

LIR CLASSICS

LIR015 - PROGRAMME NOTES

...Something New... Contemporary works for Brass Quintet

This recording is the second in a series of four (Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue), which illustrates the wide range of musical styles and colours possible in brass chamber-music. The programme includes a variety of contemporary musical styles which are integral to modern brass playing and show off the brass quintet as a truly flexible medium.

Mardi Brass is not only active in promoting existing repertoire; it seeks to expand it with new commissions. James Hesford's *Chuck's Big Leaps* and Nigel Waddington's *Four Miniatures* were written for Mardi Brass and have been recorded here for the first time. A third premiere recording is John McCabe's *Hawk in Winter Light* which demonstrates a more timbre-based example of contemporary brass writing. Jan Bach's exciting *Rounds and Dances* is a masterpiece of brass quintet composition. Relatively well known to American audiences, it deserves to be heard much more on the European stage. By contrast, Michael Nyman's music is familiar to many. His *Masque Arias*, a typically expansive, rhythmically punchy score which gathers momentum from start to finish, presented itself as a recording opportunity too good to pass up!

Adam Woolf & Edward Maxwell

James Hesford: *Chuck's Big Leaps* (2004)

"I was born in South Yorkshire and one of my first musical experiences was listening to Colliery brass bands which played around Sheffield and Rotherham. On Saturday mornings my Uncle Wilf and Uncle Gordon's rock 'n' roll band would rehearse, and sometimes my dad would take me to see them. They played music of the 1950s - Teenager in Love, Tutti Frutti, Be Bop a Lu La, and music by The Big Bopper, Elvis, Duane Eddy, Gene Vincent, etc. They were brill! Uncle Wilf gave me a few guitar lessons and the first tune I learnt was Chuck Berry's Johnny B. Goode. Later, when I was gigging in New York, I became obsessed with John Coltrane's *Giant Steps*. I got to wondering what would have happened if these two guys (Chuck and John) got together and collaborated to write a piece of music - hence *Chuck's Big Leaps*."

For those not familiar with Chuck's music, he was a singer/guitar player whose style influenced just about every contemporary guitarist in the world, including such artists as Jimi Hendrix and John McLaughlan. He was simple - he played

music based on a 12-bar blues sequence, usually in the key of E or A. He improvised using pentatonic scales, double-stopping notes that easily came under the fingers. It was harmonically irrational but the result was incredible for the time.

In complete contrast, Coltrane was a true virtuoso tenor sax player who took jazz out of the realms of 32-bar standard sequences and into modal and complex harmony, embracing ideas from Hindemith, Schoenberg, Bartok and Stravinsky.

James Hesford

Michael Nyman: Masque Arias (1991)

Michael Nyman's Masque Arias was written in 1991 for the Fine Arts Brass Ensemble and first performed at the Cambridge Festival that year. The work is transcribed for brass quintet from the music that Nyman wrote for Prospero's Books, Peter Greenaway's film version of Shakespeare's The Tempest, and was originally written for three female singers and the Michael Nyman Band. It is typical of Nyman's tonal, quasi-minimalist style.

The tradition of the English masque goes back to the 16th Century when courtiers and royalty dressed in elaborate costumes and performed brief plays which were based on allegory or mythology and contained music, dance, singing and acting with extravagant scenery. Professional actors and singers were hired for the acting and singing roles while the courtiers would take on the non-speaking roles. Often characters became aspects of human personality rather than independent characters and masques were written by the leading humanists, poets and artists of the day. The most celebrated English writer of masques was Ben Jonson (1572-1637) who composed masques for James I (1603-1625) with scenery designed by Inigo Jones (1573-1652).

Jan Bach: Rounds and Dances (1980)

Rounds and Dances was a joint commission by the four principal American brass organizations and was composed during the summer of 1980. It received its premieres in 1981 at both the National Trombone Workshop in Nashville, Tennessee (by the Eastman Brass Quintet) and the International Trumpet Guild convention in Boulder, Colorado (by the University of Wisconsin Brass Quintet). It is a suite of five short movements conceived primarily in terms of the ensemble rather than the individual parts.

The first and fourth movements are canonic in nature: in the Fanfare the instruments enter in score order, moving down from the movement's Trumpet I beginning; in Idyl the instruments enter in ascending order from the tuba's opening solo. These two movements contrast in spirit as well as form; the Fanfare is rhythmically exciting and assertive, and comes dangerously close to being trapped in its repetitions, while the Idyl is quiet and introspective with a 'long line' that builds steadily to a climactic outcome.

The remaining movements, homophonic in texture, are generic dance forms of Europe and South America. In the second movement, Sarabande, each instrument has the opportunity to display its soloistic technique against the unvarying, slow dance background of the remaining instruments. Carioca, the third movement, is a lively dance featuring an unusual opening texture with its own built-in echo effect.

The concluding 'fast and fleet' Galop is the quickest movement of the set, poking gentle fun at Rossini among other composers of Allegro movements. This movement follows the Idyl without pause.

Jan Bach

John McCabe: Hawk in Winter Light (2004/5)

Hawk in Winter Light was inspired by the sight of a hawk circling obsessively on a bright November day, hence the constantly circular nature of the music and, especially, its melodic material. Though the central section is quicker, the underlying pulse remains the same, and the transition to a quicker tempo is hardly noticeable. The piece is therefore, and unusually for a brass quintet, a single entity in which the outer sections are closely related, the final part being partly a reprise and partly a variation of the opening. The piece was commissioned by the Klara Festival of Flanders and is dedicated to Fine Arts Brass, who gave its first performance during the festival in Belgium on the 20 September 2005.

John McCabe, 2005

Nigel Waddington: Four Miniatures (2005)

The Four Miniatures are so-called because much of the material was originally conceived for larger ensembles. First Sketch was originally part of a feature for five saxophones and Bigger Pictures is the germinal idea of a much longer piece for studio orchestra. However, the rest of the work is new.

A robust fanfare introduces the piece, but quickly gives way to a gentler setting for the first miniature, September. This a ballad theme passed between the members of the quintet. It is the only programmatic segment of the piece, evoking the early turning of leaves, a poignant loss of summer and the first chill of autumn.

Reverie, the shortest segment, begins darkly but soon takes an abrupt left turn into more animated, dissonant territory. This prompts the first trumpet into a boisterous flourish, egged on by his band mates. However, the players are soon rounded up by five stentorian chords, bringing each instrument back to recall the darkness of the opening bars.

First Sketch begins in a brass band flavour, but the second trumpet soon asserts a new and lasting ballad style with his first statement of the tune, accompanied by independent lines of counterpoint in the other instruments. After its initial statement, the tune is repeated and developed by the first trumpet, passing through a middle section and climax before its original player reclaims the final notes for himself and lays them gently to rest.

Bigger Pictures, the final named segment, urges the players into rougher rhythmic and harmonic terrain before a final big push for home. It begins with the tuba's insistent bass pattern centred around D, over which the remaining four players map out a tune in parallel fixed intervals. The tune is a springboard for freely evolving melodic lines which are thrown to and fro between each member of the quintet before the reappearance of the introductory fanfare in a new key. This would-be finale is unexpectedly interrupted by a coda section - a more scenic route towards

the end of the work - which is driven home hard by all the players until each arrives home, big and brassy, on his strongest G.

Nigel Waddington