



Meridian Arts Ensemble fascinates with diverse brass works

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By **Donald Rosenberg, The Plain Dealer**

Brass instruments are dandy at many things, especially calling the troops, signaling important events and celebrating the majestic aspects of life.

But a concert devoted to fanfares? Not so fast. The five brass players of the Meridian Arts Ensemble spent much of their program Monday at Cleveland State University's Drinko Recital Hall immersed in heraldic miniatures, which they shaped with gleaming and balanced virtuosity.

What was so fascinating about the concert, apart from the artistry, was the diversity of sonic expression, which included lyrical episodes both of ancient and recent vintage. The New York musicians, ending a CSU residency presented by the Cleveland Contemporary Players, ventured through more than a dozen works without ever repeating themselves.

About those fanfares: the Meridian players offered all sorts, from the spiky and imitative to the shining and hyperactive. Amid the pieces for quintet and works for smaller complements of instruments, there were reflective beauties, such as Elgar Howarth's "Pasce Tuos," a 1976 score that pays tribute to the 15th century's Guillaume Dufay.

A healthy amount of the music came from the brain of Andrew Rindfleisch, head of the composition department at CSU, who was represented by pieces spanning two decades. Among them was a witty new score, "A Little Fanfare Music (by Lady Macbeth)," which places trumpet and trombone in unison



Courtesy of Meridian Arts Ensemble

Members of the Meridian Arts Ensemble, a New York-based brass and percussion sextet, performed Monday at Cleveland State University.

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Meridian Arts Ensemble

passages that droop in pitch and go to the edge of their ranges before the players have difficulty figuring out when to call it a day.

Rindfleisch shows his mastery of counterpoint and contrasting moods in another recent work, "Four Fanfares" for two trumpets, and an ability to mix arresting Renaissance and contemporary ideas in "In the Zone," a two-movement quintet full of conflicting flourishes and delicious surprises.

As hornist Daniel Grabois aptly pointed out, music for brass tends to fall into two categories, old and new, since most composers of the 18th and 19th centuries tended to neglect these instruments (due in part to the late development of the valve).

So Grabois was delighted to introduce three pieces "in between" those extremes, songs from the mid-19th and early-20th centuries by Walter Kollo, Stephen Foster and James Thornton in loving arrangements by Rindfleisch.

Along with the hornist, Meridian trumpeters Jon Nelson and Tim Leopold, trombonist Benjamin Herrington and tuba player Raymond Stewart showed in these nostalgic, folksy gems how wonderfully poetic and lilting brasses can be.

Momentarily, anyway. To end the evening, the Meridian wizards made an exhilarating showcase of Witold Lutoslawski's "Mini Overture," which is at once brash, brilliant, mischievous and colorful. All in two-and-a-half minutes.

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