

MERIDIAN ARTS ENSEMBLE

"GO AND SEE 'EM..."

-FRANK ZAPPA



ABOUT

Meridian Arts Ensemble, a sextet comprised of five brass players and a percussionist, is America's leading brass group exploring the music of today. Founded in 1987, with nine commercial CD releases, over fifty premieres, and performances on four continents and in forty-nine states, Meridian's exciting and ambitious musical approach has changed the face of classical music.

Now a faculty ensemble at the prestigious Manhattan School of Music, the ensemble began its career looking away from academic music and toward the American vernacular. Meridian's arrangements of the music of Frank Zappa brought critical and popular acclaim, interviews on NPR's Weekend Edition, and performances in concert halls and rock clubs. Commissions from Milton Babbitt, Elliott Sharp, Tania Leon, Su Lian Tan, Mark Applebaum, Hermeto Pascoal, Nick Didkovsky, David Sanford, The Common Sense Composers' Collective, Stephen Barber, John Halle, and Kirk Nurock have created a balanced and broad ranging repertoire for brass and percussion that peers into every corner of today's musical experience.

Meridian's catalog of nine CDs on the Channel Classics label represents an equally broad look at the music of today. From an album of Baroque and Renaissance music to the latest release exploring the music of Central and South America, Meridian's discs have garnered critical acclaim and a large and passionate popular following.

Meridian Arts Ensemble has succeeded in bringing classical music to popular audiences. Consistently attracting a diverse audience base, the ensemble has worked tirelessly to keep the traditions of classical music alive, to spread the appeal of these traditions, and to revisit these traditions from a contemporary sensibility.

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BASED IN

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5

**BRASS
PLAYERS**

+1

PERCUSSIONIST

PERFORMED IN

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STATES

+4

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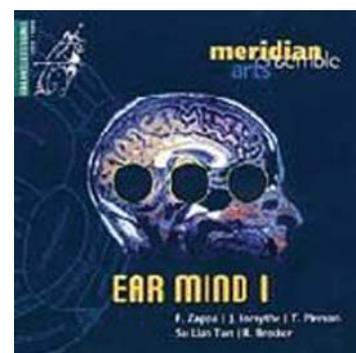
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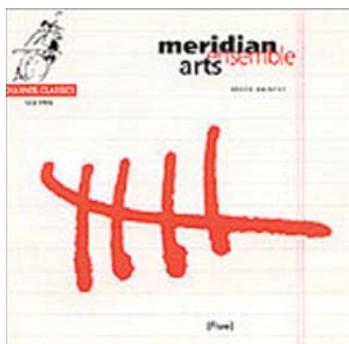
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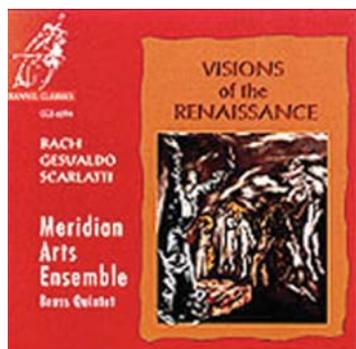
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ENSEMBLE MEMBERS

JON NELSON, TRUMPET

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Currently Associate Professor at the University at Buffalo, Jon maintains an active career as performer, producer and collaborator. He has produced five solo CD recordings and commissioned over eighty works for brass. He served as principal trumpet for the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence under Pierre Boulez, and performed with numerous other ensembles. Jon Nelson holds a BM from The Juilliard School where he studied with Mark Gould. He also studied with Laurie Frink in New York and Antoine Cure in France.

TIM LEOPOLD, TRUMPET

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Tim Leopold is the newest member of the Meridian Arts Ensemble. A Kansas native, he is equally adept in the worlds of classical music, jazz, world music, and popular idioms. In addition to performing with Josh Roseman's Extended Constellations, Tim regularly appears with David Sanford's Pittsburgh Collective, the Slee Sinfonietta and June in Buffalo, and the Broadway production of Chicago. Currently on faculty at Manhattan School of Music in the Contemporary Performance Program, Tim received his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Kansas and a Master's from the University of Oregon.

DANIEL GRABOIS, HORN

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Hornist Daniel Grabois is the chairman of the Contemporary Performance Department at Manhattan School of Music and professor of horn at The Hartt School. An extremely active performer, he has played frequently in New York and on tour with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Orpheus and St. Luke's Chamber Orchestras, Music from Marlboro, and other ensembles. He has recorded extensively, including solo and orchestral works and a horn concerto written for him. He received his bachelor's degree from Yale and his master's from the Manhattan School of Music.

BENJAMIN HERRINGTON, TROMBONE

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Prolific in the field of contemporary music, Mr. Herrington has premiered dozens of new chamber and solo works representing composers from every continent. He performs regularly with many of New York's finest ensembles such as Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and Orchestra of St. Luke's, and can be heard nightly performing on Broadway. He teaches at Princeton and Columbia Universities and Manhattan School of Music.

RAYMOND STEWART, TUBA

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Raymond Stewart is principal tuba of the American Composers Orchestra in NYC, a founding member of the Meridian Arts Ensemble, and performs regularly with the Brooklyn Philharmonic. In academia, he serves on the faculty of Columbia University, Manhattan School of Music, and SUNY Fredonia in upstate New York. 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

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John Ferrari has a multi-faceted career as a 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 [and appears frequently with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.] Mr. Ferrari holds DMA and MM degrees from SUNY Stony Brook and a BM from William Paterson University, where he has been on faculty since 2002. With the MAE he joined the faculty of Manhattan School of Music's Contemporary Performance program in 2007.

REVIEWS

San Francisco
Classical Voice
Style Surfing

By JESSICA BALIK (published Feb. 24, 2008)

Perhaps it's just me, but I possess a stereotypical image of a brass quintet. It is an image of gray-haired men who chiefly play Renaissance and Baroque music, with the occasional Christmas album thrown into the mix to shake things up a bit.

Regardless of whether my image might ring true for others, the Meridian Arts Ensemble certainly does not fit that stereotype. For starters, this New York-based ensemble is actually a sextet: a brass quintet with an added percussionist. It performed Sunday at Dinkelspiel Auditorium as part of the Stanford Lively Arts concert series. The oldest piece on the program dated from 1933. The style of its repertoire could only be pigeonholed as contemporary — and eclectic.

The program did open, though, with two pieces that shared a Latin American flair. The first was *Ocho por radio*. Composed by the Mexican musician Silvestre Revueltas, it was arranged by Meridian's own trumpeter, John Nelson. A Cuban-American composer, Dafnis Prieto, composed the second piece, which Meridian Arts Ensemble had commissioned. *Echo/Dimensions* combined the rhythmic vitality of Afro-Cuban jazz with timbral and textural contrasts.

The centerpiece of the program was also chock-full of contrasts and surprises. It was *Magnetic North*, another piece composed for Meridian, by Stanford faculty member Mark Applebaum. Instrumentation accounted for some of the novelty, since Applebaum joined the performers to play on a "Mouseketier." This homemade instrument featured a few soundboards, which were connected to amplifiers and sound mixers.

Mystery Components

On the soundboards stood various formidable-looking contraptions, including wires, strings, and something bronze. (While the precise etymology of the instrument's name is a mystery to me, I suspect it might concern one or more of these mounted objects.)

The resultant instrument was one whose visual appearance was as daunting as were the electronic sounds it produced. Jenny Bilfield, the artistic and executive director of Stanford Lively Arts, remained at the side of the stage as she introduced the program. She did not dare approach too closely Applebaum's *Mouseketier* that was usurping center stage.

Instrumentation aside, histrionics also contributed to the shocks of *Magnetic North*. Balloons, aluminum foil, Ping Pong balls, glass bottles, paper bags, and choreographed movement numbered among

"NEAR SYMPHONIC RICHNESS"
-LOS ANGELES TIMES

MERIDIAN ARTS ENSEMBLE CONSISTENTLY PUT THE "LIVELY" IN STANFORD LIVELY ARTS.

the props and gags. But this is not to say the piece was all show and no substance. On the contrary, a member of Meridian claimed that Applebaum's piece was among the most difficult the ensemble had ever undertaken. The complexity was even obvious in the notation. The score was put on display for the audience during intermission. A woman sitting one row in front of me said she would like to frame each page and hang them all in her living room.

A brief *Fanfare for All* by Milton Babbitt ushered in the program's second half, which featured a premiere, as well as two pieces that Meridian holds dear. The premiere was *Stillas*, composed by Per Bloland, a Stanford doctoral student who studies with Applebaum. Introducing his piece, Bloland was quick to concede that his work sounds quite different than *Magnetic North*.

Granted, it was not a theatrical piece, but *Stillas* embodied drama of its own sort. It was a dialectical sort, between a smooth surface with few sharp contrasts and an underbelly of taut, relentless quarter tones. Bloland explained that his piece is part of a larger work. Intrigued by it, I would be interested to hear that larger work in its entirety.

Potpourri of Styles

The final two pieces are seemingly staples in Meridian's repertoire. David Sanford's *Corpus* was one of the ensemble's first commissions. Its six-movement structure references a Baroque cantata, because each movement is based, however loosely, on the same tune. But each movement also references a particular style, and none of them sounds Baroque.

The styles instead belong to the 20th century, though not necessarily to the concert hall. The styles include 1940s bebop, and rock evocative of the late 1960s. The final piece, *Echidna's Arf*, was another jazz/rock tribute to that musical eclectic the late Frank Zappa. Meridian used to play Nelson's arrangements of Zappa's tunes for Zappa himself.

In the end, whether evoking a mariachi band or Led Zeppelin, whether playing a piece specifically commissioned for the ensemble or a piece arranged by one of its members, Meridian Arts Ensemble consistently put the "lively" in Stanford Lively Arts. Like Applebaum's *Magnetic North*, this ensemble combined serious musicianship and well-executed virtuosity with audience-engaging humor, which made the complexities of the new music it performed palatable indeed. If Meridian Arts Ensemble does defy stereotypes, it does so only to set standards of its own.

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REVIEWS

The Berkshire Eagle

Anything but ho-hum

by LESLIE KANDELL (published Aug. 11, 2007)

WILLIAMSTOWN — Out they stride onto the Clark Art Institute stage, five brass players and a percussionist, dressed mostly in black casual. The brass are placed in traditional string quintet placement — except that in the first violinist's usual seat is a trombonist wearing a black eye-patch.

No group can make a standard string quartet look ho-hum quicker than the well-traveled Meridian Arts Ensemble which, in its hometown, New York City, appears in venerable downtown venues like the Kitchen, and uptown ones like the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Meridian's repertory can exude humor and wit, but its adventurous members also explore brass music from 16th-century Venice to 20th-century South America, adding their own arrangements of "Sesame Street" as well as of their mentor Frank Zappa. The noisy, wacky mariachi of "Ocho por Radio" by the Mexican composer Silvestre Revueltas began the Williamstown Chamber concert. Before John Cage and friends turned on radios, Revueltas was surfing the dial, which yielded sounds of Mexican nationalism, foreign music and mariachi. The resulting score is compressed Revueltas, not necessarily lovable but surely intriguing. "Americantus," a dark, somber response to September 11, was announced by its composer, Britton Theurer, a trumpet player who is not in the ensemble but confessed that his daughter was interested in attending Williams College. The piece's variations on "America the Beautiful" recalled Charles Ives' organ variations on "My Country 'Tis of Thee" without adding to its concept. A future revision may benefit from an optional percussion part for John Ferrari, who sat this one out.

"Brazentia Suite," a medley arranged by Raymond Stewart, Meridian's tuba player, is a South American tour of tango, soccer and anguish. "Bachianas Brasilieras No. 5" by Villa-Lobos was originally for soprano and eight cellos (and truly familiar even to those who don't know the title) but here the horn (played by Williamstown native Daniel Grabois) covered the soprano's seductive line. Astor Piazzolla's 1964 "Oblivion" turned into atmospheric music with vibraphone. The trumpet had the tango melody, and turning down the dial on the vibraphone became part of the cadence. "Um a Zero," a 1946 soccer-induced effusion, is by Benedito Lacerda and Pixinguinha, Rio de Janeiro favorites of Villa-Lobos. (Brazil, it seems, had beaten Paraguay 1-0). The brass bounced, the frame-drum had a lick, and 60 years later, the soccer energy endures.

Tania Leon, from Cuba, has composed and conducted in the United States for much of her life and is currently a professor at Brooklyn College. "Saoko" is named for a Cuban drink of rum and cocoa. "Like many alcohol-inspired compositions," her notessay, "Saoko staggers and trips over itself, shouting (literally) as it makes its way home." But the short brass quintet is in high-contemporary style, with lay-

ered low puffs against busy overlaid trombone and trumpet lines, punctuated with drunken yells. Trumpet player Brian McWhorter explained that television provided the music of his childhood, and his "Sesame Street" medley was refracted through a lens of new music. In this version, four songs from the program's early days were barely recognizable. One would expect to be jollied along by familiar tunes, but since they are largely obscured here, it was the rhythm that carried it, as only brass can. "I Love Trash" became a slow-drag waltz with whining vocals, and "Manamanah" was rightly peppy. Before splintering, the program's theme soared heroically over rumblings. Don't worry about Frank Zappa's titles, Grabois cautioned the audience; they don't mean anything. Zappa, who died of cancer 1993, coached Meridian (founded in 1987) in exact performance details of his work after he was sent a rehearsal tape. Possibly meaningless titles of his works, arranged by trumpet player Jon Nelson, were "Harry You're a Beast" from the posthumous "Mystery Disc," with players yelping and gasping in the wild cadenza; "Orange County Lumber Truck" from "Weasels Ripped My Flesh" (1970); and "Big Swift" from "You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore" Vol. 2 (1988). The mysteriously related encore was a progressive jazz improvisation. At the short concert's intermission, Meridian's eight CD's sold briskly.

The Washington Post

Meridian Arts Ensemble Review

by JOAN REINTHALER (published March 18, 1996)

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 frenchhorn, 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.

MUSIC EDUCATION

Since its inception in 1987, the Meridian Arts Ensemble has maintained a strong presence in music education. The ensemble has given master classes, clinics and career seminars at major universities, colleges and high schools throughout the world. Members of the MAE hold degrees from the baccalaureate to the doctoral levels, and have extensive teaching experience, holding faculty positions at the Manhattan School of Music, The Hartt School, Princeton University, University of Oregon and SUNY Buffalo and SUNY Fredonia.

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 youth who are not yet involved in school music programs.

Within the ensemble's busy touring schedule, it frequently presents university level master classes across the US, Europe and South America. Past hosts have included The Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, and The Hartt School; numerous conservatory appearances in the Netherlands; Lieksa Brass Week (Finland); Gent (Belgium); the University of Bogota (Colombia); Instrumenta Verano (Oaxaca, MX); dozens of universities in the US including a recent year-long guest professorship at East Carolina University; the Midwest Band Clinic in Chicago; the Texas Music Educators Association in San Antonio; The International Trombone Festival; The International Trumpet Guild Conference and the International Brassfest.

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