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## SCHAGERL BRASS FESTIVAL 2008

BY JACK BURT

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# SCHAGERL BRASS FESTIVAL 2008

BY JACK BURT

From May 21 to 24, an hour west of Vienna, in the small, quaint village of Mank, the Schagerl brothers, Karl and Robert, hosted the Inaugural Schagerl Brass Festival. This extraordinary event featured concerts and workshops by some of the most important brass players in Europe (see <http://www.brass-festival.com> for complete information and a look at the festival program book). What follows are highlights and impressions of a participant.

## Schagerl Open House

The Schagerl Shop in Hörsdorf, a tiny neighbor of Mank, has become in recent years a destination for European brass players and touring orchestral players from outside Europe when traveling to Austria. The very successful trumpet, trombone, and tuba makers opened their shop for the duration for the festival, offering a beer garden on the lawn, and access to the instruments made in their shop, in addition to all the instruments they offer from other makers. Many who attended the festival enjoyed looking through their extensive sheet music collection and brass and jazz CD offerings.

## Workshops

Throughout each day of the Schagerl Brass Festival one was faced with a daunting task—deciding which workshop to attend. There were, on average, twenty workshops offered each morning and afternoon. I skipped about from room to room to observe and take part as well (anyone who attended could actively take part in as many as five workshop sessions). I left astonished at the level of teaching I witnessed, and the quality of students I heard. Workshops were presented in German, but also in English for non-German speaking students from Japan, Hungary, and Croatia, among others.

Workshops were defined by instrument and topics. There were daily chamber music workshops conducted by Berliner Philharmoniker trumpet section member Thomas Clamor, who is also director of the Venezuelan Youth Brass Ensemble, an offshoot of the famously successful Venezuelan youth music program *La Sistema*. Workshops were offered on orchestral audition preparation by Gábor Tarkövi, solo trumpet of the Berliner Philharmoniker. In his quaintly titled topic “general music making,” Robert Rother, of Mnozil Brass, presented his

workshops with a holistic approach, focusing on helping the participants find the proper physical and mental approach to improved sound production.

Renowned trumpeter Hannes Läubin, of the Munich Conservatory, was the highlight of the many workshops that I attended. He presented day-long masterclasses on solo literature and orchestral excerpts. As in all the workshops, the age and performance level of each participant varied; from “almost” 14-year-old twin trumpeters from Salzburg performing the Bozza *Badinage* and Neruda *Concerto* respectively; a Hungarian college-age student who ferociously attacked Desenclos’s *Incantation, Threne et Danse*; to a great number of students from German and Austrian conservatories presenting orchestral excerpts.

Each student was given Läubin’s frank observations and equally supportive suggestions. He displayed an astounding breadth of knowledge, able to demonstrate on his B-flat rotary trumpet almost any passage from any work, never referring to the printed page. With each student, he quickly perceived the issue he wished to focus upon and remained upon that point until the student felt he or she had the tools they needed to take the next step. All students (myself included) who played for Herr Läubin rightly felt they had received something special. However, during the many hours I attended his workshops I feel I have received something greater. Having been a university trumpet professor in the USA for the past 17 years, to me his display was a three-day-long demonstration of what is to be a great teacher.

This is a snapshot of only the trumpet-related workshops that were presented. There were equally impressive offerings for horn, trombone, and tuba.

## Concerts

Each day of the festival was brought to a close by a major concert in the Manker Staatsaal, or City Concert Hall.

### Mnozil Brass

Anyone who had the privilege to hear Mnozil Brass at the 2006 (Rowan) or 2008 (Banff) ITG Conferences knows that they are perhaps the most exciting and innovative musical group around. They are also the funniest. The show they performed for the Schagerl Brass Festival, entitled *Das Gelbe vom*



Berlin Philharmonic principal trumpet Gabor Tarkovi and 13-year-old Samuel Walter, playing the Neruda.

*Ei* (The Yolk of the Egg) was similar in spirit and style to the show *Seven*, which they performed at the 2006 ITG Conference. Needless to say, their reputation as a “don’t miss” group will only grow.

A blow-by-blow account of their performance is not possible (although Neville Young’s online review of the Banff ITG concert is recommended to all: <http://www.trumpetguild.org/2008conference/june5evening.pdf>) For this reviewer, the absolutely remarkable fact about Mnozil is the wonderful sense of liberation, and an expanded sense of what is possible in the concert experience that they give to each musician in their audience. Every formal wall is broken down. All limitations of the concert experience disappear. There is never a music stand; chairs are banished, except as a prop. Great music mixes with the spirits of Marcel Marceau, the Comedian Harmonists, Stan Laurel (but not Hardy), and Charlie Chaplin. No music is too elevated that it can’t be slapped around a bit, and no music is so base that it is not treated with respect. As with the performances of the recently mourned American comedian George Carlin, only self-importance and hypocrisy are in danger.

It is important to observe that each player in Mnozil Brass is a musician of the highest rank. They produce a volume appropriate to that of a symphony orchestra, a rock band or a 20-piece jazz band. Additionally, astoundingly actually—because the moments can follow each other in such close succession—they can also produce a velvety, expressive *pianissimo* equal to that of the greatest string quartets. They define what being a complete musician should be. I left this performance as I did the last time I encountered Mnozil: with cheeks and belly sore from laughing, singing, happy to be alive, and loving the gift of music.

#### Ober Österreich Brass Band

Austria has a strong brass band tradition, like those in Great Britain. Conducted by Hannes Buchegger, the Ober Österreich Brass Band has competed and placed well in English Brass Band competitions. Especially memorable in the festival concert were the contributions of soloist Hans Gansch (faculty member at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, former solo trumpet of the Vienna Philharmonic, and older brother of Thomas Gansch of Mnozil Brass). Gansch performed Phillip Sparkes *Song and Dance* with a wonderful lyrical sweetness and expressiveness in addition to a light, seemingly effortless technique. Also featured on the program was Florian Klingler (solo trumpet of the Munich Philharmonic) who performed *Escapade*, a piccolo trumpet feature dedicated to Phillip Smith by Joseph Turrin. It was performed with ease and the appropriate flash.

A centerpiece of the concert was a work written for the OÖ Brass Bands appearance at the Birmingham 2007 competition called *Titan’s Progress*, by Hermann Pallhuber. Wide-ranging and evocative, the work is highlighted by interspersed quotes and references to the brass fanfares of the Mahler *First Symphony in D* (the “Titan”). A central portion of the work is an almost literal restatement of the climax of the highly romantic string interlude of the finale. Mahler’s music, however prominently it is

featured in this fine work, is secondary to the great expression and skill shown by the composer in the larger original sections of the composition.

#### Jazz Night with Gansch & Roses

Thomas Gansch is an extraordinary musician. A founding member on Mnozil Brass, his primary musical love is jazz. As with his work with Mnozil, Gansch possesses an educated, critical, and very broad frame of reference that is expressed in



Gansch & Roses, L – R: Thomas Gansch, Tobias Weidinger, and Bryan Davis, trumpets; Oliver Kent, piano

all his playing. His band Gansch & Roses is flexible in instrumentation, but similar to Maynard Ferguson’s smaller bands of the 1950s and 60s, and his later Big Bop Nouveau; that is, heavy on the trumpet, usually three or four players, but with significant, albeit smaller contributions from trombone and saxophone. He is comfortable writing and performing in every jazz style, from simple blues to more “out” styles.

Among his sidemen and guests were Andy Haderer, a legend among European lead players; Scott Tinkler, an Australian



Austrian Brass Connection; Trumpet Section, L – R: Florian Klingler, Gabor Tarkovi, Hans Gansch, and Reiner Kuehlboeck

soloist, whose performance of *Body and Soul* suggested the reincarnation of Woody Shaw 30 years later; Tobias Weidinger

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(Tobi-Wan), and Brian Davis, both magnificent lead players and soloists. The rhythmic section consisted of Oliver Kent (piano), Joschi Schneeberger (bass), and Mario Gonzi (drums) and was expressive and sensitive throughout the concert.

Gansch composes most of the group's repertoire. The highlight of the evening for this listener was the premiere of a piece dedicated to and inspired by the memory of Bill Chase, called *The Rock of the Trumpeters*, which, though new, perfectly recreated the Chase experience of the late 1960s and early '70s.

#### Austrian Brass Connection

The festival closed with an ensemble featuring some of the finest orchestral brass players in Europe. The Austrian Brass Connection (ABC) is composed of four trumpets, two horns, four trombones, tuba and percussion. Performers included Gábor Tarkövi, Hans Gansch, and Florian Klingler on trumpet; and Otmar Gaiswinkler (Wiener Symphoniker), Leonhard Paul (Mnozil Brass), and Wolfgang Pfistermüller (bass trombone, Wiener Philharmoniker) on trombone.

The concert opened with an O. Yamaguchi arrangement of the Overture to *Die Zauberflöte*, by Mozart. The famous "three knocks" in the opening *adagio* translated perfectly for brass ensemble. The ensuing *allegro* displayed the virtuoso character of the ensemble, while each section handled the transcription of the string and woodwind parts with great finesse.

The concert continued with further transcriptions, among them: Bach (Chorale: *Mein teurer Heiland*), Smetana ("Dance of the Comedians" from *The Bartered Bride*), a set of piano preludes by Shostakovich, and a selection of scenes from *Star Wars* by John Williams.

Remarkable among the selections was a lyrical, stately performance of *The Fanfare for the Common Man* by Aaron Copland. Outfitted with rotary trumpets (by Schagerl), Vienna horns and Schagerl trombones, the ABC presented the Copland with its "American sound" intact, but broader, and with less accented *fortissimo* attacks in the climactic passages than one would expect from American brass sections. The consistent warmth of their tone quality throughout the wide dynamic spectrum was a marvel.

ABC closed the festival with an appropriate and touching encore, *Ist scho still uman See*, a tender Austrian folksong. Hans Gansch, leader of the ABC and dean of Austrian brass players, led the encore from the front of the stage, accompanied by one other flugelhorn. His remaining colleagues ringed the stage in a large circle and repeated the beautiful melody, this time in full harmony, conferring a fond "Auf Wiedersehen" to all.

## Conclusion

The Inaugural International Brass Festival was a great success, specifically due to the Herculean efforts of Karl Schagerl and his Festival Team, who stood ready at every site to help direct visitors, participants, and performers with all their needs. Mark your calendars: the next festival is planned for the last week of August 2010, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Schagerl Meisterinstrumente.

*About the author:* Jack Burt is associate professor of trumpet at the University of Maine where he also teaches the jazz ensemble, brass ensemble, trumpet ensemble, and coaches student chamber brass ensembles. His degrees are from the Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory of Music, the University of South Carolina, and the University of Texas at Austin. Prior to his appointment at Maine he taught at Texas A&M University – Kingsville where he also performed as principal trumpet with the Corpus Christi and Victoria Symphony Orchestras. Burt performs on Blackburn, Schagerl, and Lecher trumpets.

