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Quintet does 'splendid' job

By Shirley Zoernig

The Sioux City Concert Course, in its third offering of the 1981-82 season, brought the Annapolis Brass Quintet to Eppley Auditorium Sunday afternoon with a splendid performance representing four hundred years of brass ensemble music. The Quintet, America's only full-time performing brass quintet, was making its second Sioux City appearance.

The program opened with the brisk "Canzona" of Giaches de Wert, a 16th century Flemish

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composer, and demonstrated the performers' virtuosity which never faltered. The Spanish Renaissance composer, Antonio de Cabezon was heard in "Two Spanish Variations" transcribed from organ, a stately "Galliard" and the "Song of a Cavalier".

Moving to the early twentieth century, the next selection featured the two trumpeters playing silver cornets in "Willow Echoes" by Frank Simon, cornetist with the John Philip Sousa Band. This was followed by "Partita No. 2" by Robert Lichtenberger, composed for the Annapolis Brass Quintet in 1980. The second movement, building beautiful layers of sonority, showed the mastery of the performers in blending and balancing with true artistry. Another contemporary selection, "Encounter" by Alen Molineux, was introduced by the performers as "frenetic perpetual motion", a valid description.

The first half of the program concluded with two 16th century pieces written originally for strings, "Galliard" and "Canzona" by Samuel Scheidt, who, the performers surmised, would surely not have written them for strings if he had heard them played by brass!

Following the intermission, the performers, entering from various doors, treated the audience to the very new and effective "Canonic Fanfare" of George Heussenstam, a 1981 Christmas gift to the Quintet.

Returning to the 16th century for transcriptions of vocal works, next was heard the lovely "Spring Returns" by Luca Marenzio, an Italian madrigalist, and the contrasting "Revecy Venir du Printemps" of Claude LeJeune.

"Three Sketches On A Southern Hymn Tune" by Elam Sprenkle, commissioned by the Quintet in 1981, is based on the hymn "My Shepherd Shall Supply My Need", and the second section again displayed the beautiful sustained harmony of the instruments. This was followed by an entertaining "Dixieland Medley" arranged by C. Warren Kellerhouse.

The group then arranged themselves in street corner band style for "Three Dances" by Thielman Susato, a Flemish composer and music publisher of the 16th century. Their versatility was evident as everyone but the horn player doubled in percussion.

The masterful "Contrapunctus 7" from the "Art of Fugue" by Johann Sebastian Bach was played in a very precise and elegant manner and was warmly appreciated by the audience. As an encore, the quintet presented "Billy Boy", arranged by C. Warren Kellerhouse.

A Brightly Polished Concert

By John V. Hurst
Bee Reviewer

IN A DAY WHEN electronic instruments are in the ascendancy — when the synthesizer is surpassing the guitar as a source of sugary sound — it's easy to forget how sweet the tones and textures of brass can be, especially choral brass.

Easy, that is, until you're reminded by something as accomplished

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and proficient as the Annapolis Brass Quintet. This consummate, disciplined ensemble played a concert in Davis Thursday night, a program of music for brasses spanning 400 years, and the results proved far more polished and bright than the gleaming instruments themselves.

The ABQ is two trumpets (David Cran and Robert Suggs), a French horn (Marc Guy), a regular trombone (Wayne Wells) and a bass trombone (Robert Posten). The trumpets occasionally become cornets and the bass trombone is sometimes supplanted by tuba.

They're all still young enough to have full heads of hair, and they play with a crispness and cohesion at once astonishing and highly satisfying. Their proficiency at playing a range of textures and tonalities — from clean, ringing, bell-like sounds to hushed, rounded, mellow tones and somber sonorities — is similarly astounding. And they do it all with flawless precision, crisp efficiency and brisk dispatch.

Their Davis program, played to a large crowd in the University of California's Freeborn Hall, covered the works of 10 composers and progressed like a bell curve from Renaissance to contemporary to Renaissance again. By the time it ended, each member of the quintet had taken a turn at the microphone to

introduce and explain the music to come.

Taking the stage, the ABQ got right down to business with a brief "Canzon" by 16th-century composer Giaches deWert, following this with a pair of Baroque variations from the same period — one a flowing thing of canonical counterpoint — by Spain's Antonio deCabezon.

There was an immediate contrast provided by three pieces from 19th-century composer Ludwig Maurer, softly stated music with the sound, feel and formality of Victorian England. And taking the program to its intermission break were leaps into the present with works by contemporary composers George Walker and Robert Lichtenberger.

The four-section Walker work — his "Music for Brass, Sacred and Profane" (1975) — was especially invigorating, it's opening "Invokation" a lean, spare segment of strident strength and its ensuing "Dance I" a piece of angular tones, rolling staccatos and overall playfulness.

ONLY THE INTERMISSION broke the contemporary continuity. Allan Molineux's "Encounter" (1972) was a tumbling thing of 8th and 16th notes skittering up and down a flight of stairs. Lawrence Moss's "Flight" (1979-81) also tended to tumble, but

here the textures and harmonies were softer, with dissonances in the wide-spaced chords.

Then, abruptly, it was back to the 17th-century formality of Samuel Scheidt in a three-movement "Suite" that started with an allegro trot in three-quarter time, followed with a funereally fugal "Chorale" and closed with a fast, pealing "Canzona Bergamasca."

For another trio, this time of street musicians' dances by the 16th-century Flemish composer Thielman Susato, the quintet left its chairs to stand near the wings with tamborine and drum. These led to the concert's closing climax: two "Contrapuncti" from J.S. Bach's the "Art of Fugue" that, with their masterful interplay of sonorities and melodies, seemed to summarize most of what had gone before.

The encore was yet another revelation, a playful Warren Kellerhouse arrangement of the folk tune, "Billy Boy," that featured some frankly jazz inflections and a brief vocal chorus.

The Annapolis Brass Quintet is in the midst of a six-week tour, and it has been spending a mid-tour break in Davis. It's break there will end after the ensemble's concerts today and Sunday — both at 3 p.m. — at the University of the Pacific in Stockton.

ECLECTIC

Brass quintet mixes styles and centuries

By VIRGINIA MODELLE
For The Capital

Sunday evening the bright and beautiful Annapolis Brass Quintet played its customary holiday concert as part of its current artist series, sponsored by the Brass Chamber Music Society of Annapolis.

An almost intimidating exposition of five centuries of dances, carols, chansons and chorales was certainly what the players call an eclectic program. Rather than joining in a sing-along, one sat and sometimes wondered at the inclusion of certain selections, or wished for others played at previous holiday concerts.

After a brisk opening English carol medley, arranged by Errol Schlabach, it was a surprise to hear from this prestigious group, some straying from its usual precise ensemble work. This was particularly noticed early in the program, in the "Prelude" (1896) by Johannes Brahms. But the ensemble warmed up and in most of the program gave their usual sterling brand of sound.

Michael East's "Peccavi" (1610) offered a wide range of timbres, which were brightened by the substitution of trumpet for a piccolo trumpet. That small trumpet, invented about 1890 for the high obbligati

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parts in Handel and Bach, has been demonstrated in the Quintet's workshops.

Each listener has favorites and I claim as one of mine the 17th century "Swiss Chansons." The tone sang out echo-like and like many-voiced bells.

The group of three J.S. Bach selections were played with a perfection of legato line, a balance of tone color and a surge of meaningful religiosity.

I was glad that Robert Posten played only the bass trombone. He uses the tuba sometimes. It is used exclusively by some brass quintets and while unique, it does not match in tone and substantiality the bass trombone.

The four Christmas pieces, arranged by Errol Schlabach, had variations and theme developments that gave the players many chances for interacting.

"The Holly and the Ivy," arranged by Howard Cable, is one of the specialties of the quintet. Again, the piccolo trumpet added to the spirited exchange of sound.

Even in a "traditional" program, the ensemble can't resist adding a dollop of modernity. Their Baltimore friend, musician Rob Roy McGregor, has arranged "We Three Kings," "O Tannenbaum" and "Angels We Have Heard on High." All of the players are versed in jazz, so they had no trouble with the dissonances and modulations. But the familiar carols, to a singer accustomed to the usual four-part harmony, did not please me as much as would similar arrangements on different material.

The players closed with two all-time favorites and even if we weren't invited to sing, the four-part harmony of "Silent Night," with hauntingly lovely solos, duets and variations left each listener's own unique memory intact.

"Joy to the World" was a fitting climax to an evening of festivity. Added on was a short reprise of "Deck the Halls" in what seemed like at least a triple increase in tempo.

The program was taped for broadcast by radio station WBJC-FM for broadcast at 8 p.m. Jan. 2. Besides the music you will hear each player give some background of the ensemble and the music.

Harp, ABQ contrast alluringly

By VIRGINIA MODEL

For The Capital

The general air of good fellowship when old friends get together — that was the keynote of Sunday evening's concert by the Annapolis Brass Quintet, with guest artist Heidi Lehwalder, harpist, in a return engagement.

Presented by the Brass Chamber Music Society of Annapolis, the concert's main interest centered on what might be called a super dress rehearsal for the next day's recording of "Annapolis Suite." Composed in 1982 for the ABQ by Robert Starer, the six-section suite for brass quintet and harp had been given its premier performance at Kennedy Center.

Comparisons are odious, but the "Annapolis Suite" seems more skillfully assembled, at least more listenable, than the William Schmidt "Music for Scrimshaws" repeated from a 1982 concert and also written for harp and brass quintet.

In the Suite, the plangent notes of the harp are a distinct and vital complement to the brasses. The contrasting tempos of the six sec-

tions are filled with attention-getting intervals, some with a strong martial beat, some with slow rubato playing.

Of the six, I enjoyed the "Larghetto" movement the most. The harmonies of the harp are emphasized against the lyric playing of the brasses, always a particularly strong feature of the ABQ.

Ms. Lehwalder's one solo appearance was in an "Imromptu," one of the two compositions written by Gabriel Faure for solo harp. That it is not a transcription points up the fact that arrangements for instruments other than the original may weaken a work, because the harmonics don't always suit the adapted instrument. All the plangent beauty of the harp came through from Faure's original score. Ms. Lehwalder's performance was one of strength and discernment. But beautiful as it was, I wished she had repeated the Carlos Salzedo dances which she played at the 1982 concert.

The Spanish influence did appear in the final pairing of harp and brasses. Manuel de Falla's "Two Dances" was a happy choice. And I shall have to eat my previous words, for the "Introduction and Dance" is extracted and, yes, arranged for harp and brass quintet from the opera, "La Vida Breve" and the resultant blend of textures is oh-so-Spanish in mood and style. Probably because the harp and brasses were used extensively in the original: "The Neighbor's Dance," a seguidilla, further carried out the Spanish theme.

William Schmidt's "Music for Scrimshaws" (1969) for harp and brass quintet, was a repeat from the group's 1982 concert. In "Scrimshaw," Robert Posten took on the tuba in lieu of his usual bass trombone. This lends a sturdy bass quality that, with great flexibility, adds the texture that the composer calls for. The Sunday repeat bears out my belief that any first hearing is improved upon with successive hearings.

Or the reverse may be true. My

own feelings on this second hearing are ambivalent. Structurally the music satisfies and there are snatches of sea chanteys, songs and contrasts in temperament. As for the blend of harp and brasses, the composer has paired them as a "complimentary combination of feminine and masculine, with the harp representing the feminine." The blend does create alluring contrasts and rhythmically the piece is enchanting. But the main aim seems to be in pairing the brass and harp.

My attention wandered during Victor Ewald's "Quintet No. 3" (after 1911). The quintet played well but the four sections are rather nebulous in form. The final *vivace* was the best.

The next concert, as did Sunday's, will take place at Anne Arundel Community College Center for the Performing Arts. The quintet — David Cran and Robert Suggs, trumpet, Arthur Brooks, horn, Wayne Wells, trombone and Robert Posten, bass trombone and tuba — will host the Charlie Byrd Trio at 7:30 p.m. April 28.

ABQ pays tribute to Bach with bravura

Giving a stellar performance such as their audiences expect from them, the Annapolis Brass Quintet opened its 1984-85 Artists' Series on Oct. 21 with a tribute to J.S. Bach.

As Robert Suggs explained in introducing the programme, 1985 marks several important musical anniversaries, including the 300th of Bach's birth, and we are likely to hear tributes to Bach throughout the year. The ABQ wanted to beat the rush, so they presented this programme, with music from the German Renaissance and a dozen selections from Bach's music, at the beginning of their season.

In this purely delightful concert, one especially magnificent piece was Samuel Scheidt's "Canzona Bergamasca". This rich piece had an effect like that of great waves of music rolling over the listener.

The first half of the concert also featured compositions by Speer, Pezel, Schein and Praetorius, as well as three different settings of an early German song, "Greiner Zanner", by Paul Hofhaimer, Heinrich Isaac, and Heinrich Finck.

One of the surprises introduced as each musician stood and spoke at some point during the evening was that the Bach piece called "Air Pour Les Trompettes" was not, as one might expect, written to be played on trumpets. Instead, it was written for stringed instruments, imitating the style of trumpets. However, this suited it well to be played on trumpets, which is how the ABQ

presented it.

The Bach portion of the programme, the entire second half, included two familiar pieces composed for voice, "Chirst Lag In Todesbanden" and "Ein' Feste Burg Is Unser Gott", the latter of which is familiar as "A Mighty Fortress Is our God".

The concert came to a dramatic close as the Quintet stepped to the side of the stage and played a final contrapuntal piece from the shadows behind a large screen, on which slides of Renaissance art were projected.

Playing in a warm and full auditorium for an appreciative audience, the ABQ deserved every bit of enthusiastic applause they drew, and returned for one encore.

One complaint, which reflects not upon the musicians, but on their audience: there was an irksomely frequent peeping of electronic watches throughout the auditorium during the performance. Despite this thoughtlessness on the part of their audience, the ABQ gave a tribute to J.S. Bach which he surely would have appreciated.
—LLO

READER'S NOTE: This is not the first time that the "frequent peeping" of space-age watchworks has annoyed an audience, not to mention performers. Similar complaints are being noted increasingly in reviews nationwide. *TPE* suggests that owners of such gadgetry leave them home, turn them off, or put them into a pocket or handbag until the performance is over. Alternately, attend an acid rock concert — nobody will notice or care. — ED.