

The Canadian Brass. . .

'Listening to headphones stoned'

by Carl Matheson

Some attempts to bring classical music to the uninitiated have been scary. Some artistic powers get the idea that serious music is too rarefied for the unwashed millions. After all if a person doesn't have a spirit, how can he experience spiritual joy? So

the powers figure that they must compromise; they'll present serious works of art but they'll clothe them in solid pop. The results are offerings like disco versions of Stravinsky's 'Rites of Spring', selections from 'Mozartmania', and, worst of all, the Boston Pops.

The Canadian Brass are famous for their conversionary zeal. They play in unseemly places. They tell jokes on stage. They don't restrict themselves to baroque horn compositions. Not many

good musicians engage in any antics at all, let alone specialize in antics. The Canadian Brass are a first rate ensemble. They showed this between jokes in their concert at the Cohn last Friday night.

They didn't compromise on the music. The fugue of Bach's Passacalia and Fugue in C minor was one of the best played pieces in Cohn history.

The arrangement for brass preserved the ethereal quality of the fugue, as well as providing a separate tone for each voice. Piano and organ renditions, because of the homogeneity of tone, force the listener to hear harmony rather than counterpoint. Orchestral versions are too sweaty. Synthesizer arrangements are too cold. The brass version avoided all of these pitfalls. Besides this it was superbly played.

The quintet's genius for arrangement was shown by their Fat's Waller medley. It's a joy to hear a tuba and a french horn imitate a piano stride bass—and bring it off.

The quintet played the piece lustily, but they do look like dentists. Their swing was a bit too clean. So the medley was a shining example of disembodied jazz; ethereality isn't always to be desired.

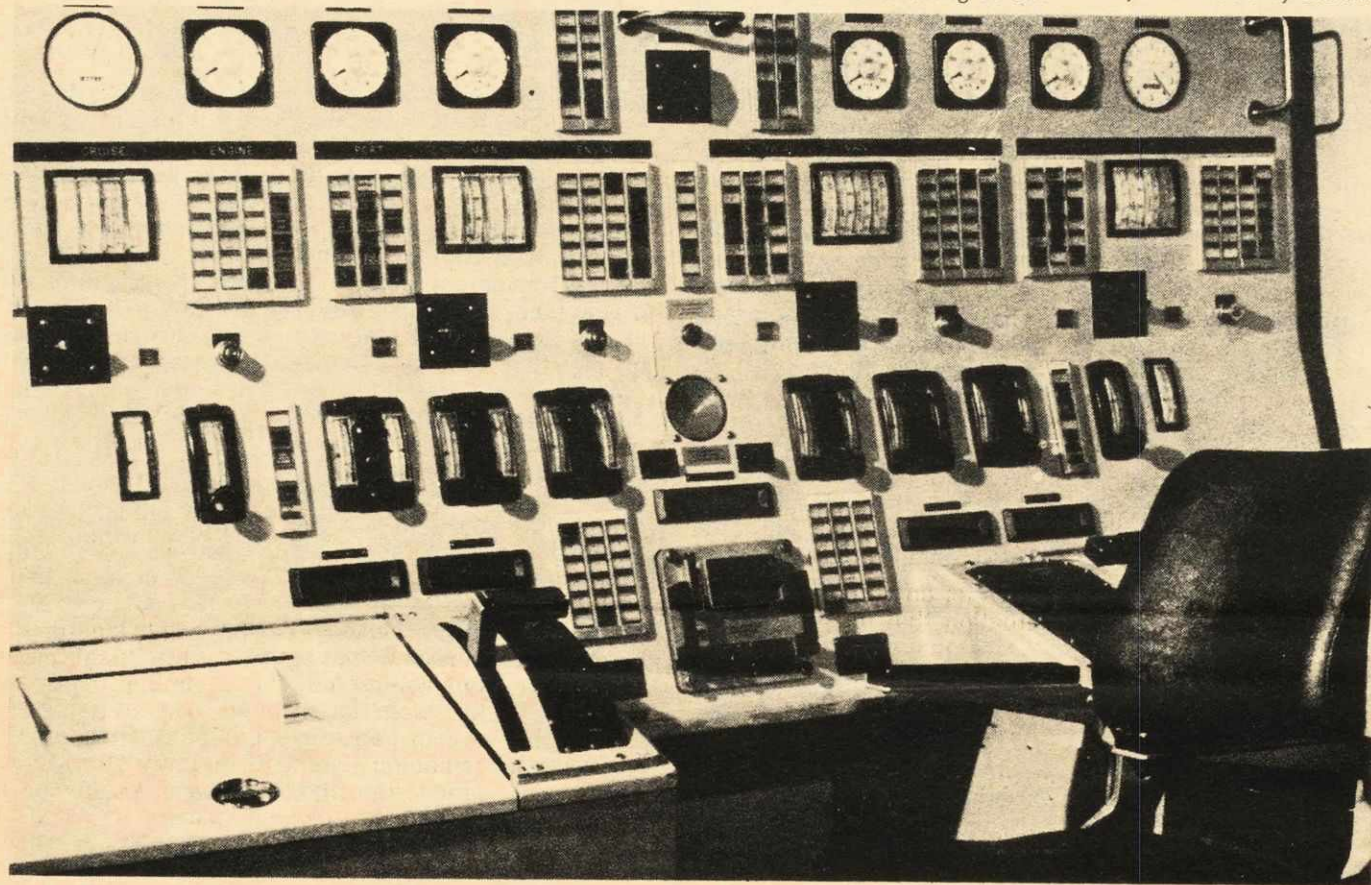
The most satisfying thing about the first half was the tone of the horns themselves. Horn music is perhaps the most synaesthetic of all forms of music. (It's like listening to headphones stoned). Because of its presence, horn music gives the illusion of being tactile. The Quintet were masters at giving the illusion of the sounds being solid objects. Not only did the group

give body to the sounds but they were able to pick up pockets of sounds and move them nearer to and farther from the listener at will. So if for nothing else but sensual kicks the concert was a successful one.

The second half of the concert was taken up by 'Hornsmoke', a comic opera for brass quintet. Bruckhauser sums this piece up in **Journal of Intellectual pretence:**

Like all operas for brass quintet 'Hornsmoke' is sorely lacking in character development. As a result it is difficult to ascertain the nature of the conceptual core of the work. We see a trumpet player dressed in women's garb and we think that the work centres on the moral status of sexual perversity in the Zorasterian moral system of the west. We then see a drunken trombone player and a blithering tuba-wielding preacher and we think that the work deals with the ramifications of the death of the protestant work ethic. We then see a fierce horn-slinger who wears glasses and we are enlightened. Here is a marksman who cannot see. Mais, C'est l'absurd. It brings to mind the ancient Portuguese saying "Do not offer coleslaw to a man with a cabbage for a head."

In spite of its abstruseness 'Hornsmoke' was a satisfying work. The rest of the audience saw into the absurdity of it at once and laughed through the opera. The mood in the auditorium was as joyous as the mood after Grapelli's and Belafonte's concerts last year.



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