

Manhattan Brass Reviews



DZUBAY *Antiphonal Fanfare No. 2. Brass Quintet No. 1. Acrostic Variations. Solus I. St. Vitus' Dance* • Manhattan Br • BRIDGE 9230 (53:34)

David Dzubay (b. 1964) is himself a trumpeter, so he brings a very personal fund of experience and wisdom to writing for brass. He currently teaches composition and directs the new-music ensemble at Indiana University, of which he's an alumnus.

These works show great craft and facility with the medium, which is too often a repository for works that strain to be cute. Brass quintets seem to be called on, all too often, to provide Christmas music and ragtime transcriptions, and audiences don't seem to demand much more. Part of the reason may be it is one of the most sonically powerful classical ensembles, and listening to an entire concert of quintet music can wear one down from the sheer volume, especially if the ideas are chewier. But Dzubay counters this to large degree with a highly calibrated ear, whose taste for transparent texture and timbral variety keeps the resultant music sonically fresh as it unfolds. While fluent in his use of mutes, he doesn't indulge in exotic colors for effect. Rather, the surface of the music is dappled and glittering, but also integrated.

The 1988 Quintet is a late student work, and shows an extremely precocious composer stretching his wings. Its general tone is that of abstracted dances, with an underlying jazziness. *Solus I* (1990) for solo horn, while expertly written, doesn't engage me for its full 10 minutes. The *Antiphonal Fanfare No. 2* (2006) is a perfect opener for any occasion. Its 40 seconds pack in a lot of information, and its lean and economical sound is Stravinskian.

The two remaining pieces are for me the winners. *St. Vitus' Dance* (2003) is another suite of character pieces, based on the phenomenon of a mass hysteria "dance craze" from the Middle Ages. While it has some aesthetic similarities with the Quintet from 15 years earlier, it strikes me as more adventurous, confident, and personal. The 1998 *Acrostic Variations* is my favorite of the set. This is

Fanfare March/April 2009 131

a series of 10 short pieces (yes variations, though the theme's rather hidden), with the first letter of each movement title spelling the name Allan Dean (Dzubay's trumpet teacher at Indiana). (Okay, there are 10 pieces but only nine letters in the name—the last movement is a Coda.) This is extremely compact, intense, *wrought* music, and a dazzling use of the ensemble.

Speaking of dazzling, the Manhattan Brass is off the chart, and the recorded sound is similarly spectacular. Of course, part of the reason for this is that the music is so well written, but this group still sounds as though they can do *anything*.

With these high positives, I also must add that while I admire Dzubay's technical mastery, I'm not left with as high and individual an artistic profile as I might desire. The *Acrostic Variations* is where it all comes together for me, with the best of both style and substance. But as these pieces show, Dzubay is obviously deepening his expression and pushing his envelope. And he's still young; in the era of Elliot Carter, he's just a baby! Highly recommended to anyone interested in new brass music, both for imaginative composition and fabulous playing. **Robert Carl**



American Record Guide

DZUBAY: *Antiphonal Fanfare 2; Brass Quintet I; Acrostic Variations; Solus I; St Vitus's Dance*
Manhattan Brass
Bridge 9230—54 minutes

David Dzubay (b 1964) is Composition chair and director of the New Music Ensemble at Indiana University, where he studied as an undergraduate and earned his doctorate. Writing for groups like Manhattan Brass means his music is full of tough individual and ensemble challenges.

A little Antiphonal Fanfare 2 (2006) for brass trio sets the tone for the album: individual virtuosity, ensemble intricacy, and a harmonic language that is dissonant and rather abstract, but not atonal. Brass Quintet 1 (1988), one of Dzubay's early works, opens with a Habanero that immediately brings *Carmin* to mind—but not for long. Soon the music is a frenetic display of fast articulation and rhythmic counterpoint; the Habanero feeling returns at the end. In II

(Variations) it becomes apparent that Dzubay likes to give players lots of fast, repeated notes; that can be very exciting but is not very interesting. After a contemplative III ('Currents'), the work ends with an agitated Rondo.

Acrostic Variations (1998) is dedicated to Allan Dean, with whom Dzubay studied trumpet at Indiana University. The acrostic has the title of each movement starting with a letter from Dean's name—so Allan generates 'Aubade,' 'Light,' 'Lyric,' 'Agile,' and 'Nocturne.'

Ann Ellsworth is the hard-working horn player in 'Solus I' (1990). As in unaccompanied solos by any number of modern composers, this piece contrasts free and thoughtful sections with technically demanding ones. The album ends with its biggest piece, the 18-minute St Vitus's Dance (2003). It is exactly what we would expect from a work inspired by the old tale of people driven to fits of uncontrollable dancing.

Outstanding readings by Manhattan Brass: trumpeters Lew Soloff and Wayne du Maine, horn player Ellsworth, trombonist Michael Seltzer, and bass trombonist David Taylor.

KILPATRICK

**CRITICS' PICKS—MUSIC: ROCK, JAZZ, ETC.**

Critic's Picks: Music

Mon 22 Manhattan Brass Quintet + Ivan Guck Yamaha Artist Services Center 8pm, \$10.

Festival of New Trumpet Music. The Manhattan Brass Quintet has long brought a spontaneous flash to contemporary classical music; now, with new lead trumpeter Lew Soloff, the group's sound has never been jazzier. Its program tonight includes pieces by Wynton Marsalis, Derek Bermel and David Dzubay.

Issue 516: August 18–24, 2005
Time Out New York



CD BRASS: The Music of Daniel Schnyder:

“Not only is it the cover of this CD with the title ‘Brass’ as focus point of attention, it is actually the music itself that gets put together, realigned and reassembled in so many joyful and heartfelt ways that one cannot imagine something more exciting.”

- Frank Bongers



KITTY BRAZELTON

Come Spring!; R; Sonar Como Una Tromba Larga; Called Out O! Texas; Sonata for the Inner Ear

Manhattan Brass Quintet

California EAR Unit

CRI- 889(CD)

Rating: artistic quality 10/sound quality 7

Kitty Brazelton is a consummate New York composer, and it shows in these five pieces. Like the city itself, her music is big and brash yet conscious of its coolness in a way that's endearing, not annoying. Unlikely combinations of cultures and styles are crammed into small spaces. Sometimes these elements interact; sometimes they tense up and skitter away from each other, as nervously as strangers brush up against each other on a crowded train. Her music's moods are by turns ebullient and funny or darkly reflective, even wistful. Occasionally the settings are distinctly uptown, but downtown's raucous self emerges more frequently. In her varied musical career, Brazelton has played in punk bands, de- and re-constructed Hildegard von Bingen, and written an opera whose plot involves extraterrestrials. She identifies herself as a totalist composer--nothing's off-limits.

So it's no surprise that her music covers a terrific sonic span and yet still has a uniquely identifiable voice. CRI's sound is unfortunately on the dry side, but not so as to prevent enjoyment of the musical fireworks on offer. Come Spring!, written for the Manhattan Brass Quintet (which reprises its performance here), references stride piano, Stax Records, Aaron Copland, and Miles Davis. The MBQ punches out Brazelton's syncopations with verve, but for the lyrical sections, including the gorgeous third movement, the playing really sings. R features a rhythm section of percussive guitar, acoustic bass, and bongos set against a 5-string violin and Brazelton's own astringent voice.

Sonar Como Una Tromba Larga ("To Sound Like a Great Waterspout") for trombone and tape takes full advantage of gifted trombonist Chris Washburne's knifesharp articulation and lovely lyricism. Called Out O! Texas pairs an intriguing combination of two sultry-voiced instruments, the alto sax (Danny Weiss) and cello (played by Dan Barrett). The piece relies on what fellow composer Butch Morris calls "comprov": the score, reproduced here, offers four visual icons on which the musicians should base their performances. (One, for example, is simply a circle bisected by a ray shooting through.) As with Come Spring!, Sonata for the Inner Ear is played by the ensemble for which it was written. In this case it's the California EAR Unit that makes its way through a score that connects wholly improvised sections with notated parts. As with all the other performances here, these musicians bring to Brazelton both technical expertise and an organic understanding of her compositional ideas. It's an incredibly invigorating disc, and definitely one to seek out.

- Anastasia Tsioulcas

The Herald-Times

Bloomington, Indiana

D4 • The Herald-Times, Thursday, January 29, 2004

MUSIC REVIEW; MANHATTAN BRASS QUINTET

Musical warmth heats hall

By Peter Jacobi
H-T Reviewer

Sixteenth century music and 18th and 20th and 21st: The visiting Manhattan Brass Quintet exhibited affinity for all, historically and stylistically, during its Tuesday evening recital in Auer Hall. And with two trumpets, a horn, trombone and tuba blaring away, there was plenty of heat inside the hall despite the cold, wind and snow out-of-doors.

A couple of highlights during the varied, very generous, two-hour program came courtesy of local composers David Dzubay and Don Freund. Dzubay's *St. Vitus' Dance*, written just last year on commission from the Manhattan Brass Quintet, proved a lively affair, as it would need to be to live up to the title, one referring to dance manias that overtook people in centuries long past.

Program notes from the composer say he was inspired by an item in the *Nuremberg Chronicle* of 1493: "Young people of Saxony were dancing in the churchyard of St. Magnus. There were 15 youths and four maidens and they danced so much and sang so loudly that they disturbed the priest, who was saying Mass. He left the chapel and came out to them, asking them to desist; but, heedless of his injunction, they continued their sport. The priest then prayed to God and St. Magnus to make them dance for a whole year as a punishment."

Dzubay gave provocative titles to the movements in his piece, such as "Tarantella in the Churchyard of St. Magnus" and "Lamentation of the Afflicted," but the work, in four parts, could be likened to a traditionally structured chamber piece with a zesty opening

movement followed by one of mysterious, more pensive dimension, then a syncopated, jaunty exposition and a finale of brash nature in which the players could karriate. The music was both expressive and impressive, both reflective of theme and deftly crafted. The performers handled it marvelously well.

Freund's 1978 *Springsongs* provided the ensemble with samples of the sort of enthusiastic, joyful music that the composer seems to favor, friendly music prompted by the experiences of a composer who welcomes the adventures of life. The musicians (let me identify them as Kevin Cobb and William Williams on trumpets, Ann Ellsworth on horn, Mike Selzer, trombone, and Steve Foreman, tuba) played with gusto.

The Manhattanees, and all of them work in and around the New York area, dug deeply into history to find Three Motets composed for voices by 16th-century composer Cipriano de Rore, these arranged handsomely for brass and wafting through the Auer air mellifluously. "The Great" Fugue of Bach, shifted by an arranger from organ to brasses, worked beautifully and resoundingly. And in the Preludes & Fugues of Shostakovich, originally written for piano, the ensemble located all of that composer's passion for Bach, translated, of course, into a mid-20th century Russian aesthetic.

Tuesday's recital also contained a comic outburst by the contemporary composer Derek Bermel, *M. Bob Fun Fare*, written for the director of bands at the University of Michigan; an atmospheric *Spiritual & Blues* by Wynton Marsalis, and Three Pieces for Brass, all of Latinesque flavor, by the Cuban composer Paquito d'Rivera. On the whole, an impressive display.

The Record

Stockton, California

It's all that brass as quintet performs at UOP

By Dianne Runion
Record Staff Writer

Take five superb young brass instrumentalists. Add a program that spans just less than 500 years of music. Put them together in a Manhattan Brass Quintet concert for Friends of Chamber Music, and you have excellent entertainment and a surprising paradox.

Only four of the 19 numbers played Sunday in Faye Spanos Concert Hall were written for a brass quintet. It wasn't a traditionally recognized ensemble until the early 20th century, said Manhattan Brass trumpet player William Williams. That meant transcriptions and lots of them.

The group, all dressed in casual black — plus a gray skirt for French horn player Ann Ellsworth — warmed up their embouchures in their opening "Hornpipe" from Handel. It was the only piece with a few splats, but try holding your mouth like

REVIEW

MANHATTAN BRASS QUINTET

■ WHERE: Faye Spanos Concert Hall, University of the Pacific
■ WHEN: Sunday

that for an hour and a half. Warm, joyful, mellow and clean, the Handel typified the group's artistry and ensemble.

Gabriel's contemporary Cipriano de Rore, whose music was showcased in three motets from the mid-16th century. All beautiful, the reverent "Parce mihi Domine's" ("Spare me, Lord") holy calm pervaded the music, which was as perfectly interwoven as a medieval tapestry. The subtlety and restraint of the third motet, "I have sinned," displayed the group's sensitively disciplined dynamics.

While originally written for two pianos, Aaron Copland's "Danzon Cubano" had a similar playfulness to that composer's

"Rodeo," but this time with a Latin flavor and all the rhythmic color and variety of a Cuban Mardi Gras parade.

Admitting to playing "stolen repertoire," trombonist Michael Seltzer introduced three George Gershwin preludes, the first of which had a jazzy, urban feel. But the lyric trumpet solo line, shared between Williams' and his fellow trumpet player Charles Porter — the only one of the quintet not to introduce numbers — was the most gorgeous with its low harmonies and slow, liquid melodies. Here, too, the rather small but appreciative audience, head Stephen Foreman's lovely tuba solo — not an instrument that often takes front and center.

Bach's Fugue in G Minor opened the second half of the concert. The tuba and trombone's deft, almost delicate intricacy added rich, low strength to Ellsworth's French horn's consistent mellifluous quality and the

trumpets' brighter sound.

Mozart's "Alleluia" and Puccini's "Agnus Dei" — the 18th century Puccini and not the "La Boheme" one — were the only two pieces that didn't work as well for me. That had nothing to do with the musicians' skill, but everything to do with the transcriptions. They didn't feel as seamless with lush melody lines somehow more disparate from the lower instrument voices' undergirding oom-pahs.

Ah, but those Duke Ellington numbers, "Prelude to a Kiss" and "Mood Indigo," blended perfectly in mind, heart and ears. Jack Gale, a trombonist, arranged the latter and the three selections from "West Side Story" in a beautiful marriage of ensemble and composition. Sometimes syncopated, sometimes bluesy, enriched with Seltzer's trombone solo in "Prelude," this music offered surprising but delightful contrasts to the Bach, Mozart, Handel and de Rore.

Probably more listeners know Wynton Marsalis, born in 1961, for his trumpet-playing genius. But musicians' musicians also know him as a composer, in this case specifically for Manhattan Brass with "Spiritual" and "Blues." While these are no "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" or "St. Louis Woman," you can hear elements of both underlying the much more complex and evocative music. These pieces capture the wailing essence of slaves' tribulations, as American slaves made music to express their pain and longing and to help them endure.

And sometimes endurance can seep into flat-out joy as it did in the concluding Fats Waller "Ain't Misbehavin'." From Bach to Waller, Manhattan Brass captured all the emotional tone color possible in 90 minutes with a concert that satisfied at virtually every level.

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