



meridian arts ensemble

From the buttoned-down polish of the **Meridian Arts Ensemble's** debut CD in 1991 to the wild abandon of their second release *Smart Went Crazy* (a line from an Allen Ginsberg poem) in 1992, it was obvious that a serious change had taken place. Between the two recordings, the Ensemble sought out rock composer **Frank Zappa**, whose own work was influenced by Edgard Varese. Performing a living room concert for Zappa and getting his approval for their renditions of his music was only the beginning of Meridian's continuous journey into broadening the scope of music for brass – they went on to commission over fifty new works to date by **Milton Babbitt, Mark Applebaum, Elliott Sharp, Tania Leon, Hermeto Pascoal, Nick Didkovsky, David Sanford, The Common Sense Composers' Collective, Stephen Barber, Ira Taxis, Kirk Nurock, John Halle**, and many others. Meridian's catalog now comprises eight critically acclaimed CD recordings on the **Channel Classics** label, with a ninth projected for 2007.

Meridian has performed on four continents, in forty-nine states, on radio and television, in concert halls, and in jazz and rock clubs. Meridian has commissioned and premiered over fifty new works, and has emerged as one of the most important new music ensembles in the world. The group blazes its own trail and eclecticism is a key element of its performances, which feature a wide variety of music, mixing classical and contemporary works, jazz and rock compositions, world music, and original works by Ensemble members.

Founded in 1987, the Meridian Arts Ensemble began as a traditional brass quintet, winning four competitions in under two years. The 1990 First Prize in the Concert Artists Guild New York Competition launched the group's international career. With the addition of a percussionist, the group has performed extensively throughout the world in **Cuba, Japan, Taiwan, Brazil, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Mexico, Austria, Costa Rica** and **Colombia**. And in the US, **Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Merkin Hall, Seiji Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood**, Chicago's **Symphony Hall** and **Pick-Staiger Hall**, Los Angeles' **Ambassador Auditorium**, the **Cleveland Museum of Art**, and Atlanta's **Spivey Hall** have all hosted the Ensemble.

Television performances have included **PBS's Live from Lincoln Center**, as well as international appearances on **German, Dutch, and Austrian state networks**. Meridian has been heard on **NPR** and **PRI** affiliates, on commercial classical stations, on alternative stations across the country, and on **Voice of America** and **Radio Free Europe**. Radio broadcasts have included NPR's **Weekend Edition, St. Paul Sunday Morning, WDR (Germany), Dutch National Radio**, and **ORF (Austria)**. In 1993, the group launched New York station **WQXR's "Artists-in-Radio"** program with a series of studio performances and interviews. Meridian displays its uniqueness and versatility through regular performances at jazz and alternative rock clubs. New York's **The Knitting Factory, CBGB's**, and the **Kitchen**; Washington D.C.'s **Black Cat**; and Los Angeles' **House of Blues**, where the group shared the stage in a performance with rock band **Duran Duran**, have hosted the Ensemble.

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The Basic Facts:

- * five brass players and one percussionist based in New York City
- * performances in 49 states
- * performances in Germany, Holland, Belgium, Austria
- * performances in Japan and Taiwan
- * performances in Cuba, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic
- * eight critically acclaimed compact discs on the Channel Classics label
- * changed the face of brass chamber music through innovative repertoire and high-octane performances

Whose music do we play (in no particular order)?

- * Frank Zappa, J.S. Bach, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Tania Leon, King Crimson, Captain Beefheart, and Jimi Hendrix
- * Mark Applebaum, Milton Babbitt, Alvin Etler, Elliott Carter, Tom Pierson
- * members of the MAE (who also do their own arranging)
- * Renaissance and Baroque music, Afro-Cuban dance styles, South American folk music

Career highlights:

- * First Prize Winner, 1990 Concert Artists Guild New York Competition
- * multiple winner of the ASCAP/Chamber Music America Adventurous Programming Award
- * performance at New York's Alice Tully Hall for the 25th Anniversary of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
- * club appearances including New York alternative spaces CBGB's, The Knitting Factory, the Cooler, the Kitchen; Black Cat in Washington, DC; House of Blues in Los Angeles
- * television broadcasts on German, Dutch, and Austrian state television
- * television broadcast on PBS's Live from Lincoln Center
- * radio broadcasts on NPR's Weekend Edition (twice), St. Paul Sunday Morning, WDR Jazz Radio (Germany), Dutch National Radio, ORF (Austria), Voice of America, and Radio Free Europe

Quotes:

- * "more exciting all the time" -Billboard Magazine
- * "Brass Wizards" -CD Review
- * "Made up of only virtuosos" -Trouw of Amsterdam
- * "Extraordinary command" -The Washington Post
- * "Near symphonic richness" -Los Angeles Times
- * "... go and see 'em" -Frank Zappa
- * "Superb virtuosos" -Fanfare

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	BRINK – (CCS 23206) David Sanford - <i>Corpus</i> Elliott Sharp - <i>Beyond the Curve</i> Nick Didkovsky - <i>Slim in Beaten Dreamers</i>
	Ear, Mind, I - (CCS 11898) Frank Zappa, <i>Selected Works, Black Page</i> ; Su Lian Tan, <i>Moo Shu Wrap Rap</i> ; Tom Pierson, <i>Brass Quintet</i> ; Randy Brecker, <i>Some Skunk Funk</i> ; Jason Forsythe, <i>Sanctity</i> ; Josef Burgstaller, <i>Lullaby, Dr. J Geysler</i> ; John Ferrari, <i>MAE We Strut?</i> , <i>Crunch</i> ; Jon Nelson, <i>Fanfare for Nothing, Sleepless</i>
	Anxiety of Influence - (CCS 9796) with guest pianist Jon Klibonoff Frank Zappa, <i>Selected Works</i> ; Claude Debussy, <i>Sarabande</i> ; Stephen Barber, <i>Semahane</i> ; Daniel Grabois, <i>Zen Monkey</i> ; Trad. Afro-Cuban, <i>El Solitario</i> ; Stanley Silverman, <i>Variations on a Theme of Kurt Weill</i> ; Raymond G. Stewart, <i>Okay Chorale, KOHS-Ska</i>
	Five - (CCS 9496) Ira Taxin, <i>Fanfare</i> ; Stephen Barber, <i>Gone is the River</i> ; Jan Radzynski, <i>Take Five</i> ; David Sampson, <i>Morning Music</i> ; Peter Robles, <i>Finale Rounds</i>
	Prime Meridian - (CCS 8195) Igor Stravinsky, <i>Fanfare for a New Theatre</i> ; Frank Zappa, <i>Selected Works</i> ; Kenny Wheeler, <i>Song for Someone</i> ; Captain Beefheart, <i>Selected Works</i> ; Milton Babbitt, <i>Fanfare for All</i> ; Jon Nelson, <i>Song for a Dead King, Paterson 2:35</i> ; Rich Shemaria, <i>Pandora's Magic Castle</i> ; Herbie Hancock, <i>Jessica</i> ; Frank London, <i>Schvitz Suite</i>
	Visions of the Renaissance - (CCS 6594) Giovanni Coprario, <i>Two Fantasias</i> ; Tomaso Albinoni, <i>Suite in G Major</i> ; J.S. Bach, <i>Three Chorales, Four Contrapuncti from the Art of the Fugue, Fantasie</i> ; Domenico Scarlatti, <i>Sonata in D Major</i> ; Johann Schein, <i>Three Psalm Settings</i> ; Don Carlo Gesualdo, <i>Three Madrigals</i> ; Orlando Gibbons, <i>Two Fantasias</i>
	Smart Went Crazy - (CCS 4192) Frank Zappa, <i>Selected Works</i> ; John Halle, <i>Softshoe</i> ; Phillip Johnston, <i>Sleeping Beauty</i> ; Billy Strayhorn, <i>Lush Life</i> ; Kirk Nurock, <i>Smart Went Crazy</i> ; Norman Yamada, <i>Mundane Dissatisfactions</i> ; Jimi Hendrix, <i>Purple Haze</i> ; Trad. Afro/Cuban, <i>Revoltillo</i>
	Winning Artists Series - (CCS 2191) Witold Lutoslawski, <i>Mini Overture</i> ; Alexander Arutiunian, <i>Armenian Scenes</i> ; Ira Taxin, <i>Brass Quintet</i> ; Jan Bach, <i>Laudes</i> ; Alvin Etler, <i>Quintet for Brass Instruments</i>

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The members of the MAE have extensive professional performance and teaching experience, university educations from the Baccalaureate to the Doctoral levels, frequently compose and arrange, and have contributed to many scholarly journals.

The MAE has appeared at educational institutions worldwide. Past associations have included conservatories and universities in the US, The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and South America.

Since its inception in 1987, the Meridian Arts Ensemble has maintained a strong presence in music education. The Ensemble has given masterclasses, clinics, and career seminars at major universities, colleges, and high schools throughout the world. Members of the MAE hold college degrees from the Baccalaureate to the Doctoral levels, and have extensive teaching experience, holding faculty and staff positions at the Hartt School of Music, Princeton University, Arizona State University, and The Juilliard School.

In addition to their teaching experience, the members of the MAE compose and arrange music, and have contributed to many of the major music journals, including the Instrumentalist, the International Trumpet Guild Journal, the Horn Call, The T.U.B.A. Journal, Windplayer Magazine, and Chamber Music America Magazine.

The MAE values the importance of interacting with young musicians. The Ensemble frequently presents local and regional residencies across the US, performing for and working with music students of all ages and youngsters who are not yet involved in school music programs.

Within the Ensemble's busy touring schedule, it frequently presents university level masterclasses across the US, Europe, and South America. Past hosts have included The Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, and Hartt School of Music; numerous conservatory appearances in the Netherlands; Gent (Belgium); the University of Bogota (Colombia); dozens of universities in the US.; the Midwest Band Clinic in Chicago; the Texas Music Educators Association in San Antonio; The International Trombone Festival; and the International Brassfest.

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THE PLAIN DEALER

Meridian Ensemble shines in wide latitude of styles

Friday, October 29, 1999, by Donald Rosenberg, Plain Dealer Music Critic

They played. They screamed. They vocalized. They entertained.

They are the members of the Meridian Arts Ensemble, which presented a program Wednesday at the Cleveland Museum of Art's Gartner Auditorium that was as ear-filling as it was intriguing. The music wasn't to everyone's taste, which one player was quick to acknowledge after intermission. "Thanks for sticking around," he said.

For those who did so, the Meridian proved an eclectic whirlwind that basked in myriad styles and went wildly avant-garde. These superior instrumentalists - a brass quintet and percussionist - think nothing of dipping tonal toes into the classical, pop, jazz, rock and ethnomusic fields. They juxtapose idioms and negotiate complex ideas with dashing nonchalance.

So many works. So many notes. The Meridian exults in adventurous musical realms, including scores written by their own and their friends. Ensemble hornist Daniel Grabois contributed "Migration," which is said to be based on a Schubert theme but explodes with so many feisty jazzy rhythms that dear old Franz must take a back seat to the 1990s activity.

The haunting "Nansi Imali," which is Zulu for "Here is the Money," was performed in an arrangement by Stephen Barber that included chants, spoken phrases and trombone swoops. Another brief encounter was Cuban-born composer Tania Leon's "Saoko," which is named for a Cuban drink made of rum and cocoa. The piece certainly sounds inebriated, with all sorts of quirky and spicy tidbits and a few vocal outbursts near the end.

David Sanford borrows formal aspects of the baroque cantata for his six-movement work, "Corpus," and then heads in every conceivable musical direction. The writing is brash and breezy, full of outlandish riffs and quizzical patterns. The players use myriad mutes to achieve a spectrum of colors. It is a high-energy, occasionally lyrical jam session where just about anything goes.

The Meridian musicians spent their second half in equally varied company. Tomas Genet's "Little Buddha" claims an engaging swing feel. The classical and big-band worlds meet one another in John Halle's "By All Means" by way of layered textures and rhythmic vigor.

By all means, the night's most surprising piece was Su Lian Tan's "Moo Shu Rap Wrap," which is as tantalizing and strange as the title suggests. The work evokes Chinese hip hop in a panoply of tonal whoops, conflicts, spoken gestures and instrumental challenges (a trumpeter playing trumpet and fluegelhorn at once). Neat, bizarre, raw and whimsical, you might say.

Jason Forsythe's "Sanctity" takes a much more traditional route, unrolling a lovely gospel tune until a surprise ending. The Meridian played this piece with the same care for phrasing, attack, interplay and sonic color as they did everything else, including four irresistible pieces by Frank Zappa that ended the night with a sonic punch.

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The New York Times

MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 1994

Amalgam of the Avant-Garde

By EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

There has always been an element of playfulness in the American musical avant-garde, an almost innocent-seeming toying with instruments or manners or styles that has accompanied the movement's more dark, obsessive and uniform political and social visions. Nothing is sacred, much is amusing, and anything goes.

This aspect of American musical life is being celebrated in a six-concert series at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, Chelsea, that ends on Saturday night. The series, organized by Ben Neill, the Kitchen's music curator, doesn't really deserve its Germanic and portentous title, Gruppen II (the subtitle, as for Gruppen I last season, is "Chamber Music for the 21st Century"). At least on paper, the program promises a mix of jazz, Minimalism, new age, rock, hardware experimentation and art music, which may not produce anything more coherent than an evident determination to avoid too much coherence.

The opening concert on Friday night certainly seemed to set the tone. Its first half featured the talented

Meridian Arts Ensemble. This youthful group began its life steeped in the Classical tradition (it played a piece by the 17th-century composer Johann Schein on Friday and has commissioned works from such un-Kitcheny composers as Milton Babbitt). But it has now decided to follow the example of the Kronos Quartet: it even recorded, à la Kronos, Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze" on its recent Channel Masters recording "Smart Went Crazy."

On Friday, adding drums and percussion (played by John Ferrari) to its core brass quintet — Jon Nelson and Richard Kelley on trumpets, Daniel Grabois on French horn, Ben Herrington on trombone, Raymond Stewart on tuba — the Meridian took on Captain Beefheart, Frank Zappa and Duke Ellington's longtime collaborator Billy Strayhorn in a series of pieces dedicated to Zappa's memory.

The playing was as focused as the assemblage of styles was not. Strayhorn's "Lush Life" was sleek and bluesy. The transcriptions of Zappa's songs captured some of that upbeat rocker's determined iconoclasm and quirky wit. The ensemble kept all the balls in the air, juggling pieces by the Brecker Brothers ("Some Skunk Funk") and Rich Shemaria in its romp.

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The New York Times

Meridian Arts Ensemble: A Tribute to Frank Zappa - 2004
by Allan Kozinn

Frank Zappa's fascination with contemporary classical music is evident even in some of his early Mothers of Invention albums, and by the mid-1980's he was overseeing recordings of his own classical works as a sideline to his rock endeavors. The Meridian Arts Ensemble — a brass quintet, augmented on this occasion by piano and percussion — was taken with Zappa's music, and not long before his death in 1993 the group won his approval for its arrangements of several of his pieces.

The group played those arrangements as a tribute to Zappa at Merkin Concert Hall on Wednesday evening. Included as well were works that Zappa found influential, by Gesualdo, Stravinsky and Conlon Nancarrow, along with Ira Taxin's pointillistic Brass Quintet (1973), which Zappa was known to admire. And there were scores by Stephen Barber and Don Van Vliet (better known as Captain Beefheart), musicians who worked with Zappa.

It was a program with considerable appeal. Mr. Taxin's work, which opened it, quickly demonstrated the virtuosity of the ensemble's brass players: even the tuba lines, often the source of muddy intonation in brass groups, were cleanly and precisely articulated. Mr. Barber's "Semahane — Whirling Wall" (1993) was enlivened by a combination of vigorous, high-energy brass playing and delicate, almost Bachian pianism, supported by percussion writing that varied from the sparkling to the explosive.

Helena Bugallo, a pianist, gave an agile reading of Nancarrow's spare-textured but rhythmically tricky "Canon A for Ursula." And Stravinsky was represented by the brief "Fanfare for New Theater" (1964) and "Fanfare" (1953), works that were juxtaposed with arrangements of two 17th-century madrigals by Gesualdo, the only works in which the group's intonation began to flag.

The ensemble was at its best in two works by Mr. Van Vliet — "A Carrot Is as Close as a Rabbit Gets to a Diamond" and "Suction Prints" — and the three Zappa scores. Rhythmically and harmonically both composers threw more than a few curves, but what gave this music its irresistible appeal was a freewheeling combination of sensibilities that included rock, jazz, 1920's pop and modernist classicism as well as a measure of sheer zaniness.

The musicians were Jon Nelson and Brian McWhorter, trumpeters; Daniel Grabois, hornist; Benjamin Herrington, trombonist; Raymond Stewart, tuba player; John Ferrari, percussionist; and Ms. Bugallo.

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The Washington Post

March 18, 1996

Style Section PERFORMING ARTS

by Joan Reintaler

The urge to classify seems bred into the human spirit and is certainly nourished by our schooling. Then along comes a music group such as the Meridian Arts Ensemble that confounds the urge. It is a brass quintet, but sometimes with the addition of some big-time percussion, it is a sextet, no longer all brass. Its members play works of baroque formalism as well as arrangements of Frank Zappa's theatricalism. The one constant in the ensemble's performance at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater Thursday night, however, was extraordinary command of whatever they happened to be addressing at the moment.

Much of their program --- some of the pieces of which were written by ensemble members --- would have been at home in a jazz club or rock joint. Daniel Grabois, who plays the french horn, contributed a piece called "Zen Monkey" most notable for a wonderful passage beginning with a tightly controlled rhythmic pattern that slides apart and decomposes into splendid chaos. Tuba player Raymond Stewart put together "KOHS-ska", a rhythmically compelling piece for the sextet full of abrupt but satisfying modulations, and lead trumpeter Jon Nelson's "Fanfare for Nothing" and "Sleepless", both written during bouts of insomnia, sparkled with energy.

The performances were bright and clean, the music-making was intense and laced with good humor, and the introductions to each piece were entertaining and helpful.

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Jon Nelson, trumpet

Currently Assistant Professor of the State University of New York at Buffalo, Jon Nelson maintains an active career as performer, producer and collaborator. He has served as principal trumpet for the Festival Aix en Provence de Musique in France under the direction of Pierre Boulez, and the Minería Festival Orchestra in Mexico City. Mr. Nelson holds a B.M. from The Juilliard School where he studied with Mark Gould. He has also studied with Laurie Frink in New York, and Antoine Cure in France.

Brian McWhorter, trumpet

Brian McWhorter has recorded and performed extensively in contemporary and improvisational genres and is responsible for a wide variety of new works for the trumpet. Mr. McWhorter is a graduate of The Juilliard School and the University of Oregon and held positions at Princeton University and Louisiana State University before his current appointment as Assistant Professor of Trumpet at the University of Oregon. Along with Kevin Cobb, he hosts the Integral Trumpet Retreat.

Daniel Grabois, horn

Hornist Daniel Grabois has performed frequently throughout New York and on tour with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra, Bargemusic, American Ballet Theater, Musicians from Marlboro, Philharmonia Virtuosi and Speculum Musicae in addition to many others. He received his master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music and his bachelor's degree (summa cum laude) from Yale. Mr. Grabois is currently the horn instructor at the Hartt School of Music and at Princeton University.

Benjamin Herrington, trombone

As one of New York's leading trombonists, Mr. Herrington has performed with such notables as the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, New Millennium Ensemble, Continuum!, St. Luke's Orchestra, New Jersey Opera, Philharmonia Virtuosi and the Sospeso Ensemble. He graduated in 1986 with performance honors from New England Conservatory and completed his graduate studies at Juilliard in 1990.

Raymond Stewart, tuba

Raymond Stewart is principal tuba of the American Composers Orchestra and is also Assistant Professor of Music at SUNY Fredonia College where he teaches the tuba studio and lectures in World Music. He received his high school diploma from the Interlochen Arts Academy, BM from the University of Miami School of Music, and MM from the Manhattan School of Music.

John Ferrari, percussion

John Ferrari enjoys a multi-faceted career as a versatile classical and hand percussionist, drummer, conductor, and educator in the New York area. He is a founding member of the Naumburg Award winning New Millennium Ensemble. Mr. Ferrari holds DMA and MM degrees from SUNY Stony Brook, and a BM from William Paterson University in New Jersey where he has been on the performing arts faculty since 2002.

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