The Aspen Experience  
by Kevin Cobb

I will never forget trying rather unsuccessfully to hold back a smile during the interview portion of my ABQ audition when asked whether I would be willing to spend summers in Aspen, CO. When I talk to people about it, there is almost always a predictable, sarcastic response, "It must be so rough for you to spend summers out there!" To be sure, it is a pleasant respite from a hectic year in the city, but I quickly learned that the time spent there is more than a summer vacation. Aspen is important not only to the ongoing vitality of the ABQ but for the continuity of our teaching philosophy. So, as winter begins to close down on us out here on the East coast, I often find the mind wandering to thoughts of summertime when we're surrounded by the majesty of the mountains, the crisp, clean air, and the unlimited sun. I completed my fifth summer with the ABQ at Aspen last year and while many things remain the same as they have been for decades, there are also several new and exciting events taking place that signify the ongoing evolution of the place the ABQ has called home for the last 34 summers.

First and foremost, the Aspen Music Festival and School is undoubtedly fun - for the students as well as the faculty! It is a wonderful atmosphere where students come eager to learn, the setting is picturesque, and the Festival provides the best opportunities for quality music making. You might be in a rehearsal in the morning, perhaps hiking in the afternoon, attending a master-class, or find yourself playing softball with Ray and John. Almost every night there is a concert featuring some of the best musicians in the world. There's never a shortage of things to do but the summers are certainly not all about hiking and softball games.

Between the private teaching, the orchestral responsibilities, and the quintet, I can honestly say that I work as hard out in Aspen as anytime during the "regular season". From the first week, all of us hit the ground running, literally trying to catch our breath. (As anyone will tell you who has tried running at 8000 feet, it's hard!) All in all it's a lot of work, but we also have opportunities that we don't have in New York, perhaps the most important being that Aspen bonds the quintet as a group. This is done in a variety of ways. The summer certainly affords us consistent rehearsal times every week. This formal time not only keeps the mechanics of the ensemble well oiled, . . . Continued on page 2
The fellowship group Aspen 2003: Helios Brass Quintet
Eric Starr, trombone; Paul Mulbrook horn; Derrick Stauffer, trumpet;
Aubrey Foard, tuba; William Day, trumpet

The Aspen Experience
(continued from page 1)

but allow us to talk over programming considerations, review the
backlog of new works, and ponder new directions for the future.
However, not everything is accomplished in a formal rehearsal
setting. We often share time with each other on a hike or at din-
ner and this is certainly a luxury we don’t usually have in New
York.

So far, I haven’t mentioned anything new. Over the years the
program has tried to accurately reflect what a brass player today
can expect in professional life. But recently, the Festival has taken
many exciting steps toward the future. For instance, it has opened
two new major performance halls—Harris Hall being the intimate
recital hall and the brand new Benedict Music Tent replacing the
old main venue for larger orchestral performances. These won-
derful facilities are a testament to Aspen’s commitment to artistic
excellence and longevity. Also, a brand new program, the
American Academy of Conducting, was recently founded with
Maestro David Zinman giving young talent the opportunity to
study on full fellowship with some of the world’s most established
conductors. This vision of stability and attracting the best young
talent is something the ABQ shares as well as we continue to find
ways of expanding and improving the summer experience for
brass players.

The past four summers have been especially rewarding
because we have been able to invite a student brass quintet to
join us in Aspen. They join us not just as regular students, but as
part of a special, quintet intensive program that gives added
emphasis to their preexisting ensemble. They receive coachings
twice a week with an ABQ member and play alongside the ABQ
on the Aspen recital as well as the concert in Salida, Colorado
(which, incidentally, marked 25 years last summer!) Presently, as
many of you know, we are fortunate to have three New Horizons
fellowships from the Festival. These fellowships enable us to
offer financial support to a young and upcoming brass quintet for
a summer residency at Aspen. This has given us some out-
standing talent in previous years and this last summer was no
exception. The Helios Brass Quintet (pictured above) from the
Cleveland Institute of Music marked the second summer that a
group from CIM won the residency out of the increasing number
of applications we received.

This time last year, we asked for your financial support in sup-
plementing the student residency program and the response was
very positive. Again, we thank those of you who gave to “fill in the
gap” between the fellowship funding and the housing costs. With
your help, the Helios members were able to attend the Festival
free of charge—a first! We were proud of the contributions from
our supporters as it endorses the validity of the program to the
Festival and the students themselves.

To quote a letter from the Helios quintet:
"The brass quintet fellowship to the Aspen Music Festival was the
perfect opportunity for us to immerse ourselves in music. It was
the equivalent of spending a year in Spain while trying to learn
Spanish. Our financial situation was taken care of, allowing us to
concentrate…on the true reason we were there…"

"Combining the Helios Quintet with the ABQ raised our level of
musicianship to a level we did not realize was possible. What
makes the quintet fellowship in Aspen special is the personal rela-

Dan Asia’s latest CD of
three works - including
his Brass Quintet
recorded by the
American Brass Quintet

F O R T Y - F O U R T H S E A S O N
Rojak on the Road - 2003  
by John Rojak

So the ABQ walks into a bar and….wait, this is not a joke! Over even my relatively short tenure with the quintet we've played some unusual venues (including a parking lot in Boulder), but playing in a bar in Ketchum, Idaho seems to top the list of our chamber music concert experiences. The tour was in our fall/ winter season in 2002 and took us on our usual hopscotch across the U.S.—Virginia, Wisconsin, Colorado and Idaho this trip.

We started at Wolf Trap, which is a wonderful venue. There at the master class I learned to be careful about tossing a question back to the audience. A young tuba player asked what is probably the most frequently asked question we get, which is, “why do you have a bass trombone instead of a tuba?” Seeing that he was apparently a college music major, I decided to have him analyze that and answer. “Why do you think?” I asked. His stinging reply was, “I don't know…you couldn't find a tuba player good enough?” Now we have a bass trombone player who knows better.

From there we traveled to Platteville, Wisconsin. After bad weather caused us to miss the connecting flight from Chicago, we had an easy 3-hour drive to our next destination for a mini-residency. As good readers of this newsletter will know, the ABQ has been conducting a great deal of these at colleges across the country. This has been a wonderful development for us for several reasons. We get to really work with and know the students and faculty, often play more than one concert, and we are able to stay in one place for more than a night, unpack and hang up our clothes. The stay there was fun, with our 4 master classes and concert, and grabbing some great pizza with the brass faculty in between.

The next stop was Boulder, Colorado for a residency at Colorado University. (The aforementioned parking lot was on a previous trip.) The low brass faculty, Bill Stanley and Mike Allen, are old friends, so after the student ensembles gave a showcase for us, beer was in order. We went to a nice brewpub where a few students joined us— I don’t remember going to bars with my teachers—and had a nice first evening. They worked us the next 24 hours with 5 hours of classes, culminating in an 8am Business of Music class the morning after our concert. (What I’ve learned from the Business classes is that they usually have donuts and coffee for everybody.)

After the donuts, it was on to Denver University for a single class at the new Lamont School of Music. Budgeted at $35 million, it was not quite finished and had already cost $65 million. You get what you pay for, and when we played in their recital hall I think we all were wondering how we could find a way to record a CD in there. It’s a spectacular facility, and the teaching studios sure made me envious. The manager of the building was a friend we knew from Aspen, so we put on hardhats and visited the unfinished large concert hall. Someday we’ll have a photo exhibit of the ABQ in hardhats—quite haute couture.

Our final stop of the tour was Sun Valley/Ketchum, Idaho. Our flight arrived in Boise around 7pm and we had about 3 hours driving in front of us. So we thought, even though we knew a couple of good restaurants in Boise, we weren’t starving yet and would drive an hour or so before dinner. I mentioned this later to some-
ABQ Repertoire and Programming

by Raymond Mase

For a number of years, the ABQ has been using a program biography that begins with "When the American Brass Quintet played it’s first public performance in 1960, brass chamber music was relatively unknown to concert audiences." To brass players and older chamber music enthusiasts, it is common knowledge that brass quintets were newcomers to the string-oriented chamber music field around 1960. Presenters and managers agreed that one of the biggest challenges facing the newly-formed ABQ, would be demonstrating a suitable repertoire, and that while transcriptions and arrangements could temporarily promote the group, the ABQ would need to compile a varied and unique-to-brass repertoire to secure long-term concertizing. The establishment of the serious brass quintet repertoire became the mission of the early ABQ players, and continues to be the driving force behind the group’s activities today.

The ABQ concert repertoire that has developed over the years is primarily from the 16th century (music played by cornets and sackbuts), the 19th century (after the development of valved brasses in the early 1800’s) and the contemporary brass works of the last fifty years. Brass instruments of the 16th century were used in all kinds of settings—from the illustrious ceremonial music of Venice to the popular dance music of Elizabethan England—and there is an enormous amount of music available. While the instrumentation of the music of this period is mostly unspecified, brass playing was widespread and chamber music audiences have welcomed modern brass editions of this repertoire. ABQ editions of early music are included on virtually every ABQ concert—in the last few seasons we’ve even included some music written over five hundred years ago.

The brass music of the 19th century falls into two distinct categories—the serious chamber music of Victor Ewald and a small group of his colleagues from St. Petersburg, and a wealth of American brass band music of a more popular nature. The ABQ has been responsible for the modern American premieres of three of Ewald’s quintets, as well as the performance and recording of forgotten brass band music—often on period instruments. Our collaboration with the Moravian Music Foundation several years ago produced a recording of brass music from the civil war called A Storm in the Land-Music of the 28th North Carolina Regimental Band. A suite of these pieces has been included on ABQ programs since the release of the recording.

If there has been a repertoire priority for the ABQ, it lies with the creation of new brass works. Early on, the ABQ realized that while the brass music of other centuries would be important, it would be the promotion of new brass works through commissioning, performing and recording, that would secure a place for brass chamber music well into the future. The Quintet has been responsible for over one hundred new works and in the last decade alone, has released recordings of over twenty contemporary brass works in collaboration with Summit Records.

Certainly quality music is critical to successful concertizing, but intelligent presentation of music is also important. The ABQ often gets compliments about our something-for-everyone programming, but the balance and placement of works on a concert takes careful planning. Based on our many years of concert experience, we have come up with a format that seems to work well for most venues. We like the opening piece to be fresh and dynamic, and most often a collection of early music fits this slot best. We usually follow with a developed piece that will require an audience to listen in more depth but generally in a fairly conservative style. Immediately before intermission is reserved for our most challenging work (to listen to and to play)—typically a major ABQ commission. Putting this piece right before intermission gives the audience a chance to talk about it during the break, and it also gives us some rest after what is likely the most physically demanding work on the program. After intermission we offer our lightest fare—brass band selections, or some less common early music like Josquin or Stoltzer. We always want a big piece to close the program—something powerful and serious, but also engaging and accessible. Over the last ten years nothing has filled that spot with the frequency of the two quintets written for the ABQ by Eric Ewazen—Colchester Fantasy and Frost Fire.

Another aspect of our program presentation is talking to our audience. While we do provide informative, printed program notes for our concerts, hearing us speak before the works we play can give an audience further insight into the composer’s intentions, highlight our performance objectives, and show us as warm, breathing human beings. No one in the ABQ is a trained speaker, but audiences always seem to enjoy our informal commentary about the music we play. Sometimes collecting our thoughts about the music is a greater source of anxiety than actually playing the music.

As editor of many of our early music editions and senior ABQ member, I have taken on a fair amount of the responsibility for programming over my thirty-one years with the Quintet. And over these years, I have watched the brass field go through remarkable changes. When I started with the ABQ there were really only a handful of brass quintets out there, all basically trying to promote a brass repertoire of substance. But in the 1970’s, lighter, more entertaining brass programs of arrangements of classical and popular music emerged under the guise of chamber music. John Swallow, the New York Brass Quintet trombonist for many years, once commented to me that around 1960 an important management refused to roster the NY Brass Quintet if the group intended to program arrangements and transcriptions—but it was the NYBO’s reluctance to play arrangements and transcriptions twenty years later that forced a parting of ways with that same management. Programming of arrangements of popular music has never been a consideration for the ABQ. We play the music we believe in—but we never intended to be inflexible about repertoire either. As the brass field became more entertainment oriented, we quietly resisted. When pressured to program music outside the realm of chamber music, we simply refused. Today I’m happy knowing that we’ve never lost sight of those early ABQ commitments to the serious side of brass chamber music and based on the response to our programs over the decades, we’ve made a good choice.

“Presenters and managers agreed that one of the biggest challenges facing the newly-formed ABQ, would be demonstrating a suitable repertoire.”

American Brass Quintet
Raymond Mase & Kevin Cobb, trumpets
David Wakefield, horn
Michael Powell, trombone
John D. Rojak, bass trombone

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Reflections on Twenty Years in the ABQ
(continued from page 1)

Other Voices, which I later performed and recorded with the Quintet.

I auditioned on December 30, 1982. My first performance with the American Brass Quintet was January 29, 1983 at the Arts Club of Chicago. (I kept the program.) We played works of Bertali, Holborne, the Americana Suite, two fugues by J.S. Bach, and the Suite of William Lovelock. Musically and personally, I felt very much at home in the ABQ from the beginning.

Being a member of the ABQ, I wear two hats: performer and teacher. I have greatly enjoyed teaching for my entire career. Now, in addition to the quintet's residency at The Juilliard School, I am also on the faculties of the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, and the State University of New York at Stony Brook. I have been especially fortunate to have students from these institutions who have gone on to their own outstanding careers. The ABQ usually is engaged for mini-residencies in the places we visit on tour, so I have, along with my colleagues, given master classes in trombone and chamber music all over the world.

In addition, I have been fortunate in the free-lance scene in NYC. I have had the wonderful privilege of performing and recording with the finest musicians in New York, in ensembles such as the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. I frequently see my ABQ colleagues on these "outside" engagements, and it is always good to run into them. I would add that in the beginning my colleagues were supportive in helping me work into the scene in NY, for which I will be always grateful.

I would be remiss if I did not remember some people who were instrumental (pun intended) in preparing me for a musician's life. My principal teacher was Don Hummel, who is now retired from Wichita State University. I still remember what a thrill it was to see him in action, whether in solo or quintet recital, and as principal trombonist in the Wichita Symphony. During a year at WSU that Hummel was on sabbatical (1971), a young trombonist named Ronald Borror taught there. He really turned my head around with fresh ideas about style, repertoire, and technique. As it turned out, soon after he departed Wichita he took a position with the American Brass Quintet, and he is my direct predecessor here. Later I had the great fortune to study with Ron's teacher, John Swallow. I have admired Swallow since I first heard the New York Brass Quintet when I was a high school student. In addition to being a truly great artist, mentor, and conversationalist, he is one of the most gifted and articulate proponents of brass chamber music. I had a few lessons from the extraordinary Byron McCulloh, who was for many years the bass trombonist in the Pittsburgh Symphony, as well as a very gifted composer. I would also remember Bob Biddlecome, who was in the ABQ for 28 years. Although I was not exactly his student, I certainly learned a lot from Bob, practical things like how to pack for a tour, and how to play the Elliott Carter Quintet. His musicianship, humor, selfless dedication to the ABQ and to brass chamber music in general means much to me and to us all.

I have always had the support of my wife Reita, with whom I recently celebrated a 30th anniversary, as well as our three children in my career with the ABQ and as a free-lance musician in New York. I have a rather different schedule every week, and the ABQ is away sometimes. In addition, of course, musicians always work on weekends. This necessitates much forbearance by our wives (or significant others) and children, and the entire quintet is fortunate in this respect.

Often I make light of my sometimes-hectic schedule. My students know that sometimes it seems I'm a hit-and-run teacher, generally running. Overall, I cannot imagine living life differently.

News Nuggets

- The ABQ performed Daniel Asia's Brass Quintet in celebration of the composer's 50th birthday at the Abraham Goodman House on January 17th. The brass quintet was written for the ABQ on a grant from the Fromme Foundation and was recently released on a recording of his chamber music (see recording news).

- ABQ with Bargemusic founder and director Olga Bloom at the Bargemusic

- In conjunction with formal concerts on Sept 11th and 13th at Bargemusic, the ABQ performed a special early-morning memorial concert on Sept. 11th. Bargemusic concerts take place on a barge docked in the East River close to the Brooklyn Bridge.

- The Juilliard School has commissioned composer Joan Tower to write a new brass quintet for the ABQ in celebration of Juilliard's 100th anniversary. The piece will be premiered in May of 2006 as part of Juilliard's Centennial. Composer Steven Sacco has written a new work for the ABQ to be premiered this summer at the Aspen Music Festival.

- The ABQ Seminar's class concert at Juilliard in December included a performance of the NY premiere of Harold Popp's Legacy in Brass, and Bruce Lazarus' recently-revised brass quintet, Stary Messenger.

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