

Review - Atlantic Brass Quintet

I have a confession. Or, perhaps more of a disclaimer. I have a soft spot for brass groups. Maybe because I play trumpet myself, but there is something about the sound that is like no other, like a boys choir or a pipe organ, instantly identifiable and unique. It does, however, have to be done very well. The final concert of the KCCA 2015/2016 series was done very, very well.

The Atlantic Brass Quintet, consisting of 2 trumpets, a French horn, trombone and tuba, and based out of Boston, is exceptional. The resumes of it's members are impressive to say the least both in paper credentials and real life accomplishments, and the calibre of music heard on Tuesday night reflected that precisely. I use the word precisely on purpose, as the player's remarkable and consistent precision was one of the many key components that helped make for an entertaining and musically satisfying performance. The selections of music ranged from Handel and Bach, to traditional Roma pieces, to a wonderful contemporary composition by trumpeter Andrew Sorg, displaying an amazing range and versatility without ever sounding out of their element. The Sorg piece in particular was a favourite of mine, very modern without being unmusical, whimsical (the last chord was even sung by the group) and dark all at once, telling a story as outlined by the composer himself. His telling of the story was in particular a useful and effective setup for the piece, allowing the audience to better understand an admittedly abstract work (as compared to the other selections).

Many of the pieces played, such as the Bach, were not originally written for a brass quintet format, and as such, had to be arranged for this group, much of which was accomplished by members of the quintet themselves. This is not simply a matter of playing string or voice parts on a horn, it demands a much more carefully thought out plan, and while there were certainly some pieces that felt like a more natural fit, there were times where I think the original composer himself would have used the brass had the modern versions of these instruments existed at the time.

From the opening piece, featuring two perfectly matched piccolo trumpets, to the encore, an adaptation of *Airport Sadness*, a modern jazz piece by pianist and composer Brad Meldhau, this quintet impressed me with their beautiful tone, versatility, dexterity, and yes, precision, none of which diminished, a very impressive feat considering the high physical demands of playing brass instruments. (Even the higher altitude of our amazing home would have been an influence on performance, but you wouldn't have known). The Atlantic Brass Quintet was a perfect and polished way to end this KCCA season. See you in the fall!