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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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PISTON: *Tunbridge Fair*. COWELL: *Little Concerto for Piano and Band*. BENCRISSUTTO: *Symphonic Jazz Suite*. LANZA: *Eidesis IV for Wind Ensemble and Electronic Sounds*. McGill Wind Ensemble conducted by Robert Gibson. MCGILL UNIVERSITY RECORDS 79008.

Apparently McGill University of Montreal is fully and seriously committed to its new recording project: this seventh release in the series, a program by the McGill Wind Ensemble under Robert Gibson, adheres to the highest professional standards in both the interpretive and reproductive departments.

Musicologically speaking, the disc is outstanding for the first stereo recording of Walter Piston's irrepressible band repertory piece, *Tunbridge Fair*, and the first recording ever of Henry Cowell's *Little Concerto for Piano and Winds*. Though designated an "intermezzo" by the composer, the Piston is really a frisky, almost pugnacious overture featuring one of his high-stepping and strutting "jig-tunes" which quickly sets off into a breathtakingly intricate but always clear-headed maze of rhythmic displacement and contrapuntal prodigality. Gibson's young players negotiate their way through the challenging score with the required mien of cool swagger and casual precision; in fact, Gibson seems to maintain a faster gait and sharper dynamics than Fennell on his fine old Mercury recording with the Eastman Ensemble, though the latter had the edge in thumpingly resonant bass.

Like so many of Cowell's inoffensive works, the *Little Concerto* promises more than it delivers, no matter how much the listener keeps wishing for it to be a better piece than it actually is. One knows from such authoritative works as the *Sinfonietta*, the *Synchrony*, the *Variations for Orchestra*, and some of the middle symphonies, and from the sheer abundance, imagination, and humanity of his huge catalog, that Cowell was capable of writing near-great music but, alas, only intermittently. Of course, one mustn't demand too much from a modestly titled "little concerto," but Cowell's facile, slapdash mixture of literal-minded dissonance (i.e., the fistful of chords and the plucking of piano strings as a kind of horizontal harp) and folksy blandness is just too simplistic to sustain much interest beyond the level of quirky amiability. The liner note speaks of Cowell's "melody, whimsy and freedom"—all very true, but this three-movement sequence of *Step Dance—Rondo—Hornpipe* could also do with a little more substance, structure, and subtlety.

After coming down so hard on Cowell, it may seem churlish, if not downright Mongolian, to say a few kind words about a piece calling itself *Symphonic Jazz Suite* by one Frank Bencriscutto, an American trained at Eastman and now teaching in Minnesota. But one brings only a limited set of expectations and critical parameters when approaching so-called "third stream" music, and anyhow the reader should know that this listener

may be the only person in the world (hopefully not) who regards Rolf Liebermann's *Concerto for Jazz Band and Symphony Orchestra* (recently reissued on RCA) a minor masterpiece of the genre in its skillful and exciting balancing and accommodating of the symphonic and jazz idioms (as are Norm Symond's *Concerto for Jazz Quintet and Symphony Orchestra*—once available on a CBC transcription—and a 1980 Columbia release, NJC 36318, which dropped soundlessly into our culture's bottomless musical oblivion without a ripple—Patrick J. Williams's *American Concerto*).

Anyhow, Benrciscutto isn't operating in this league because all he really does is provide a sufficiently dense, cushiony, and flexible framework for a quintet of soloists to do their thing (though I suspect only the first movement contains any real, un-notated improvisation). The composer makes a half-hearted attempt to dignify and unify the first and third movements by the stanzaic repetition of a fanfare-like sequence of chords, but basically what we get in Blues/Ballad-Rock/Progressive Jazz is a driving, catchy, quasi-commercialized cross-pollination of Stan Kenton, Michel Legrand, and Burt Bacharach—which in our book is pretty high-quality stuff of its kind. But, of course, there are those who will reasonably question the wisdom and necessity for tying up a whole side—and such a talented ensemble—with what is essentially third-rank—though not third-rate—repertoire.

There is a fourth work on this disc—*Eidesis IV* for winds and electronic sounds by the Argentine-born Alcides Lanza, who spent some years in New York but is now attached to the McGill faculty. This reviewer must candidly disqualify himself from the task of evaluating this type of music—which, for all he knows, may be very successful on its own terms, because he finds its combination of mercilessly loud and static sound waves and philosophical program notes too unnerving and masochistic an exercise in upsetting the delicate equilibrium of his aesthetic sensibilities. Let others who are braver and better-equipped rush in where this sonic and critical coward fears to tread.

Paul Snook
(FANFARE, V/5 (1982), 289-90)

THE MOUNT ROYAL BRASS QUINTET. The Mount Royal Brass Quintet. MCGILL UNIVERSITY RECORDS 77004, produced by Donald Steven.

SCHEIDT: *Canzon "Bergamasca."* BACH: *The Art of Fugue: Contrapunctus I.* EWALD: *Quintet for Brass, Op. 5.* ARNOLD: *Quintet for Brass.* JONES: *Passacaglia and Fugue for Brass Quintet.*

Whether or not this is a debut disc, the Mount Royal Brass Quintet surely bids fair to compete for best-quintet honors with the Canadian