

MAIN MENU

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Written by Neville Young

**Wednesday, May 30th - 12:30p.m.
(photos below)**

There was a real air of anticipation as the large audience streamed into the Campus Center Auditorium for Spanish Brass - Luur Metalls: this fine ensemble's reputation clearly preceded it. Even after the excellent prelude, listeners continued to turn up till it felt like we had the whole Conference in there.

Spanish Brass did not disappoint. Starting with just hornist Manuel Pérez Ortega on stage, and building one player after another into the gorgeous canonical beginning to *Battalia Imperial* by J B Cabanilles, they set a standard of tone, precision, and musicality that was clearly enjoyed by all of us there. All the introductions, and some rather good jokes besides, were most ably done by trumpet player Carlos Benetó Grau.

Lutoslawski's *Mini Overture* was introduced as "one of the finest pieces in the brass quintet repertoire" and Spanish Brass went on to illustrate just how the claim works, their energetic, precise approach keeping the tension just right and never losing that tightness and drive even in the slower, more halting moments. Next came a real treat, Juanjo Colomer's *Historia de un Mutante* for brass quintet, mouthpieces, and rings. In this excellent, complex and exciting piece the rings (tapped alarmingly against the instruments, sometimes while they were also being played) provided an interesting percussion line, strongly offset by very busy, fast rhythmical playing in the brass. Chorale-like passages featured the superb high, quiet flugel of Juanjo Serna Salvador, such a searing sound of such intense core and beauty that I didn't know whether to cry or just throw away my flugel when I get home: doing both would probably cover it. The mouthpiece bit was also rather good, with four players doing quite sophisticated harmony parts while a tonal focus was provided by trombonist Indalecio Bonet Manrique. This was a surprisingly beautiful effect.

Next came *Suite Impromptu* by André Lafosse, a four-movement work full of lightness, warmth, and above all, Frenchness. This was played smoothly (in a good way!) and with great poise by the quintet, showing a great understanding of their European neighbours. A suite of three pieces by Cuban composer and sax giant Paquito d'Rivera followed, the edgy-to-smooth *Wapango* giving way to gentle, restrained moments and cool solos in *Danzón* and the fantastic rocking tuba style of Sergio Finca Quirós setting a driving, exciting pace for the last movement *El Cura*. One to hear again I rather think!

Back in Spain we heard a truly wonderful arrangement of Albeniz's *Asturias* - if you ever wondered how to do guitar on brass quintet, this is it: it's quite simple if you can double-tongue all day at ninety mph. Staying at home, the quintet then rounded off their programme with *La Bola de Luis Alonzo*, an arrangement of ballet music by Gerónimo Jimenez which offered us a broad, colourful spectacle so you could pretty much hear and see the dancers.

There was no way we were going to let Spanish Brass leave without an encore and this they duly delivered, the Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Jobim's *No More Blues* being given a superbly relaxed performance: it's interesting that after raising the roof their encore reinforced just how very well they can play quietly too. This entirely enjoyable number featured jazz solos on flugel and trombone, and left us wanting to hear more.

