



Asbury

*With
Adolph Herseth,
soloist*

BRASS

QUINTET

works by
Lutoslawski
Böhme
Grainger
Jevtic
Bozza
Saint-Saens

Albany
ALBANY

The Asbury Brass Quintet

The works contained on this disc illustrate the enormous variety of music written or arranged for brass quintet. The sonorous combination of instruments that comprises the brass quintet (two trumpets, horn, trombone and tuba), has attracted many composers and has become as standard in chamber music as the string quartet or piano quintet. The Asbury Brass Quintet makes its home in Chicago, a city which is synonymous worldwide with brass playing. There is no more pertinent example of this than Adolph Herseth, Principal Trumpet of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, who is featured with the Asbury Quintet on this disc in the Sextet by Oskar Böhme. Mr. Herseth has touched the lives of each of the Asbury players, be it as teacher, colleague or mentor.

The Asbury Brass Quintet (Neal Berntsen and Kevin Hartman, trumpets; Gregory Flint, horn; Mark Fisher, trombone and Charles Schuchat, tuba) was formed in 1982 by five students at Northwestern University. The group gained its name while several of the players lived in "The Brass House" on Asbury Street. The Quintet won first prize at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition in Indiana, and in the same year, also captured the prestigious Saunderson Award at the Coleman Chamber Music Competition in California, which gave this young group a meteoric rise to the top rank of brass ensembles in America. The Quintet has made many guest appearances on radio and TV and regularly plays to critical acclaim throughout the United States. They perform a vast array of music and are especially interested in contemporary brass literature, having commissioned several distinguished works to date. Performances by the Asbury Quintet



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appropriate compensation. The title is somewhat amusing as all overtures used to be brief, before Messrs. Beethoven, Rossini and Berlioz expanded the overture into detailed character studies and the symphonic poem. Lutoslawski's *Mini overture* clocks in at under three minutes but it is beautifully crafted, displaying the composer's innate feel for structure and textural clarity. It is a helter-skelter piece which juxtaposes mixed meters and exploits the pealing, bell-like quality of the brass quintet's expansive registers.

Sextet in E Flat Minor, Op. 30

Oskar Böhme (1870-1938)

Oskar Wilhelmovitch Böhme was born in Potschappel, near Dresden, the son of the trumpet playing Wilhelm Böhme. After graduating from the Leipzig Conservatory, Oskar Böhme went to Russia where he played trumpet for the Imperial Theatre Orchestra in St. Petersburg. He gained a fine reputation and soon became the Principal player at the Marynsky Theatre (now the Kirov), a position he held from 1901-23. His small catalogue of compositions is exclusively for brass, his Trumpet Concerto in E minor (1899) being the most famous, which, as Max Sommerhalder states: "remains the only authentic trumpet concerto of the romantic era, the first concerto of its kind since Hummel's of 1803." Like so many Soviet citizens of German origin, Böhme was sent to the provinces in the régime of the 1930s and died in obscurity in 1938.

The Sextet was originally called *Trompetten-Sextett*, and is scored for 3 trumpets, two trombones and tuba. [On this recording, the Asbury players use horn and euphonium rather than trombones which they considered more fitting to the work's warmly lyrical character.] It is not exactly known when this four-movement Sextet was written, but it is considered to originate from Böhme's early years in Russia. The first movement is a sonata-form movement which opens with a brief *Adagio* preface in the style of a chorale. The *Allegro* uses much close imitation which brings Mendelssohn to mind (especially the introduction to his oratorio *Elijah*), and the transitional material has a distinct Slavic flavor to it. The movement is built from short, motivic sequences and closes with a fanfare-like flourish in the trumpets. The second movement is a *Scherzo in E flat major*, the gossamer writing again suggests Mendelssohn (perhaps Böhme was paying tribute to the former Director of his *alma mater in Leipzig?*), but the teasing syncopations and off-beat accents are very Beethovenian. The Trio is a delectable rustic dance with an agile walking-bass from

Quintette Victoria

Ivan Jevtic (b. 1947)

The three remaining items on this disc share a French theme. Ivan Jevtic is originally from Yugoslavia but now lives in Paris. Neal Berntsen, one of the Asbury trumpet players, met Jevtic in 1988 while attending a trumpet competition in the French capital. The composer showed him his *Quintette Victoria* (1982) and Berntsen, being impressed by the score, agreed to perform the American premiere of the *Quintette* with the Asbury Quintet. The *Quintette* is in one continuous movement which divides into several discernible sections. The work opens with a tiny rhythmical cell being tossed around the instruments, this *Allegro* also containing specialized brass techniques and colors, such as *glissandi*, flutter-tonguing and muted sonorities blended with natural tones. A *Lento* section follows which includes a passage reminiscent of the 'Sheep meadow' episode from Richard Strauss' *Don quixote*. The music develops a melodic intensity before the tuba initiates the *Scherzando*. Jevtic comically overlaps the instruments at one point so that the music seems to exist in several tempi, giving the impression of momentary aural vertigo. After these fun and games the music is marked *Misterioso*, the instruments insistently repeating different notes to eerie effect. A brief, unison *Recitativo* heralds another *Scherzando* section (it is interesting to note here that the horn and second trumpet often levitate over the first trumpet), in which elements from the opening are recalled. The *Quintette* concludes with a virtuoso display of ever-quickening rhythms that is cut off abruptly with the players in full stride.

Sonatine

Eugène Bozza (b. 1905)

Eugène Bozza is well known to brass players for his études and test pieces. The *Sonatine* was written in 1951 and is humbly dedicated to the musicians of the Republican Guard. The first movement, like the Lutoslawski *Mini Overture*, makes potent use of mixed meters and dove-tailing shapes among the five instruments. The second movement contains a long-breathed melody for the trumpet which soars over a chordal undercarriage. The music seems to get quicker in this *Andante* but the pulse remains constant, the variations being written in increasingly rapid note values. The third movement is a 'catch-me-if-you-can' race which requires stunning ensemble and a corporate brilliance of technique. John Fletcher, the late tuba player of the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble used to say of this



From left: Kevin Hartman, Bill Bradley, Gregory Flint, Charles Schuchat, Adolph Herseth, Mark Fisher, Neal Berntsen, Mitch Arnold. Produced by The Asbury Brass Quintet; Producer on Böhme: Mitch Arnold; Engineer: Bill Bradley; Editing: Bill Bradley; Mastered at Classic Digital, Inc. Thanks to Elizabeth and everyone at GLPAA and all our family and friends. And a special thanks to Mr. Herseth for an unforgettable experience!



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