

Brass Quintet

Nicholas Francis (2007)

duration ca. 16'

Instrumentation

2 trumpets in C
horn in F
tenor trombone
tuba

About the music

Early in the summer of 2003, I set about writing a large-scale brass quintet that I intended to have read by my students at that summer's Marrowstone Music Festival in Bellingham, Washington. Time and motion, however, wait for no man and I was forced to abandon the work while it was still a sketch. All the same, I was fond of a great deal of that material and so in the fall of 2006, when my good friend Nate Rensink suggested that I consider writing a substantial work for a new quintet with which he was involved in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I immediately thought of the dormant sketches. I began formal work in the summer of 2007, and work progressed remarkably quickly, yielding a quintet whose form was surprisingly symmetrical. Its three movements are fused into a single "macro-movement", and in fact they share thematic material to the extent that they might just as well be considered a single movement divided into three equal parts.

The work opens with a gentle hymn, but there is something wrong—the tune is not fully worked out, and the hymning seems cursory. Regardless, the music gradually works itself up into a heroic tune, but the conditions are unstable; the heroism with all its pomp comes too soon and, in spite of recourse to a simpler (if somewhat sinister) second theme, the first section collapses dramatically under its own weight.

The second movement begins in the barren wasteland left by the disintegration of the first. After a time, paraphrased fragments of the Anglican seafaring hymn *Eternal Father* begin emerging from the ashes, eventually appearing alongside a restatement of the germinal hymn from the opening of the piece. Gradually the wasteland begins to bloom, and the movement closes quietly in E major.

In these newly fertile conditions comes the finale in two sections, the first a long and weightless tune in which the first trumpet and then the horn float above a gently oscillating ensemble, clearly establishing E-flat major as the tonic. The second theme reworks the germinal hymn material in diminution in the relative key of C minor, increasing in density until a short fugato sets up a fully worked-out statement of the original chorale. This brings the music back to E-flat major, with all of its heroic properties, and heads the quintet towards a thunderous climax followed by a mad gallop to the finish.

This music is dedicated with deep gratitude to Nate and to all the members of the **Sapphire Brass**, without whose confidence in new music it might never have been written.

N.P.F., Vancouver, British Columbia, 7 November 2007

for the Sapphire Brass
Brass Quintet

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Slowly - simple and hymnlike
(♩=60)

1st. Trumpet in C

2nd. Trumpet in C

Horn in F

Trombone

Tuba

7

accel.

A ♩=70 accel.

lightly

13

accel.

♩=80 accel.

♩=90 accel.

mp

mp

mp

mp

104 **G**

mp mp mp mf f f sf sf

f a little wildly

112 **rall.** **More deliberately** (♩=100) **A tempo** (♩=136)

ff ff ff p p

(long) (long) (long) (long) (long)

con sord.

122 **Deliberately** (♩=110) **con sord.**

pp mp ff ff ff ff

con sord.

Q

283

mf cresc. poco a poco

mf cresc. poco a poco

mf cresc. poco a poco

mf cresc. poco a poco

mf cresc. poco a poco

288

mf cresc. poco a poco

293

mf cresc. poco a poco

390

f *mf*
f *mf*
f *mf*
mf *f*
mf *f*

396

ff
ff
ff
ff
ff