

Chestnut Brass toots its own horns well

Joann Freeman, pianist and music director of the American Artists Series, never fails to provide material seldom heard anywhere else.

Last Sunday's program at the Kingswood auditorium featured the Chestnut Brass Company from Philadelphia with brass instruments of all ages and shapes.

In the preview Louis Stout professor, University of Michigan School of Music, aided by a student-assistant, demonstrated instruments ranging from natural seashells to the modern horn. While those of us who don't play brass instruments are not likely to become experts in 45 minutes, Stout's resourceful humor proved to be so captivating that every minute of the presentation turned out to be delightful. He might be called the Victor Borge of the horn.

During the preview and the pro-



Avigdor Zaromp

gram itself, one's attention was inevitably drawn to the large collection of assorted instruments. Many of them were old and primitive, some not a pretty sight. But they illustrated the challenges, which brass players have faced throughout the centuries and which they still do even with modern enhancements.

Sunday's program consisted mostly of items and composers one never hears about. Ranging from short Renaissance selections to works writ-

ten by contemporary composers, the music demonstrated the skill and versatility of the performers. The sound was always bright and accurate, with very few distortions. Among the extended selections were brass quintets by John Davidson and the Swedish composer Axel Jorgensen.

The Davidson quintet, in contemporary style, opens with a passacaglia, which features the same form as Pachelbel's famous (or infamous) Can-

non, and which I found far more resourceful. Among the more popular tidbits was Khachaturian's Sabre Dance featuring impressive musical acrobatics for the brass. Other tuneful selections consisted of 19th century pieces by obscure composers.

Most of this music is not in the same league of that written by the great masters, to be sure. But this dedicated group has the spark and inspiration needed to expose the listener to new dimensions and frontiers. I wouldn't choose it as a steady diet, but as an occasional diversion from the mundane it is highly recommended.

The Chestnut Brass Company gets its name from the place where the group first performed — on Chestnut Street in downtown Philadelphia. The five members of the group are:

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Bruce Barrie and Terry Everson, trumpets; Marian Hesse, horn; David Vining, trombone; and Jay Krush, tuba. The designation of the instruments refers only to their primary roles — each is extremely versatile

and capable of performing on a variety of standard and non-standard instruments. Jay Krush is also a talented composer and arranger and several of his arrangements appeared on the program.

Versatile Tuckwell conducts and plays horn

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

Barry Tuckwell is a familiar figure in classical music. This doesn't make him unique, of course, but his choice of instrument does. Tuckwell is the only horn player who made a successful solo career with this instrument. He has been the sole ruler of this special domain for the past couple of decades.

As is the case with many other celebrities, Tuckwell has talents outside his chosen instruments. While he has appeared here before as a soloist, last weekend marked his first appearance here as a guest conduc-

tor, in addition to his solo roles. He led the Detroit Symphony Chamber Orchestra at Orchestra Hall on the Friday and Sunday programs.

The program consisted of rarely performed selections, most of which have received their DSO debut on this occasion. These consisted of a Haydn symphony, horn concerti by Mozart and Haydn and two 20th century works by Frank Bridge and Alberto Ginastera.

Of these, I found the Symphony No. 47 by Haydn to be the least impressive, musically as well as in terms of the quality of the performance. Among Haydn's more than 100

symphonies, some are bound to be less profound than others.

While I don't know them all — this one seems to be from the bottom of the barrel with its simplistic and naive style. The monotonous, metronomic performance didn't do much to enhance it.

Things improved considerably when Tuckwell assumed his traditional solo role in the concerti, with only nominal conducting. The Haydn D Major Concerto is a better work than the 47th Symphony, in my opinion, even though not quite on the level of the Mozart concerti. But it shone under Tuckwell's performance, in spite of some occasional blurred notes.

The Mozart Concerto No. 3, K. 447 offered the best of both worlds in terms of its music and its brilliant performance. It was the one item on the program in which the "real" Barry Tuckwell emerged in his traditional performing glory.

As a conductor, Tuckwell was more impressive with the 20th century works. "There is a Willow

review

Grows Aslant a Brook" by Bridge describes the scene of Ophelia's suicide in "Hamlet" — the title is from Shakespeare's text relating to that

scene. The impressionistic musical painting of this scene came through most convincingly.

The Variaciones Concertantes by

the Argentine composer, Ginastera, consists of variations featuring a variety of solo instruments. Some of the format is reminiscent of "Britten's Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra." Here Tuckwell again demonstrated his capability as a conductor, being actively involved in projecting the music rather than just peering it. Both modern works were well received.

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