

Review**Brownbag Concert at Trinity: organist****Todd Wilson & ProMusica Brass Quintet (October 23)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Though the modern brass quintet — two trumpets, horn, trombone and tuba — only dates from the years following World War II, that combination of instruments has now become a popular standard. And what could be more thrilling than partnering a brass quintet with pipe organ?

The ProMusica Brass Quintet, based in Columbus, made their way up Interstate 71 last Wednesday to perform with cathedral organist and music director Todd Wilson on the noontime Brownbag Concert Series at Trinity Cathedral in downtown Cleveland.

The ensemble — Thomas Battenberg and Timothy Leasure, trumpets, Charles Waddell, horn, Andrew Millat, trombone and James Akins, tuba — comprises musicians who play either in the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra or Columbus Symphony. Some play in both. Together with Wilson, they served up a varied, masterfully performed program of Renaissance, Baroque and Romantic music for a large lunchtime audience.

The concert began with Battenberg's arrangement of a tune everybody knows as the theme music for PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre*, Jean-Jacques Moret's *Rondeau*. Though Wilson was literally upstairs at the keydesk of the Flentrop organ and the quintet were at ground level, the six musicians achieved a perfect ensemble. Wilson added stylish Gallic ornaments to his portions of the music.

In Giovanni Gabrieli's double-choir motet, *O Magnum Mysterium*, organ and brass traded blocks of sound back and forth; when both choirs "sang" together, the blend was colorful and refined.

Low brass were supple at the beginning of Johann Pezel's *Sonata 22*, and the quintet, playing alone, found a variety of tone colors as they stylishly tapered off phrases. Wilson brought out similarly enticing colors in his elegant playing of three Bach *Schübler* Chorales — arrangements of cantata arias that in the case of *Meine Seele erhebt den Herrn* showed off the Dutch organ's sumptuous flute stops.

Dramatic restraint and beautifully shaped phrases as organ and brass passed material among themselves made Richard Strauss's *Feierlicher Einzug* a fine conclusion to the first half of the program. Before the Strauss, James Akins told the audience that he had first heard a brass quintet in this very place, at a Boar's Head Festival in 1969, which moved him to approach the tuba player and ask for lessons. He dedicated the Strauss to that performer, the late Ronald Bishop, for many years principal of The Cleveland Orchestra.

Brass quintets play a lot of music originally written for other instruments. Sometimes those arrangements work better than others. When appropriated for brass, Mozart's *Serenade* from *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* takes on an oom-pah quality perfect for Oktoberfest, but is probably otherwise best left to strings. Even so, the quintet played it with as much lightness and transparency as their instruments allowed.

On the other hand, Todd Wilson's solo organ arrangement of "Theme from *No, No, Nanette*" (aka "Tea for Two," worked beautifully on the Flentrop, which for a few minutes was happy to sound like a Wurlitzer minus the sobbing tibias.

Two big brass and organ arrangements closed the program: Karg-Elert's *Praise the Lord with Drums and Cymbals* and Widor's famous *Toccata*. A thrilling conclusion to an especially sonorous noonday concert.

Photo of Todd Wilson by Sam Hubish.

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