

## Exploring Leonard Salzedo's *Capriccio* for Brass Quintet

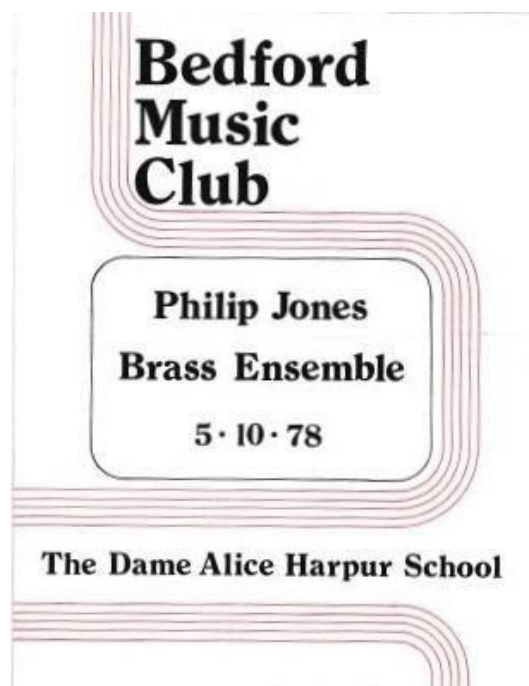
by John France

Leonard Salzedo's *Capriccio* for brass quintet, op.90 (1977) is a perfect example of how a remarkable piece of music can be created, played, and recorded and then largely disappear from public view. Checking back on news databases discovers a handful of performances of this work. In over forty years there have only been two professional recordings – by the legendary Philip Jones Brass Ensemble (PJBE) in 1979, and the Albany Brass Ensemble in 1981. Listening to the *Capriccio* today uncovers a work that is well-constructed, lively, and rhythmical, sensitive to the abilities of the artists, and most importantly, maintaining the listeners interest from the first note to the last.

In his unpublished autobiography, Salzedo writes that the *Capriccio* was completed during February 1977. It was specifically written for the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble. The Quintet is scored for two trumpets, horn, trombone, and tuba. Other works written around this time include the *Meditacion Espiritual* for organ, op.88 (1976), the *Tonada Sefardita* for seven clarinets, op.89 (1976) and *The Pied Piper of Hamelin – A Dramatic Cantata*, op.91 (1977). Four years later, Salzedo would turn to the brass media again with his *Diferencias* for brass ensemble, op.95. To my knowledge, none of these pieces has been recorded.

In a programme note, Leonard Salzedo has written that the '*Capriccio* is in one continuous movement which falls into three main sections. The first, marked *Allegro assai moderato*, is highly rhythmic in character and consists of the interplay between two short motifs. The second section, *Andante*, begins with a passage for solo tuba. The mood is very quiet and contemplative at first, but gradually becomes more animated and, after a slightly quicker passage, returns to its opening tranquillity. It leads into the final section, which opens hesitantly, but quickly accelerates to *Presto*. The main motif of this section uses a scale derived from one of the Arabic modes. Each of the individual instruments is featured in a short rhythmic solo before the final climax.' (Argo ZRG 906)

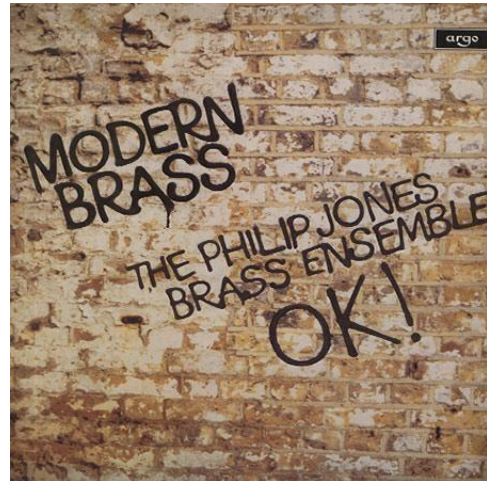
The premiere was given by the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble on October 5th, 1978, during a concert sponsored by the Bedford Music Club. The venue was the Dame Alice Harpur School. In 2010, this independent school merged with Bedford High School and the new school was called Bedford Girls' School. The concert opened with *Balletts and Madrigals* which were a series of transcriptions by David Epps of music by Thomas Morley (c.1557-1603), Thomas Weelkes (c.1575-1623) and Thomas Tompkins (1572-1656). This was followed by a brass 'Quartet' by Raymond Premru (1934-98) (but cited as Premon in the programme). This piece specifically composed for the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble had three movements: 'Contrapunctus', 'Nocturne', and 'Toccata'. The first half of the concert concluded with a performance of the Quintet in B [flat] minor by the Russian composer and onetime pupil of Tchaikovsky, Victor Ewald (1860-1935). Ewald was an engineer, architect, and composer of mainly brass music. After the interval and coffee, the audience heard two Sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757), transcribed by Stephen Dodgson (1924-2013). Then followed the premiere of Salzedo's *Capriccio*. The evening concluded with a number of unspecified 'lollipops' introduced by members of the ensemble. The programme booklet observes that the composer would be in the audience.



The Philip Jones Brass Ensemble at that time included Philip Jones and James Watson, trumpets, Ifor James, horn, John Iveson, trombone and John Fletcher, tuba. One final note: the PJBE was a last-minute booking. The programme booklet states that 'We can only say that we are grateful to them and feel ourselves mighty fortunate to find a complete International forward line sitting on the subs. bench, when five other players failed a fitness test.' I was unable to locate any reviews of this concert.

On 16 March 1980, the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble performed Salzedo's *Capriccio* at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank. The concert also included Malcolm Arnold's Symphony for brass instruments, op.123 (1978), Praetorius' *Terpsichore Suite* and John Jenkins's *Newark Siege*, both arranged by Peter Reeves. The *Daily Telegraph* (17 March 1980, p.11) reported that the 'marginally more hair-raising *Capriccio* for Brass Quintete (sic)...[where] the ideas were...more academic and the general impact less broadly based, less significant in concept...' than in the Malcolm Arnold work. *The Times* (18 March 1980, p.10) reminded readers that Salzedo's *Divertimento*, which was composed in 1959, was used as the theme music to the BBC's 'Open University' Programmes. That said, the present *Capriccio* is 'truly capricious and constantly fascinating [and] played with a gripping sense of ensemble throughout, from the firework sparks of colour in the opening Allegro to the magically muted tutti passages in the final Presto.' Finally, 'every dynamic nuance of the central contemplative tuba solo was captured by John Fletcher.'

The Argo Record Company ran a full-page advert in the October 1979 (p.659) edition of *The Gramophone*. It headlined, 'Argo puts more Sunshine into Autumn.' Most prominent was 'Modern Brass' featuring the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble. This was originally released on Argos LP (ZRG 906) and on cassette (KZRC 906). The only recording of Raymond Premru's *Music from Harter Fell* was included on this disc. The recording was made at the Church of St George the Martyr, during January 1979. One other work on this LP was Malcolm Arnold's 'brilliant, brash and wistful' Symphony for brass instruments. Other LPs advertised in *The Gramophone* included William Bennett playing Mozart Flute Concerti, a selection of Parry's *English Lyrics*, ballet music by Handel, and the famous four-record collection *Festival of King's* the with Choir of King's College, Cambridge under Sir David Willcocks and Philip Ledger.



Malcolm MacDonald reviewed the album for *The Gramophone* (November 1979, p.801). He considered that Salzedo's *Capriccio* 'certainly has variety of style, emphasised by the variety of sound and texture available from his chosen quintet...There is also great rhythmic variety, with plenty of propulsive syncopations; no risk here of the music seeming long-winded.' This last remark refers to MacDonald's earlier thoughts about Raymond Premru's *Harter Fell*. Regarding this latter work, I certainly do not agree with MacDonald's sentiment that Premru's score is 'interminable.' For my taste, the composer has got the balance just about perfect.

There was an extensive review of the PJBE LP in the lamented *Records and Recording* magazine (November 1979, p.67). David Denton reminds the reader that the *Capriccio* is in one continuous movement, which falls quite naturally into three main sections. He thinks that the first 'is an intriguing mosaic of rhythmic patterns, where melody is of second importance to the pulse of the music.' However, as the players enter the second section, the 'whole nature of the work changes...with a long passage for solo tuba, and though the trumpets frequently chatter above the tuba, it is that instrument that dominates.' As the music progresses to the third and final section, Denton notes that 'the trumpet activity slowly takes over to form the main idea in the finale.' In conclusion, the reviewer thinks that 'each instrument is here given a chance to shine as soloist, and here, as throughout the work, the

playing is admirable. Finally, David Denton offers his 'congratulations to the engineers for the excellent balance of the instruments and for the outstanding general quality of the sound.'

The recording of Salzedo's *Capriccio* made by the Albany Brass Ensemble would appear to be a 'home-made' production issued in 1981. I was unable to find a review of this LP (ABE1). Other works on this album included Victor Ewald's *Quintet No.2, op.6*, Praetorius's *Dances from Terpsichore*, the Suite from Handel's *Water Music*, and the Finale from Rossini's Overture to *William Tell*.

Hopefully, Leonard Salzedo's *Capriccio* will be taken up by a new generation of brass instrumentalists, or maybe a CD company will rerelease the 1979 Philip Jones Brass Ensemble recording. Meanwhile, this latter has been uploaded to [YouTube](#). There is also a [video](#) of the All Saints Brass playing the work at the Philip Jones Brass Competition, 2018.

***John France***

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