

Trombone Unit Hannover – Full Power
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The past decade has been good for large trombone ensembles: some great groups have made outstanding recordings. An all-star American-Viennese octet played works by Eric Ewazen (May/June 2002). The New Trombone Collective has made several albums (Nov/Dec 2005: 237), and the Chicago Trombone Consort made a very impressive one (July/Aug 2010: 209). And now comes this amazing offering by Trombone Unit Hanover, an octet that formed in 2008 to participate in the German Music Competition. Winning in 2011 made this album possible. The players—former students of Jonas Bylund at the Hanover University of Music, Drama, and Media—are members of various German orchestras.

The notes give almost no information about the three octets and three quartets that constitute the program. They do tell us that Daniel Schnyder (b 1961) composed his eightminute octet Olympia for TUH, but that's about all. Like everything Schnyder writes, it is a hyperactive, polystylistic three-ring-circus. I prefer the two octets by Derek Bourgeois (b 1941), which offer plenty of variety and technical display without being manic like the Schnyder piece. This trombone ensemble's noble, imposing sound is heard to full advantage in all three works.

As for the quartets, Schnyder's threemovement, 11-minute one is much like the octet: often manic, full of impressive technical display and ensemble precision, and with disparate styles bumping into each other. The two-movement, eight-minute one by Saskia Apon (b 1957) has become quite popular of late. The lyrical I is quite serious, speaks a tonal harmonic language, and has imposing phrases where melodies are heard in octaves. II is quick and includes intricate pointillism that is performed superbly here.

I didn't pay much attention to 'Under the Pillow' when it appeared on a collection of trombone virtuoso Christian Lindberg's compositions a dozen years ago (Sept/Oct 2001). Compared with some of the catchier pieces, it was a bit nondescript—even as played by Lindberg's own Trombone Unit 2000 (one of whose members was Jonas Bylund, the teacher of the present players). How do the readings compare? Well, this one lasts a little longer, but otherwise they sound almost identical.

It has been a while since I last heard the avant-garde Bolos, by Folke Rabe (b 1935) and Jan Bark (b 1934). The piece is played well, but it's a sound-only recording of a theatrical work.
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