

Pitzen Brass Ensemble

Reviews - Publicity -

Photos

FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 1979

Brass group 'rocks' at NU

By Lise Lustgarten

Among the places the Pitzen Brass Ensemble has performed is Northwestern's illustrious Rock.

The 15-member ensemble played there Wednesday at noon to gain publicity for their upcoming concert at 3 p.m. Saturday in Alice Millar Chapel.

The ensemble was formed in 1976 as the Pitzen Brass Quintet. Last year the quintet won the \$1,000 second prize Saunderson Award at the Coleman Chamber Music Auditions at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena.

"THE EXPANSION TO a larger group was very exciting," said music graduate student Mitchell Arnold, the ensemble's conductor. "There's been a lot of good group brass music written between the Renaissance and the present. There's more to do with a large group."

All the members of the ensemble have taken classes with the NU music department, Arnold said.

"Having been aware of each other's abilities from musical ensembles, we decided it would be fun and productive if we could get together as a performing group," he said.

The Pitzen Brass Ensemble has been rehearsing together since late September. Their performances have been mostly limited to churches in the Chicago area, Arnold said.

"THIS IS A HIGHLY professional group," said music senior John Kargut. "We were blessed with very fine teaching here, which contributes to the quality of the group."

The concert Saturday will feature music ranging from 16th century dance suites to contemporary pieces, Arnold said.

Daily Northwestern, April 20, 1979

Pitzen Brass opens Evanston season

By STEPHANIE ETTELSON

Brass is beautiful, especially in a Gothic church.

On Sunday, the Pitzen Brass Ensemble opened its fifth season at Evanston's St. Luke's Church with a program of Italian Renaissance music spiced with some modern offerings. Music director and conductor Mitchell Arnold provided able leadership for the group he cofounded in 1978.

Arnold currently is director of the Northwestern University Brass Choir and a faculty member at Mundelein College. He also is founding member of Kapture, an aural arts performance ensemble, for which he has composed, performed and coproduced concerts including a Music at

Midnight series this past summer at the Cross Currents cabaret in Chicago.

WITH THE exception of Michael Tippett's brilliant "Fanfare for Brass," the first half of the program suffered from lack of variety. Three polychoral works by the illustrious Venetian composer Giovanni Gabrieli were presented which exploit the antiphonal dialogue techniques and color contrasts that influenced an entire school of composers.

In a recent concert by Music of the Baroque, which also included several compositions from Gabrieli's landmark "Sacrae Symphoniae" (1587), the brass choirs were spatially separated in facing balconies. Physically, that was impossible

at St. Luke's, but the overall effect suffered by comparison. However, articulation of the contrapuntal lines was always distinct.

Short works of Banchieri, Buonamente, Grillo and Frescobaldi completed this portion of the program, utilizing both large and small ensembles, the latter performing in the chamber manner without conductor. Of these the Canzon "La Organista Bella" in echo provided the most interest in terms of the moving parts.

AFTER INTERMISSION, "The Duke of Marlborough Fanfare," by adopted American Percy Grainger, provided welcome diversion from Renaissance harmonies. Written in 1930 on the eve of World War II, it is subtitled "The British War

a review

Mood Grows."

An arrangement of Brahms' "Geistliches Lied," composed in 1856 for four-part choir and organ, followed. Here the ensemble demonstrated its lyrical expressivity in the warmth of Brahmsian song. As with many of Brahms' works for small ensemble, the suggestion of symphonic orchestration is omnipresent, which is of particular interest since the composer did not write his First Symphony until 1876, well after he had become an established world figure with his chamber music, choral works, songs and piano pieces.

A contemporary American tour de force concluded the concert. "Requiem and Resurrection" by Alan Hovhaness, replete with the Oriental cast of modal melodies, added a battery of percussion to the brass. Hypnotically sensuous in parts, waves of sound swept the acoustically marvelous church.

IT IS CURIOUS that with so many fine female brass players around town performing with other organizations, not one appeared in this 16-member ensemble. Surely there is a good reason.

The Pitzen Brass Ensemble is an outgrowth of the award-winning Pitzen Brass Quintet. It has performed Alan Stout's "WFMT Fanfare," and appeared at the Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concert series. Recently, it collaborated with the St. Luke's church choir, directed by organist Richard Webster, in an album, "Music from St. Luke's."

The second of the three-concert series will be April 17, with an all-French program including works by Satie and Poulenc. Tickets are \$5. For information, call 328-5261.



Pitzen
Brass
Ensemble

D6 March 3, 1983 A PIONEER PRESS NEWSPAPER

Evanston Review Left to Right: Jeffery Hickey, Thomas Rolfs, Patrick Jensen, trumpet; Jonathan Ring, Charles Hodgson, Brian Thomas, Tod Bowermaster, horn

Provocative Programming

PITZEN BRASS ENSEMBLE
at Saint Luke's Church, Evanston
March 4, 1984

By Kyle Gann

Few classical performers realize that in music, as elsewhere in life, presentation is everything. They program a romantic piece, a classical piece, one vaguely "modern," and perhaps a post-1720 Baroque piece, and call that "balance." They have to avoid good but unfamiliar works that do not grab the audience automatically, because they haven't learned to effectively market a piece through contrast and careful juxtaposition, and neither do their desultory program notes contain the compositional insights that could deftly open up closed minds.

Mitchell Arnold, conductor of the estimable Pitzen Brass, is an exception. The ensemble's 1984 season has begun, and once again they are joyously hopscothching through history, pitting the old against the new and the lighthearted against the heavy in a way that flatters the qualities peculiar to each piece. This skipping from romantic Germany to the Medici's Italy to 1970s America brings out hidden aspects of the changes of history, often forcing the realization that the times change less than we think. Equally effective is Arnold's affable running commentary, which abjures the usual biographical statistics and goes straight to the most interesting core of each work. Combine this with the Pitzen Brass's sharp, gleaming execution and the visual and acoustic beauty of Saint Luke's Church, and no

composer could ask for a more ingratiating presentation.

For example, this concert began with a brief fanfare, filled with ninth chords and mild dissonances, from the ballet *La peri* by French impressionist Paul Dukas. (*La peri*, as Arnold explained, was this hyper-self-critical composer's last major work, though he lived for another 23 years.) From here we jumped to two canzoni from the Italian collection *Canzoni per sonare* of 1608. The *Canzon 30 a 8* of Girolamo Frescobaldi was typical of his polyphonic compositions, alternating two choirs with occasional points of homophony. That of Orindio Bartolini was more striking, its three texturally contrasted sections providing a clear location of the roots of later 17th-century concerto form. The outer sections were predictably canonic, but the softer middle section, nominally in 3/4 meter, was subtly divided into phrases of five beats each. (Earlier and more obvious instances of five-beat groupings can be found in Dufay's canon *Alons eni* and Busnois's *Missa "Je ne demande,"* and I would appreciate hearing from anyone with an earlier citation in Western Europe.)

Had this been a concert of atonal music, the Nonet of American composer Wallingford Riegger would probably have sounded pedestrian and unimaginative. Had the piece followed a romantic work, it would have sounded overly spare and thin. But the contrast of its 12-tone language with these innocent modal works relieved the Nonet of unfair expectations and allowed the peculiar character of Riegger's playful counterpoint to come

through nicely. Like early 17th-century polyphony, 12-tone music tends toward the static by its very nature, and the Frescobaldi and Riegger works operated on the same level, though in terms of pitch language they complemented each other perfectly, and the seductiveness of the 12-tone style hit me in a way it has not for some time. Riegger wrote some very delightful music, but its best qualities are delicate, and easily destroyed by juxtaposition with coarser romantic or modern works: This Nonet, full of striking harmonies and expressive though angular melodies, played around with an easily identifiable five-note motive, and generously gave its best lines to a deservingly tuba player, Charles Schuchat. Riegger wrote his best music for winds, I believe, and next year I hope to hear the Pitzen tackle his more ambitious *Music for Brass Choir*.

Brahms's *Fest- und Gedenksprüche* were originally written for chorus, using as text various passages from Luther's German Bible. Arnold explained their composition as a reaction to German political turmoil in 1888. All three movements used some inversion of the major or minor triad as opening and primary motive. The last two sounded little more modern than the Frescobaldi, save for an occasional chromatic neighbor note and a moment of dark, Brahmsian tension before the second movement's recapitulation. But the first was as delicate as a piece for brass choir can be, and could easily be imagined as an arrangement of a soulful Brahms piano intermezzo.

Everyone remembers where they

were the day John Kennedy died. Hopeless music-ween that I am, I remember the day Stravinsky died, April 6, 1971. The editor of London's *Tempo* magazine reacted by asking a number of composers, including Copland, Milhaud, and Boulez, to write canons as elegies to the late master, and only Elliott Carter wrote his canon for brass. I suppose it's best not to get too

MUSIC

sentimental about these things, but Carter's Canon for 3 was even drier and less expressive than Stravinsky's own memorial for Dylan Thomas. I imagine one could take the score and find some interesting arithmetic relationships in the piece, but I could see no interest it should have outside academic circles. Once again, though, that it followed a brief but cheerful *Intrada* by German Baroque composer Melchior Franck made for as favorable a setting as Canon for 3 could have.

It strikes me that we hear the music of Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-Chung far too seldom. He was a student of Varese and is an authority on ancient music, and this combination of influences has given him a modernist style colored with almost poignant tenderness. The Pitzen played his *Soliloquy of a Bhiksuni* of

1958. A *bhiksuni* (according to my Sanskrit dictionary, which I keep on my lap at all times for just such an emergency) is a Brahman in the fourth stage, who has forsaken house and family to live on alms only, and the restlessness of this *bhiksuni*'s soliloquy showed that the experience was not a pleasant one. Kevin Hartman, playing a somewhat Eastern-sounding melody on the trumpet, soloed as the *bhiksuni*, while a choral accompaniment in the lower brass, punctuated by triangle, tambourine, and timpani, kept threatening to interrupt his meditation. *Soliloquy* was a worthy successor to Chou's subtle and better-known *And the Fallen Petals*.

Unfortunately, the last and longest work, by Finnish composer Einojuhani Rautavaara, was also the most trivial. Usually, enough brass can make any piece sound effective, but *A Requiem in Our Time* was an inept pastiche of Grofe and Mussorgsky clichés that any commercial jazz arranger could have improved on. Programming for just brass, even the most assiduous conductor is bound to exhaust his resources at some point. That few composers impart their most profound or intimate thoughts to brass instruments makes the high quality of the Pitzen's concerts all the more remarkable.

The Pitzen Brass play all styles with precision and élan, but seem especially to enjoy the drama of such works as those by Riegger and Chou. They will perform again at Saint Luke's Church April 29 and June 10. If you like interesting music well played and intelligently presented, go hear them.

2 READER—Section 2

READER'S GUIDE TO THE MUSIC SCENE

Continued from previous page

Hornets: Next Friday, April 19, Critics: Next Saturday, April 20, Big Twin & the Mellow Fellows: Next Sunday, April 21, Slugs: 941-7650.

ACORN ON OAK: 116 E. Oak: Mondays through Saturdays, Buddy Charles: 944-6835.

ANTHES: 1824 W. Augusta: Friday, Lonnie Walker & Robin Webster: Saturdays and Sundays, Karat with Bernadette Petroska: 856-1400.

APPLE FARM: Arlington Park: Hilton, Euclid and Rohlfing, Arlington Heights: Sundays, 10:30 am-1:30 pm, Jerry King: 394-2000.

ARNES: 1030 N. State: Tuesdays through Saturdays, Miles Green: Trio: 266-4800.

ARTS CO.: 11900 S. Harlem, Palos Heights: Tonight through Sunday, Freddie Bell with Patti York: 361-5570.

ASH HAZARD: 1600 W. Diversey: Fridays and Saturdays, Carol Lane: 248-1600.

ATHENS SUPPER CLUB: 4726 N. Western: Tuesdays through Sundays, Tina Dana, Hector & Mari Cannon, Athens Quartet: 878-1150.



Critic's Choice: PITZEN BRASS ENSEMBLE

This is Brass City; Chicago turns out no more exemplary performers than its brass players, and the Pitzen Brass contains some of the best in town. What's more, director Mitchell Arnold leaves no stone unturned in his search for interesting and unusual repertoire, and thus every Pitzen concert provides fascinating glimpses into a number of diverse and obscure corners in the history of music, all worth investigating. This Sunday's concert looks to be the best of their '85 season. For one thing, *Espone La Lucha*, a commemoration of the Spanish Civil War by amiable Chicago composer Frank Abbinanti, will receive its world premiere. The Pitzen will contribute to the recent revival of the works of the eccentric, occasionally experimental Australian composer Percy Grainger with two pieces based on folk songs. Also included will be works by Stravinsky, Wilhelm Lichten (a Gabelni student), Pablo Casals (J), Russo-German romantic Oskar Bohme, and dances from Praetorius's ever-popular collection *Terpsichore*. Arnold's enlightening commentary is a pleasure, and some will find the acoustics of Saint Luke's Church alone worth the trip. Sunday, 7:30 PM, Saint Luke's Episcopal Church, 939 Hinman (at Lee), Evanston, 328-9261 or 262-8100 ext. 538.

—Kyle Gann

BAGUETTES: Hyatt Regency Woodfield, 1800 E. Golf, Schaumburg: Tuesdays through Saturdays, 6-11:30 pm, Francois Franco: 885-1234.

BARN OF BARRINGTON: 1415 S. Barrington Rd., Barrington: Fridays through Sundays and Wednesdays, Kenneth Goodman: 381-8585.

BEESTAKE INN: 6925 N. Sheridan: Tonight and Saturday, Iv Black: Next Friday, April 19, John Burnett: Next Saturday, April 20, Before & After: 923-6600.

BENTLEY'S: 10300 W. Higgins, Rosemont: Saturdays, Genetic Blues Brothers: 592-568.

BEPPING'S: Como Inn, 546 N. Milwaukee: Tuesdays through Saturdays, John Sakellariades: 421-5222.

BIDDY MULLIGAN'S: 7644 N. Sheridan: Tonight, Michael Black & the Dreads, Nyan Como, Tony "Big Red" Aiken, Yabba Griffiths, Main Attraction (benefit for Ethiopian Children's Relief Fund): Saturday, Bo Diddley: Monday, Safari: Wednesday, Ron LaSalle & the Twin Buller Band: 761-6532.

BILLY AND COMPANY: 124 S. Milwaukee, Wheeling: Tuesdays through Saturdays, Deon Jackson: 941-6160.

THE BISTRO: Hyatt Regency O'Hare, River Rd. at Kennedy Expressway, Rosemont: Mondays through Saturdays, Candy: Sundays, Debbie Fiore: Trio: 696-1234.

BOBBY LONDON LOUNGE: Schaumburg Marriott Hotel, 50 N. Martingale, Schaumburg:

Pitzen Brass Ensemble Photographs



1981 standing room only Pitzen Brass Ensemble subscription series concert, St. Luke's Episcopal Church. Left to Right: Peter Wahrhaftig, tuba; Mitchell Arnold, conductor; Steven Mayer and Timothy Myers, trombone; William Essert and Robert Smith, trumpet.



St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 1982 — Upper Row: Thomas Rolfs, trumpet; Paul Bauer, bass trombone; Neal Berntsen, trumpet — Middle Row: Charles Hodges, horn; Stephen Wilson, trombone; Walter Hamberg, trumpet; David Ferguson, trombone — Lower Row: Mitchell Arnold, conductor; Kevin Hartman, trumpet; Tod Bowermaster, horn; Eric Ruske, horn; Jonathan Ring, horn; Charles Schuchat, tuba



St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 1984 (photo used in 1985 *Chicago Reader* publicity)

Upper Row Left to Right: Walter Hamberg, Thomas Rolfs, Neal Berntsen, Patrick Jensen, trumpet

Middle Row Left to Right: Kevin Hartmann, trumpet; Glenn Monson, David Ferguson, Paul Bauer, Alan Tobias, trombone

Lower Row Left to Right: Mitchel Arnold, conductor; Stephen Proser, horn; James Smelser, horn; Greg Flint, horn; Tod Bowermaster, horn; Charles Schuchat, tuba

St. Luke's
Episcopal
Church,
1984

Charles
Schuchat,
tuba

Paul Bauer,
bass
trombone





1985—Upper Row Left to Right: Paul Bauer, bass trombone; Alan Tobias, trombone; Neal Berntsen, trumpet
Middle Row Left to Right: Kevin Hartman, trumpet; Walter Hamberg, trumpet; David Ferguson, trombone
Lower Row Left to Right: Mitchell Arnold, conductor; Tod Bowermaster, horn; Adele Trawick, horn; James Smelser, horn; Stephen Proser, horn; Charles Schuchat, tuba



1985 — Left to Right: Kevin Hartman, trumpet; Walter Hamberg, trumpet; Glenn Monson, trombone; David Ferguson, trombone; Paul Bauer, bass trombone