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ITG 2000 Conference COVERAGE



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Concert: Epsilon Brass Quartet Wednesday, May 24, 2000 3:30pm Arthur A. Moliterno, Reviewer

Few performances begin with a standing ovation, yet the musical renditions of the Epsilon Brass Quartet (Franck Pulcini, trumpet and flugelhorn, Jean-Pierre Cenedese, French horn, Bruno Flahou, trombone, and Thierry Thibault, tuba) just might make this practice fashionable. Originally organized in 1986 at the Paris Conservatory, the ensemble played seven demanding and technically challenging compositions.

The first selection, *Generique*, was written by Thibault. The piece started with Thibault entering alone, followed in short order by the trombone, now a slow duet. The French horn entered shortly thereafter, with the final entrance by the trumpet. Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor*, was introduced with a sense of humor that captivated the audience and did little to foretell the serious skill required of the arrangement. One wondered if there were two quartets playing, the sound being so rich and full and the articulation clean and precise. The entire group matched the almost effortless high register work of Pulcini in power and stamina. The dynamic range of the group on this piece filled the large recital hall with an intensity and energy that few can sustain without lapses in intonation. The concluding chord in the low register was as full and robust as anyone could demand of the instruments or players.

Switching from a well-known classical work to a jazz piece presented no difficulty for this versatile ensemble. *I Remember Clifford* (Benny Golson) featured trombonist Flahou, along with Pulcini on flugelhorn. The sharing of lead parts among all four players throughout the arrangement was especially engaging. *Three Tangos*, three short dance numbers by Astor Pizzola, had Thibault busy keeping the tango moving and sensuous with his driving bass lines.

After the tangos, tubist Thibault adopted the role of humorous emcee for the ensemble as he took over the lead part in Fritz Kreisler's *Liebes Lied*, having reminded everyone that the piece was meant for violin although he intended to play a brass instrument anyway. This rendition would make an excellent example for student tuba players regarding the delicacy the instrument is capable of sustaining. The blend of instruments did not overpower or hide the luxurious big sound he produced.

By far the most humorous and demanding piece was a version of Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*, with members playing the parts of the Jets and Sharks. The



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ensemble performed *Something's Coming, America, Maria, One Hand, One Heart, Tonight, I Feel Pretty, and Somewhere*. The power of the opening symphonic sound was matched throughout this extended seven-part arrangement by a variety of lyrical solos.

This piece was quickly followed by the finale, *Marching Band*, a composition by Thibault, who intended to imitate French version of a marching band, although Sousa would have enjoyed the opening fanfare and the upper register triplets by the trumpet. Ending the concert with such a rousing piece, complete with a stinger high and loud enough to reach outside the concert hall, left the audience clapping for more. An encore did little to satisfy the audience's desire, but a standing ovation did much to leave the ensemble with a sense of just much the ITG audience appreciated the eminently powerful and impeccable playing of the French ensemble. (Arthur A. Molierno, associate professor of English, Wright State University)

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