

Mnozil Brass: Seriously Funny, Whimsically Brazen

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Serious in sarcastic wit, chops in high-octane performance, a mastering in stage presence and riotous physical humor-attributes not commonly associated with your average musical ensemble. Yet [these brass](#) are not brash when they claim that “no tone is too high for us, no lip is too hot, no music is too inferior.”

The proverbial curtain of [the Aztec Theatre](#) arose to unveil an ensemble that is at best fantastically comical, and at worst fantastically comical (to borrow the off-kilter charm that suffuses their sarcasm). Decorating the stage last Thursday, [Mnozil Brass](#) comes in no shortage of shapes and sizes, colors and disguises.

Suits ranged from red velvet three-piece sans jacket, to turquoise blue with high water pants and a vest made of comic strip clippings. Three trumpets and three trombones plus a tuba equals

euphonious ecstasy for these brass-aholics, and no one man was short on wit or wondrous whirlwinds of sound from their bent and branded and forged anew horns.

A reprieve from the humorous onslaught was rarely given during the two and a half hour exclamatory expedition (save for the 15-minute intermission, where the smiles of audience members yet refused to leave their faces, an overflowing in reflection of but the first half of their brassified journey a la Austria).

The ladies and gentlemen of [ARTS San Antonio](#) succeeded in once again roping in a group that is internationally renowned yet locally unnoticed, in order to vivify audience members' musical sensibilities and throw a sensational splash in their auditory palate. The troubadours have trumpeted and tromboned and tubaed across the planet, performing in playful strut from Russia to Australia and all across Europe via their humbly triumphant start at Josef Mnozil's Tavern in Vienna circa 1992.



Mnozil Brass breaks from instruments for a classic Austrian folk tune, demonstrating equal prowess with vocals. Photo by Adam Tutor.

The success of these ruffraff raconteurs is born from their ability to come at you from any angle, spitting fireballs of sound through horns while simultaneously maneuvering their bodies and

funny bones in such a way that one may feel as if Dizzy Gillespie and Jim Carrey were merged seamlessly together into one magnificent brass machine. While steeped in the music of their home country (they even [performed a capella](#) a German folk song) the septet's repertoire stateside seemingly comes primarily from [movie soundtrack classics](#) and oft obscure but nevertheless renowned pop songs.

Early in the first set, for example, Thomas Gansch (of turquoise blue suit) and Robert Rother (whose bald head, wild eyes, and expressive face made him a quiet favorite for me), teamed up for a little crowd participation via Bobby McFerrin's "[Don't Worry Be Happy](#)," enticing the crowd to whistle along to a whistler's dandy, hip-gyrations slowly turning into a hip version of the Macarena done in time with the whistlers.

Gansch, one of the founding members of the ensemble, could be proclaimed as MVP (Most Voracious Performer), due to his high-octane energy through trumpet and stage presence. The only individual who spoke out to the audience, Gansch did so solely in Spanish, taking on a powerfully decadent accent from the southern reaches of Spain, allowing the sibilance to sputter through the airwaves as he made wordplay with simple soliloquies prior to playing a tune inspired by the same language.

Notecards in his hand that read "*Si*" and "*No*," Gansch addressed the audience as they pined for the punch line. "*Damas y caballeros, niños y niñas...y ninjas*" to which a castanet-bound Roman Rindberger (the third, most dashing of trumpet-players whose slender form and flowing locks left him suited for the Latin Lover role) karate kicked into the crowd. Rindberger placed the clatter of his mini-percussions choicely before the end of Gansch's sentences, waving his arms in the air majestically in the flair form of a flamenco diva.

Catering to the crowd (but oh! how they loved it) quite cheesily, the ensemble commenced to follow the Spanish pomp into the bull ring, where they recreated more hilarious stunts and played fiercely and unceasingly to the myriad foot steps and castanets of Rindberger. Hard to measure versus other tunes, but the crowd appeared to favor these based on the volume of their hearty applause.

The seven were no stranger to props, donning clown noses, terminator-eye patches for a robotic-interpretation of the Beverly Hills Cop theme song, a ringmaster's outfit with Rother on a leash as a bear, and even a recreation of [Planet of the Apes](#) with a rocket blowup marked "Yes Yes Yes" (the title of groups traveling show). All men save for Rother let instruments aside they were warped into ape-mode by trombonist Gerhard Fussl, and proceeded to dance and whoop and holler around the rocket while beating their chests and each other to the crowds insane delight.



Robert Rother (bear) and Leonard Paul (ringmaster) reimagine the relationship between man and beast. Photo by Adam Tutor.

It is certainly safe to say (and I think I commented myself) that it was impossible to expect what ridiculousness (or ridiculous awesomeness) was to transpire next, new stops and pops quite literally blowing our collective minds. Yet when the group emerged from leaving the stage after the second set the grand wonder of all wonders (for me at least) happened.

The crowd on their feet, and cheering marvelously, were starting to make the ensemble blush, or even break character. They had been standing without instruments at the edge, clearly at this point not bravado-induced and basking in the spotlight, but desiring to say something. Genuine smiles were exchanged from face to face as they waited patiently.

At last, Rother gave a subtle hand motion to simmer down and they did, and this is what they had to say: “Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?” And the crowd erupted once again. I myself couldn’t stop laughing, bewildered at how this song has played a role in my life. Gansch took the non-covetable role of assuming Freddie Mercury’s cherubic tenor, and the entire group effortlessly dissected the opus “[Bohemian Rhapsody](#)” before our very eyes.

Gansch killed the vocals, and Rother Brian Mays’ guitar solo through his trumpet, and the other five magnificently rendered the operatic spectacle of the layered Queen voices, while enlisting

their physical humor talents once again. Most memorably during the air-rockin' riffs connected to "so you think you can stop me and spit in my eye," where the entire gang was busy recreating a street fight with their instruments as they sang and trombonist Zoltan Kiss blew out the background.

The wind blew any way, and the crowd hushed then roared once more, knocked out by this uniquely wonderful and exquisite ensemble-in form and in performance, owning their respective art, one zany take at a time.

**Featured/top image: Thomas Gansch and Zoltan Kiss go robotic during the theme song to Beverly Hills Cop. Photo by Adam Tutor.*