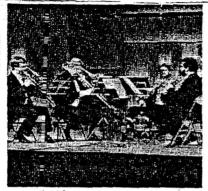
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The Asahi Shimbun - Saturday, 1st December 1984

HOW TEMDER THE ABO SOUNDS!

by Genri Nakagawa

Having heard a concert of the American Brass Quintet on their 3rd tour of Japan, I was convenced that this was undoubtedly one of the truly best ensembles of its kind. With the horn player sitting in the middle, flanked by two trumpet players on his left and two trombone players on his right, the American Brass Quintet played in their dark suits. (Photo - November 26th at Hitomi Memorial Hall, Tokyo)

The best part of the ABQ primarily is in its sound.

What a tender and puffy sound they produce! Without a hint of hard-working, effort, strain or stiffness, they bring out the supplest tonal quality with such a seeming ease! The subtle blend of their ensemble-playing was so special that any brass fan who might have heard the ABQ for the first time, should have wondered if it indeed was the sound of a brass group.

It goes without saying that they never cracked at "fortes", nor broke off at "pianos". The sheer delicacy of nuance in their ensemble-playing was just like that of a string quintet or even of a vocal quintet; and yet, the sounds produced were of a brass ensemble —— What a delightful experience!

The uniqueness of the Quintet lies in the fact that they are making real music, not simply showing off their virtuosity. Brass music is generally associated with "brassy and gaudy" sounds blown in full force, but these five fine musicians never give way to such an easy show-case effect, but concentrate on serving music in the essential sence of the word. There is no doubt about their eye-opening virtuosity, but what you hear in the end is a tonal poem. This indeed is a chamber music approach, which is the ideal of any music-making after all, though in brass music it is not bad sometimes to indulge in the physical joy of blowing.

From the Renaissance to comtemporary music, from Bach to Foster, they offered a wonderfully varied programme, of which I was particularly impressed by "Music for Brass Instruments" by Dahl (an American composer born in Hamburg); then "Dance Movements" by Snow (a contemporary American composer). In the two pieces from Bach's "Art of Fugue", their 4-part playing was done with exquisite precision.