

Reprints from the

International Trumpet Guild® Journal

to promote communications among trumpet players around the world and to improve the artistic level of performance, teaching, and literature associated with the trumpet

CHAMBER MUSIC CONNECTION

MARC REESE, COLUMN EDITOR

CHAMBER MUSIC PARTNERSHIP

BY RAYMOND MASE

October 2015 • Page 71

The International Trumpet Guild® (ITG) is the copyright owner of all data contained in this file. **ITG gives the individual end-user the right to:**

- Download and retain an electronic copy of this file on a single workstation that you own
- Transmit an unaltered copy of this file to any single individual end-user, so long as no fee, whether direct or indirect is charged
- Print a single copy of pages of this file
- Quote fair use passages of this file in not-for-profit research papers as long as the ITGJ, date, and page number are cited as the source.

The International Trumpet Guild® prohibits the following without prior written permission:

- Duplication or distribution of this file, the data contained herein, or printed copies made from this file for profit or for a charge, whether direct or indirect
- Transmission of this file or the data contained herein to more than one individual end-user
- Distribution of this file or the data contained herein in any form to more than one end user (as in the form of a chain letter)
- Printing or distribution of more than a single copy of the pages of this file
- Alteration of this file or the data contained herein
- Placement of this file on any web site, server, or any other database or device that allows for the accessing or copying of this file or the data contained herein by any third party, including such a device intended to be used wholly within an institution.

<http://www.trumpetguild.org>

Please retain this cover sheet with printed document.

CHAMBER MUSIC CONNECTION

MARC REESE, COLUMN EDITOR



Chamber Music Connection is a forum for ideas concerning the trumpet's role in the expanding literature in all types of chamber music. Ideas and suggestions should be directed to: Marc Reese, Assistant Dean and Brass Department Head, Lynn University Conservatory of Music, 3601 North Military Trail, Boca Raton, FL 33066 USA; chamber@trumpetguild.org

CHAMBER MUSIC PARTNERSHIP

BY RAYMOND MASE

When I joined the American Brass Quintet in 1973, it never occurred to me that the group would become the center of my entire professional career. I was an eager 21-year-old trumpeter coming out of the New England Conservatory, trying to find my way into the field. But looking back, I see that while my trumpet playing

opened the door for me into the ABQ, I was completely unaware of the skills required to contribute effectively to the quintet beyond my musicianship. Having been retired from the group for nearly two years now, I have had time to reflect on my long career in chamber music and identify some of the things that helped sustain our quintet partnership.



“While musical excellence is certainly the highest priority for a successful chamber music group, keeping the ensemble focused and running smoothly outside of the music is essential.”

While musical excellence is certainly the highest priority for a successful chamber music group, keeping the ensemble focused and running smoothly outside of the music is essential. Chamber groups generally work without music directors, administrative staffs, or union contracts and must find ways internally to keep the group functioning efficiently and moving forward. When I first started with the ABQ, I was impressed by the very keen sense of group identity and clear mission that helped the quintet stay on track and committed. That mission, often spoken of by the senior members of the group, was simple enough—to promote serious brass chamber music. Still, it always surprised me how often we made difficult decisions by considering whether something was consistent with our mission or not. The mission statement defined who we were, and with that definition came clarity in determining short- and long-term goals. Undoubtedly other groups have very different objectives than the ABQ, but establishing a collective purpose can help focus valuable time and resources and help members realize their individual roles.

Even with a clear sense of purpose and a motivated membership, the ABQ recognized early on that there was, and likely would remain, a fairly

limited market for the serious brass chamber music the group chose to present. Expecting full, year-round employment from the quintet seemed unrealistic, so the members augmented their quintet income with other playing and teaching in the New York area. Rarely did a member put unreasonable pressure on the group to become something it wasn't or complain that the group wasn't living up to their personal expectations of what it should be. However, like many groups, financial pressures were sometimes difficult to manage. To help stabilize quintet income and budget effectively, the ABQ decided to establish a reasonable, fixed pay scale for our services, rather than have it vary from event to event. We adopted a system in which days on the road paid the same daily rate regardless of whether it was a travel day, a concert day, or a day off. In this way, players knew well in advance exactly what a tour would pay—no more, no less. Putting money away from more profitable dates allowed the group to maintain that scale even for the tours with more down time, ultimately helping to support recordings or commissions. Equalizing the group's compensation in this way reduced some of the financial anxiety of brass quintet life.

Securing ongoing performing and teaching outside the ABQ, combined with a fair and well-balanced pay scale, certainly helped relieve individual financial pressures. But without a consistent annual schedule, there would be crisis after crisis of conflicting ABQ work with outside engagements. Also, since the ABQ never considered performing with substitute players, a particularly busy ABQ year would limit the member's availability for the other work that helped sustain them. Then, in a leaner year, it was that much harder for the members to secure the additional work needed to make ends meet. For the ABQ, the residencies at The Juilliard School during the school year and at the Aspen Music Festival in the summer provided exactly the kind of consistency we had been looking for. The residencies not only helped the group by increasing ABQ income and enhancing the ABQ's presence in the chamber music field, but they also helped stabilize the quintet's schedule by conforming to the academic calendar. A well-defined, consistent, annual schedule helped boost confidence in the group's ability to sustain itself long term.

On paper, we all want to believe that in a partnership, everyone shares the workload equally. But in every group, it doesn't take long to discover that some people are simply better equipped for certain tasks than others. Allowing people to take initiative and assume more responsibility in specific areas according to their interests and skills keeps members invested and motivated. Someone with strong communicative and "people" skills can and should be encouraged to emerge as a good spokesperson for the group. Rather than by appointment or entitlement, leadership should evolve naturally to the person (or persons) who can best integrate the day-to-day operation of the group with its artistic vision. Making group deci-

sions by consensus helps avoid the divisions created by voting and being forced to take one side or the other on a particular issue. Some groups even manage to successfully oversee pretty much all areas of their operation, but it is important to recognize that some things—like concert management, grant writing, and photos and promotional materials—are often better left to outside professionals. It can take time for people to become comfortable with their roles, but sharing responsibility and trusting each other's judgment toward collective goals are

keys to any successful partnership.

When I muse about my ABQ years to friends and students, questions of the pros and cons of a career in chamber music invariably come along. I guess it is obvious that for me, the goods must have far outweighed the bads, or I probably would not have stayed in the ABQ for forty years! Personally, the teamwork, sense of family, and artistic freedom of quintet life easily made up for the struggle of crowded airports, cancelled flights, and the unreasonably long work days. I found great satisfaction in knowing that if a performance or project went well, it was because of our team effort. Of course, conversely, if something did not go so well, we had no one to blame but ourselves. For me, chamber music and the ABQ partnership was not only incredibly fulfilling musically, but defined who I am as a person and can be summed up perfectly by the old adage "You get out of something what you put into it."

About the author: As American Brass Quintet trumpeter from 1973 to 2013, Raymond Mase performed worldwide, premiered over 100 new brass works, and contributed countless editions of sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and nineteenth-century brass music to the ABQ library and their highly acclaimed recordings. He serves as principal trumpet of the New York City Ballet Orchestra, chair of brass at The Juilliard School, and was the 2014 recipient of the FONT (Festival of New Trumpet Music) Award of Recognition for his contributions to contemporary brass music. Mr. Mase can be heard on more than 130 recordings and has been an Aspen Music Festival and School artist-faculty member since 1973.



“Personally, the teamwork, sense of family, and artistic freedom of quintet life easily made up for the struggle of crowded airports, cancelled flights, and the unreasonably long work days.”

“Allowing people to take initiative and assume more responsibility in specific areas according to their interests and skills keeps members invested and motivated.”
