

And The Trumpet Shall Sound

BY LYNN SAMPSON

THE WORLD of classical music can sometimes be like a private club — members only, a closed shop. Although everyone from Zanzibar to Soho knew about the recent collaborations of the world's three top operatic tenors, first at the concert in Rome and not long ago in Los Angeles, it might surprise you to know an even more spectacular event just took place at Long Beach State University. A closely guarded secret, few outsiders even knew it was in the offing. If I don't tell you about it, no one else will.

In 1974, three distinguished musicians met for dinner in Bloomington, Indiana, and formed a plan to create professional guilds that would promote their own musical specialties, disseminate helpful hints to, and provide moral support for, fellow musicians. What became the International Trumpet Guild and the Tubists Universal Brotherhood Association began that evening at the home of a man named Harvey Phillips, who for many years played tuba for Arturo Toscanini in the great conductor's NBC Symphony Orchestra. Phillips, who was then teaching music at the University of

A veteran print and broadcast arts critic, Lynn Sampson hosts "Movies Worth Watching with Lynn Sampson," daily on KCIV-FM, Modesto.

Indiana, was joined by trumpet teachers Robert Nagel of Yale and Charles Gorham of Indiana University. Together, they founded these two fraternal organizations to serve the world's top trumpet players and low brass performers (tubas and euphoniums). Well, few outside of the profession knew these organizations even existed, which quietly went about doing what they do. For 20 years, rank and file music lovers have been out



Photograph by Keith Ian Polakoff

of the loop.

The time has come to break the story and blow their cover.

Once a year somewhere in the world, one of the most remarkable musical events of all time takes place under the cover of hushed, professional anonymity. It is a "by invitation only" series of workshops and concerts of which few in this supposedly tightly-networked, overly-informed world have ever heard. I can calmly and seriously state that in all my years of attending and reviewing concerts at venues in Europe and America, nothing I have ever experienced was as

intense and powerful as what I saw and heard when I crashed this heretofore hermetic gathering last June.

It is called "International Brassfest." What it *is* is the convention of the world's best brass players — trumpets and tubas surely, but trombones, horns, and even ancient cornettos and sackbuts as well. For a few days each year the cream of the cream convene to perform for one another from nine in the morning until eleven each night. During their four days at Long Beach State, they managed to hold 36 master classes and 15 concerts. Concert number 12 was the most powerful and memorable artistic experience I have ever known. The other 14 were not far behind it.

What you have is the world's best symphony and solo players, many teaching brass professors of music from top universities, and an accompanying retinue of outstanding students. The artistically incendiary result is awesome. And it is guarded. As I stood at the ticket desk having my press credentials verified, a forlorn man hugging a trumpet case approached and politely asked: would they please allow his wife to attend the afternoon concert? The official behind the desk was not encouraging

about her chances of getting in, although the husband was one of the performers. That was the concert that re-ordered my personal hierarchy of great artistic experiences.

After the stellar performances of men and women like the first chair trumpeter of the Philadelphia Symphony, the world's leading expert on late seventeenth century Bolognese trumpet concertos, and the first chair trombonist of the LA Philharmonic; after the rafter-shaking recitals of the Tonight Show's lead trumpeter and the soloist from Stan Kenton's Big Band; after the concert by the world's leading Baroque trumpeter; after all that came something they innocently call "The Festival of Trumpets."

"The Festival of Trumpets" is simply this: thirteen ensembles taking the stage one at a time to perform a wide range of chamber music for trumpets and then all gathering *en masse* to perform one single piece played by everyone. The beautiful interior of brand new Carpenter Hall on the campus of CSU-Long Beach will never see

its like again. Neither will I. One hundred and thirteen professional trumpeters stood tightly packed on stage and reached back through 381 years of music history to the San Marco Cathedral of Venice to perform the great "Sonata XX" of Giovanni Gabrieli for five brass choirs. With more than 20 players in each choir, it was a faithful rendering of Gabrieli's tribute to the remarkable acoustics of the great Venetian cathedral of San Marco. On April 25, 1615, he assembled a similar, though smaller, group of musicians and placed them in five equal groups within that monumental edifice — one in the chancel, one in each transept, one at the western door, and one in the choir loft.

In Long Beach, each choir played Gabrieli's polyphonic theme individually in turn. Then came the mammoth "tutti" section with all 113 trumpeters playing at once. The effect was not ear splitting or overdone. I should know for I was sitting dead center in the third row. It was, however, catastrophically stupendous and more powerful emotionally than anything I have ever seen and heard on any stage in

all my life. In a few minutes "Sonata XX" was finished, 113 musicians lowered their instruments, and it was suddenly 1996 again.

Brassfest organizers don't exactly *say* they want to keep audiences out. They say they lack funds for advertising, that they have no feasible way of gearing up to attract crowds, and so forth. Maybe. I suspect they simply like the atmosphere they have created, a gathering of, by, and for professional musicians, and that they are not particularly interested in opening it up in ways that could transform things.

But don't despair. Something very like the Long Beach event will happen again next year, as it does every year. They might even relent and let the public in, not just insiders and reporters. All you have to do is somehow find your way to Gothenberg, Sweden, late next spring where the next "International Brassfest," with one hundred-plus trumpeters, will be waiting to blow you away. In the meantime, recordings featuring these same unparalleled musicians are available from Summit Records of Tempe, Arizona: 800/543-5156. CPR

Correspondence

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we cannot count that as incitement to the vandals who long since rendered General Grant's neighborhood so insalubrious. Do they know who's buried there anyway? For them it may be a tough question.

Some specifics on the domestic manners of General Grant are further discussed in this issue in my regular column (see page 24). Lincoln and Sherman will have to wait, perhaps forever, as I have just learned that the editor of this journal is a scalawag, hence capable of almost any iniquity including censorship.

Not a scalawag, but a son of the South who mourns the tragedy that Southerners sacrificed much good rather than give up defending indefensible slavery. — Editor

Some Trick

Tim W. Ferguson (Press Watch, CPR, May/June) referred to a proposed ballot measure "requiring competitive bidding of public projects over a certain size. The idea sounded okay, but was this some trick a special interest was up to?" His skepticism is well founded. The initiative is sponsored by a state employees union, Professional Engineers in California Government (PECG). We expect PECG to submit its signatures to the counties any day.

Buried in the text of the initiative is language that would devastate private engineering, architectural and other consulting firms in California, create a *de facto* state monopoly on these services, and impose yet additional bureaucratic delays on the delivery of many needed private and public projects. The initiative expressly requires the preparation and filing of papers with

the State Controller and obtaining the Controller's permission before procuring engineering, environmental, architectural, and surveying consulting services. It contains a "Stacked Deck," so that it is unlikely that the Controller would ever give that permission.

An important point is that this initiative impacts much more than just traditional state projects, such as Caltrans projects and state buildings. It also impacts local agency projects, regional agency projects, and private projects in California. PECG has already spent a lot of money qualifying the initiative for the ballot and will likely spend far more to pass it. We expect that PECG will wait until right before the election and then launch a very misleading media campaign.

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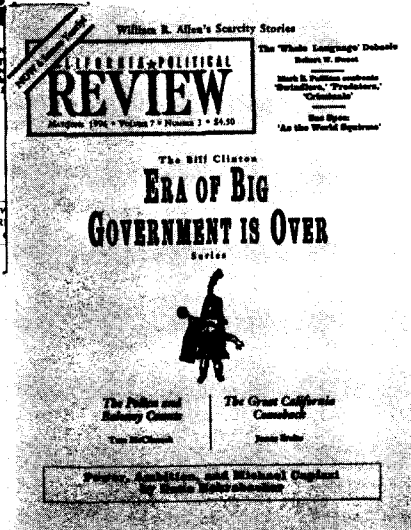
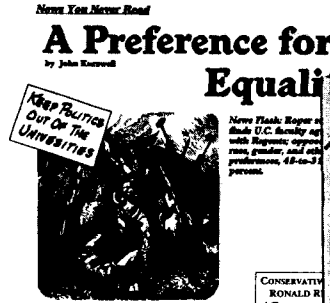
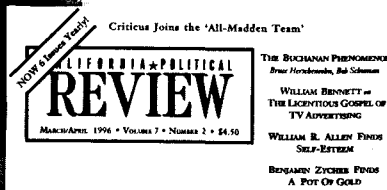
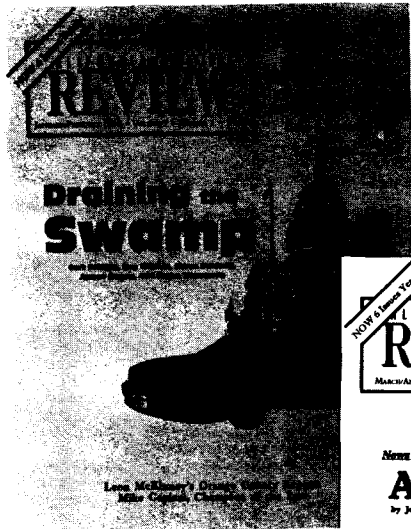
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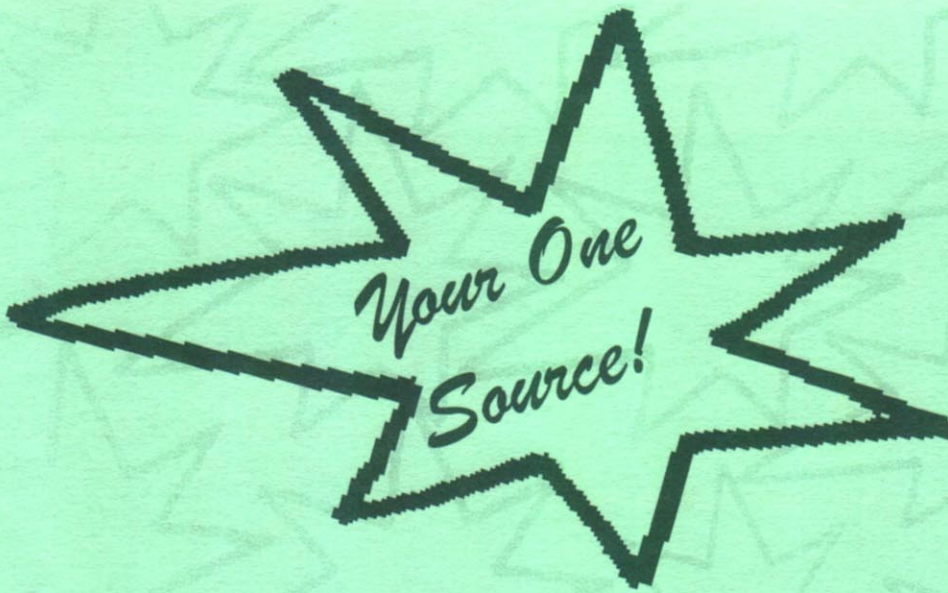
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