

# Brass quintet creates brilliance of sound

## MUSIC REVIEW

By Francis Church  
News Leader music critic

Within the space of less than a generation, the brass quintet has become not only a widely heard but also very popular chamber music medium.

A leader in this brassy forward march onto concert stages throughout the world has been the American Brass Quintet.

This group made its Richmond bow last night as the fifth attraction in The Terrace Concerts series at the Virginia Commonwealth University Performing Arts Center.

The American Brass Quintet consists of two trumpets, French horn, trombone and bass trombone, the last used instead of the tuba that one occasionally hears in such ensembles as the Richmond Symphony Brass Quintet.

This configuration lends a brilliance, flexibility and chamber musi-

clike ambiance, at least as executed by last night's performers.

The program covered a broad spectrum of music from the 16th century to the present. The players opened with three short selections from the Renaissance Venetian literature. Not only excellent technique, but also smooth phrasing and sensitivity to the varied tonal colors, were displayed.

Trumpeters Raymond Mase and Chris Gekker switched from conventional trumpets to flügelhorns for darker textures and to the more piercing, higher-pitched D trumpets for tonal brilliance.

Lighter-hued music from the Elizabethan era followed. These five pieces (out of the seven listed in the printed program) were a mixed bag, with the bigger sounds coming across better than the likes of the somewhat ragged "Joyne Hands" by Thomas Morley, which one suspects is better sung than played on brass instruments.

Most effective of all the first-half

selections was "Dance Movements" by David Snow, a Washington area composer who penned this 10-minute opus especially for the American Brass Quintet.

This is angular and jagged both rhythmically and tonally, somewhat in the vein of such mid-20th century neoclassical composers as Stravinsky and Hindemith but thoroughly original in its use of the brass instruments. Especially effective were the extended passages for the two trombones, somewhat neglected members of brass ensembles when it comes to solo and duo work.

Michael Powell, trombonist, and Robert Biddlecome, bass trombonist, handled their assignments skillfully.

Also of interest in this work was one of the fanfares for trumpet and French horn, the latter played by David Wakefield. That, too, is not your everyday brass combination.

The first half closed with a short "Battle Gaillard" by Samuel Scheidt, an early baroque composer whose ties were near the Venetian brass

tradition. The D trumpets were a highlight.

The second half featured Four Pieces, a sprightly romantic work from the pen of Ludwig Maurer, a German who moved to the court of the Russian czar; two sections of J.S. Bach's "Art of the Fugue"; and a highly listenable Suite by the British-Australian composer, William Lovelock, also written for the American Brass Quintet.

The first and last numbers were definitely and distinctively successful examples of brass ensemble writing, both in technique and tone colors.

On the other hand, the Bach number failed to register. The complex counterpoint of Bach, at least in this instance, seems better fitted for the wiry timbres of string instruments.

The warmly applauding audience (announced as a sellout, although a number of subscribers didn't show) was rewarded with two encores — a rondo from Brazil and an arrangement of Stephen Foster's "Ellen Fan Dance Step" for brass band.

Dear Dave,  
One more. Sorry they  
say "written for ABQ" -  
just they're assumption, I guess  
Cheers,  
Chon