to check what the others are) and had authentic po-boy sandwiches in Baton Rouge. Most significantly, though, we were reunited with Bob Grechesky at Butler University in Indianapolis.

Bob Grechesky is the head of bands at Butler, and a fine euphonium player, with a keen interest in brass music. He conducted the world premiere of Eric Ewazen's *Shadowcatcher* with ABQ as soloists at Butler in 1995, and we'd had a fantastic time with him. Bob is a champion eater and was very excited to introduce us to his culinary world. We discovered a bar food called Scotch eggs. Those are hard-boiled eggs wrapped in sausage and breadcrumbs, then deep-fried. Former ABQ trumpeter Chris Gekker remarked that it was like swallowing an embolism. But they were delicious. For the celebratory dinner he took us to an all you can eat seafood buffet, and prepped us by giving his strategy for a perfect meal. That entailed making 4 trips to the tables before thinking about the dessert feast. After finishing our plates from the 2nd trip, Ray said, "Well, maybe it's time to take a look at those desserts." Bob looked crestfallen, and seemed very disappointed in our appetites.

With this memory, we prepared ourselves for the reunion. Sure enough, we wound up at a seafood buffet restaurant, but this time we were ready. We filled our plates sparingly each time, and sure enough, we all made 3 or 4 trips to the tables. Bob was proud of us, and we felt like real brass players! The next night we went to the bar where the Scotch eggs are served, and Bob found the ultimate bar food—a Scotch egg pizza. He ordered one, but we decided to rest on our laurels (slightly larger laurels than when we started the tour) and let it repose on the table while we sipped our beverages.

Being on the road as much as we were last season turned out very nicely. One aspect that helps is the great interest in our mini-residencies. Not only do we get to know students and faculty much better, but we get to unpack our suitcases and stay in one place for a couple of days. Our hosts, whether we were previously acquainted or not, are always gracious and hospitable, and I can't think of a venue where we are not eager to return. See you on the road! ■

Still on Course

(continued from Page 4)

TS: The premise of the question is wrong in my thinking. There are numerous studies, both defined and anecdotal, about audience attendance at both symphonic and chamber series. "Pop" chamber music groups began appearing on serious chamber music series before the great condensing of multiple series into what is often now a single series with multiple disciplines. These groups offer a legitimate service but I have a problem when they are misrepresented to the market and the public as a serious chamber music group.

The pop side of brass had no more motivation than the greenback. The legitimate brass chamber music niche was being



Composer Huang Ruo, whose new brass quintet *The Three Tenses*, received its world premiere on July 30th at the Aspen Music Festival, and its New York premiere at the Juilliard School on Nov. 30th.

built by the American, Eastman and New York brass quintets since the early 1960s and others attempted to follow with varying success. I believe that it is only in the last decade or so that more forward thinking chamber music series have come to accept that there is legitimate brass chamber music. This is a learning process for many of them. Many have been (and some continue to be) stuck in the land of string quartets written from the time of Haydn and Mozart to late Beethoven (and the occasional foray into early 20th Century works). I recall a phone conversation two years ago with the person running a very prominent series in a major city. They were weeping over an ever-dwindling audience. The series was nothing but string quartets playing works played hundreds of times on the series. I suggested that they were boring their audience to death (or at least to non-attendance). That series is now "experimenting" with such odd items as piano trios and even the Czech Nonet. Ticket sales are up. Perhaps they will eventually venture as far afield as a brass quintet.

KC: *Todd, you also manage more "traditional" groups like string quartets, piano trio, etc. I am curious if there is any difference in the booking process? Do you have to convince the presenter any differently with our quintet than you would with another ensemble on your roster?*

TS: An interesting question. I have the luxury of only working with high quality groups on my roster. The broad market knows that they only get high-end from this office. So, discussions are never about quality but more about dates, cost and effectiveness toward meeting their needs. Regarding the presenter standpoint, Douglas Hamilton, my chief associate, has a wonderful term, "cultural leadership", that he uses to describe what he views as a responsibility of the venue to provide leadership in programming for their public. Unfortunately, this seems to be greatly lacking at many venues. One must also define "culture" and perhaps the

watering down of that term is what needs real scrutiny.

After speaking with Todd, I felt it was worth pursuing the question of how the brass quintet is perceived on the outside. In an effort to investigate this issue, I reviewed the recent offerings of several music societies to find out what is being presented as chamber music today. The results were not shocking, but also not encouraging.

I randomly began with the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society that has an impressive season of approximately 60 concerts. In fact, this year they are celebrating their 20th anniversary season. Of those 60 concerts, 16 are string quartets. Nearly one-third of their season is represented by string quartets, many of which are playing safe, audience-friendly composers such as Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. The other remaining concerts are largely made up of string trios, piano trios, violinists, and solo pianists. There was not one "non-traditional" ensemble—not one woodwind quintet, brass quintet, percussion group, saxophone quartet, or more surprisingly, no real dedication to new music.

Other chamber music series offered similar results: La Jolla has 22 concerts, including three string quartets, and the rest of the concerts are based more towards piano – 5 pianists plus a featured pianist with the Takacs string quartet and Leon Fleisher soloing with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. In Buffalo – 7 concerts, 4 string quartets. Pittsburgh has 6 concerts with 4 string quartets. Columbus has 7 concerts with 4 string quartets, piano solo, cello and piano, and a string sextet. In Ottawa, Canada, that series has 8 concerts, only two string quartets, a piano trio, two early music groups, and a violin solo. But they did have one dedicated new music concert. Cleveland, may present the best news, as far as we're concerned, with 7 concerts, three being string quartets, but also one concert featuring the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet, and next spring, ABQ!

It is well known that the arts are facing many difficulties – a steady decline in interest, lower audience attendance, and reduced funding overall. Chamber music gets only a very small fraction of an ever-dwindling financial pie. The big name soloists, orchestras, and chamber music ensembles will likely always remain, but our challenge is to preserve the smaller, equally vital orchestras, ensembles, and educational programs. The times ahead no doubt will test the ingenuity of the quintet in the face of declining arts support, but we will continue to push forward, steeled by the alternative. We must continue to expand the serious repertoire by commissioning the best composers while concurrently pursuing archival recording projects. Our residency program has been a success due to the increased need and desire for legitimate brass chamber music and we will continue to promote this type of education.

In the end, perhaps not surprisingly, the ABQ mission for the future appears similar to the past. While we cannot yet say, "mission accomplished" with respect to ABQ's original goal of achieving equality for brass chamber music, perhaps we can say "mission still valid." We must steadfastly reassert our commitment to the task that was laid out over four decades ago. Today, we face different, yet equally formidable obstacles that can only be overcome through a joint effort. If you are a colleague, acquaintance, supporter, or just a casual listener, you too share in the ABQ mission. True artistic support is multifaceted, not just financial. Support comes in the form of education through discussion about legitimate chamber music. It also comes through the programming of real brass music if you are a performer, and requesting this music at concerts if you are a listener. Everyone shares in this responsibility, in this cultural leadership, that affects us all. And for the sake of our future, may we all succeed. ■

Another milestone

(continued from Page 5)

Brass Quintet, Extension Ensemble, and Urban Brass Quintet had their beginnings under our tutelage. With this strong awareness of the brass chamber field developing at Juilliard, we began presenting a type of brass forum during anniversary years where brass players, composers and students would come together to get a closer look at the past, present and future of brass chamber music. These *State of the Art* seminars as we've called them, have regularly brought together some of the leaders of the field and given us a great opportunity to evaluate our own work among our peers. Scheduled on consecutive evenings, the *State of the Art* seminar and 35th anniversary concert transformed that anniversary into a two-day brass chamber music festival.

The ongoing Juilliard support for the ABQ's work has been remarkable, and in celebration of our 40th year, Juilliard presented us in concert at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall. The program of all first performances included new works by Robert Beaser and Melinda Wagner, a new adaptation of Schuman's *American Hymn* by Kevin Cobb, and new early music editions of mine—Marenzio madrigals, Coperario Fancies, and Cherubini Marches. Bob Biddlecome joined us on stage for our closing pieces. For The *State of the Art* seminar that year, composer Melinda Wagner and NY Brass Quintet trombonist John Swallow joined us in looking at the developments in the field that are keeping brass chamber music alive and moving forward. With the release of two new Summit recordings that year—*Classic American Brass* and *American Brass Quintessence*—the ABQ's 40th anniversary proved to be the most satisfying and complete of our anniversary seasons.

That puts us up to date with the past anniversaries, and makes me wonder what we can possibly do to top all that. I'm happy to say that events for this 45th year are well under way, and will center around the "official" ABQ anniversary concert on May 4, 2006 in the Juilliard theater (recently renamed the Peter Jay Sharp Theater). The program will not only celebrate our 45th year, but in conjunction with the year-long celebration of Juilliard's Centennial, the School has commissioned a new work for us by composer Joan Tower to be premiered on that concert. Also on the program we'll do the first NY performance of David Sampson's *Breakaway* for two trumpets and electronics, and perform the very first ABQ commission from 1961—*Triptych* of Charles Whittenberg. Selections from the ABQ's 45th anniversary recording *In Gabriel's Day* will also be performed on the concert with the ABQ joined by our Juilliard students. We'll host another *State of the Art* seminar at Juilliard on April 17th and once again bring together people in the field. This fall we've been out on tour as usual, but we've also just completed a week-long recording project of the second installment of the music of the 26th N.C. Regimental Band. Nola Reed Knouse, the director of the Moravian Music Foundation has prepared another twenty-five pieces played by the 26th Band for this new cd that will be called *Cheer Boys, Cheer!* There's much more in store for this year that you can read about in the news nuggets section of this newsletter.

Even with the tremendous amount of energy required to manage all these Quintet activities, it is important not to lose sight of the goals and dreams that have driven the ABQ for these 45 years. I still remember the first time I heard my senior colleagues in the group passionately speak about establishing brass chamber music in a very string oriented chamber music world. They recognized that would take a very long time and enormous dedication by many generations of ABQ members to achieve that goal. Well, here we are forty-five years later with some solid groundwork to report—performances worldwide, over fifty recordings, well over

one hundred works written, residencies at two of the finest institutions in the world with Aspen and Juilliard—well on our way to realizing that dream. And with the 50th anniversary of the ABQ right around the corner, we'll hope to continue our work for the ABQ and brass chamber music not only to that major milestone but also far beyond. ■

American Brass Quintet Discography

1995-2005

Recordings by the American Brass Quintet

Fyre & Lightning (Summit DCD 181) Consort Music of 1600

Premier! (Summit DCD 187)

Wks. by Jan Bach, Sampson, Schuller, Welcher

American Brass Quintessence: Music of Five Centuries (Summit DCD 187)

Wks. by Josquin, Stoltzer, Brade, Bach, Cherubini, Ewald, Lazarof & Plog
Classic American Brass (Summit DCD 275)

Wks. of Carter, Dahl, Sanders, Whittenberg

A Storm in the Land (NW 80608-2)

Music of the 26th N.C. Regimental Band, ABQ Brass Band

American Visions (Summit DCD 365)

Wks. by Adler, Beaser, Schuman, Thomas, Tower, Wagner

In Gabriel's Day (Summit DCD 429)

Wks. of Venice c. 1600, with Urban Brass Quintet and Juilliard students

Collections featuring the American Brass Quintet

Chamber Music of Eric Ewazen. *Frost Fire* (Well Tempered WTP 5172)

Robert Starer. *Annapolis Suite* (MMC 2048)

Robert Starer. *Evanescence* (Troy 244)

Music To My Ears. *Elizabethan Madrigals* (Arabesque Z6695)

Music for the Soloists of the ABQ & Friends

by Eric Ewazen (Well Tempered WTP 5189)

Shadowcatcher—Eric Ewazen

(with Juilliard Wind Ensemble, Mark Gould cond.)(NW 80587-2)

Trilogy: Chamber Music of Dan Asia (*Brass Quintet*) Summit (DCD 385)

Decet—The Music of David Sampson—*Strata* (Troy 780)

Recent reissues on compact disc

American Brass Quintet (Crystal CD 214)

Wks. by Bertali, Bach, Ewald, Amy, Lovelock

Gunther Becker Portrait (Cybele 660.202)

Leonardo Balada—*Mosaico* (from 4 for 5 Serenus 12041) (Troy 417)

Meyer Kupferman—*Brass Quintet* (from 4 for 5 Serenus 12041)

Kupferman Orchestral Music Vol. 14 (Soundspells Productions CD 133)

Reflections

(continued from page 2)

The New York Premiere and "Quintet" in its final form

The New York premiere took place at Juilliard (my alma mater) on a Daniel Saidenberg Faculty Recital. This was the quintet in its final form, and the first performance before the big ABQ tour. The ABQ gave an exquisitely beautiful performance of the piece in its final form. Many people commented to me that it sounded as if they had been playing it all their lives—in my estimation, one of the greatest compliments you can hear. I was really pleased that Andrew Thomas, my first composition teacher, sat next to me for the performance. I studied with Mr. Thomas when I was a boy in the Pre-college division some 24 years ago.

ABQ Tour & Recording

The ABQ took Quintet on the road, and toured with it throughout the United States during the 2004-2005 season. The culmination of the tour was the recording that was made in late September of 2005. We recorded the piece at the acoustically beautiful Academy of Arts and Letters in New York City. The disc is being produced by Grammy Award winner, Judith Sherman and will be released in 2007.

Words cannot adequately express the depth of my gratitude to the men of the American Brass Quintet. To Ray, Kevin, Dave, Mike, and John, I am eternally grateful. —Steven Sacco ■

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Works by Jan Bach, Sampson, Schuller, Welcher (Summit DCD 187) _____ No. of CDs @ \$16

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www.americanbrassquintet.org/discography.htm for complete listing of recordings

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A Storm in the Land:

Music of the 26th N.C. Regimental Band, CSA

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