

# LIR CLASSICS

## LIR010 - PROGRAMME NOTES

### Something Old...

Something Old... is the first instalment of a four-CD project currently being undertaken by Mardi Brass. Still to come are Something New..., Something Borrowed... and Something Blue... This neatly encapsulates the variety and versatility which is synonymous with Mardi Brass.

The music on this CD consists of original five-part brass compositions, along with works which in some way featured early brass instruments in their original scoring. The exceptions are the Dance of the Sylphes, the middle Mozart Church Sonata, and Rameau's Gavotte and Variations, which has been a consistent audience favourite since its first performance in Mardi Brass's 1992 debut recital.

Our musical journey is inextricably linked with the evolution of the instruments of the brass family, from the wind music of the Renaissance Courts - often performed on cornetts and sackbuts - to some of the first chamber music written for the valved brass instruments developed in the Romantic era. Early brass instruments, with the exception of the trombone, were very different from their modern counterparts. The invention of the valve (c.1815) revolutionised brass playing and led to the development of a whole raft of new instruments, including the tuba.

When using modern instruments to perform music written before this time, it is important to consider the instruments for which it was originally conceived: for example, the cornett or cornetto (not to be confused with the cornet of brass band fame) was a highly virtuosic treble wind instrument which was popular throughout Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. As this instrument was noted for its clear vocal quality and florid capabilities, our trumpet players imitate this softer quality rather than playing in the more aggressive style often heard in modern performances of early brass music.

When choosing music to adapt for modern brass instruments, we are careful to select music which will be enhanced, or illuminated from a new perspective. Some of the pieces have been transcribed more-or-less verbatim, with decisions only being made about which instrument plays which line; others have been arranged more freely, with extra voices added (or sometimes omitted) and melodies transposed into different octaves. In either case, we have tried to remain faithful to the spirit of the music. Mardi Brass does not believe that music has one definitive mode of performance - it is a living art, even when one considers works composed hundreds of years ago. In the same way that an actor uses his personality and experience to bring out different nuances in the character he is portraying, so

a piece of music can exist in many different, but equally valid, guises. Each performance breathes new life into the work.

The earliest pieces on this CD make up the Renaissance Suite: The Base of Spayne, a four part dance from a manuscript by Henry VIII; a Pavane in five parts entitled The Image of Melancholly by Holborne - dating from 1599 - and a Chaconne by Merula, originally scored for two unspecified treble instruments (cornetts or violins being the most popular choice at the time), a solo bass part (probably trombone, bassoon or a stringed instrument) and basso continuo. In this arrangement, two more parts have been added to fill out the texture and replace the harmonies which would have been played by the continuo.

The natural (ie. valveless) trumpet flourished during the late 17th and first half of the 18th centuries. The Duke of Gloucester's Birthday Ode dates from 1695, the year of Purcell's death, and was scored for trumpet, oboes, strings and continuo. This arrangement of the Chaconne amalgamates the whole of the seventh movement with parts of the eighth, a format devised by trumpeter Crispian Steele-Perkins, which we have borrowed with his kind permission. The chaconne form is treated more freely than the Merula Chaconne, in which the bass line repeats exactly throughout.

The Handel Concerto's outer movements may sound familiar as the Allegro and Hornpipe from the Water Music (1717). Handel frequently recycled old music and the Concerto in F, dating from 1722, featured two solo horns, played in this arrangement by horn and trombone. The harmonies are richer and textures more intricate than the versions used in the Water Music. When performing these two movements it is customary to insert a slow movement in between: we have chosen the beautiful aria Eternal Source of Light Divine from the Birthday Ode to Queen Anne (1713), originally written for alto voice, solo trumpet, strings and continuo. In this arrangement, the horn replaces the vocal part.

Vierdanck's Sonata, Als ich einmal Lust bekam ('As I Once Had My Desire'), was originally conceived for cornetts and sackbuts (the sackbut being an early type of trombone). It is based on a song by Gabriel Voigtlander and was originally performed by the German Stadtpfeifer (musicians employed by the state to perform at civic functions). To more accurately capture the intended texture of this piece, the bass trombone (rather than the tuba) is used as the bottom voice in this performance.

Rameau's Gavotte and Six Variations for solo harpsichord was published in 1724. It lends itself well to brass transcription, as each instrument of the quintet is featured in turn in this virtuosic arrangement. Variations five and six are notable in Rameau's use of the rhythm of a Cuban Rumba, which he unwittingly anticipated around 200 years before this dance form was invented!

The 19th century was a time of explosive growth for brass instruments, both technologically and musically. The Industrial Revolution and invention of the valve allowed manufacturers to create a variety of chromatic brass instruments. A new family of 'conically' bored instruments were invented by Adolphe Sax and included the cornet, flugelhorn, tenor saxhorn, baritone saxhorn, euphonium and tuba, all of which are still found in brass bands today. This in turn allowed composers to create radically different sounds and textures in their music. The 'cylindrically' bored trombone remained essentially unchanged and the natural trumpet

continued to be employed by many composers who used its grandeur alongside the more agile, but softer, cornet.

One of the first to capitalise on these developments was Hector Berlioz, who championed the new valved instruments to such composers as Wagner and Liszt. (Incidentally, Berlioz was also the first composer to write for the saxophone). In these scenes from *The Damnation of Faust*, Berlioz exploited the rich sonorities of cornet and trombones to accompany Mephistopheles as he lulls Faust to sleep along the banks of the river Elbe. As Faust dreams of the love which will cost him his soul, the forest Sylphs dance around his sleeping form.

Mozart composed four horn concerti and used trombones in works such as the Mass in c minor and, of course, the Requiem. Indeed, the usage of the trombone in the *Tuba Mirum* was one of the few instrumental details of the piece actually penned by Mozart himself. He also wrote a large quantity of chamber music for wind instruments which featured the horn, but produced little of note for the trumpet, though there is speculation regarding a trumpet concerto which has been lost.

While he was working in Salzburg, Mozart wrote 17 single movement Church Sonatas. Although most were written for 2 violins, bass and organ continuo, he did utilise brass instruments in several of these works. KV 329 is thought to date from March 1779. It was scored for 2 violins, 2 oboes, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, cello, bass and organ continuo. The slow movement, KV 67, is thought to date from 1772 and was written for 2 violins, bass and organ continuo. KV 263 dating from Dec 1776 was originally scored for 2 violins, 2 trumpets, bass and organ continuo. As their name suggests, these were liturgical works and were intended for performance between the chanting of the Epistle and the Gospel.

Despite the developments in instrument design and orchestral writing, brass instruments were not to be the focus of chamber music until the end of the 19th century. While performers such as Arban and Wurm were demonstrating the virtuosic potential of the modern instruments, composers such as Ludwig Maurer, Wilhelm Ramsoe, and Victor Ewald were laying the foundations of the modern brass repertoire.

Considering the prominence of his compositions, surprisingly little research has been published regarding Ewald's life. Various publications have referred to him as a cellist, hornist, tubist, and cornetist, as well as a professional civil engineer. It is safe to say that Ewald had an advanced understanding of the timbral and technical possibilities of the brass family, as is evident in his *Quintet for Brass No. 2, Op. 6*. To fully evoke Ewald's rich sonorities, this performance employs the mellow sounds of the cornet and flugelhorn along with the French horn, trombone and tuba.

For further details on Mardi Brass, its plans, recordings and education work, please visit [www.mardi brass.com](http://www.mardi brass.com)