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Call It a BRASSh Goal—River Falls Faculty Quintet Seeks National Reputation

BY MICHAEL WOOLSEY

I'd like us to be known as the best faculty brass quintet in the nation," says Tom Barnett of the River Falls Brass. Started in 2001, the quintet includes Barnett and Craig Hara on trumpets, Andrew Parks on horn, Rick Gaynor on trombone, and Charles Wazanowski on tuba. All are adjunct instructors in the UW-River Falls music department except for Barnett who is a full-time assistant professor.

While performing for their first international audience in Hawaii, Barnett was elated by the quintet's reception. "There were a few folks from Wisconsin who said 'Wow! You're from River Falls?'" remembers Barnett of the 2004 Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities in Honolulu. The conference featured scores of international presenters addressing topics as varied as the south American rain forest and medieval poetry—but they were the only brass quintet.

In addition to showcasing its classical, jazz and popular repertoire in concert, the group also fulfills an educational mission. "We provide outreach to schools to encourage interest in music," explains Barnett. Using a large sea shell, known as a conch, the quintet talks to

young students about the evolution of music. "Sound is produced when air is blown into the conch, likely making it one of the first (wind) instruments," he shares.

Being in a brass quintet allows the musicians to be more autonomous and expressive when compared to playing in an orchestra, adds Barnett. That's not to say that playing with an orchestra isn't rewarding. As part of the orchestral back up for the popular rock band the Moody Blues, Barnett had one of his most electrifying experiences. And each member of the quintet has individually performed with popular musicians and vocalists of our day, including Pavarotti, Lionel Hampton, and the Temptations, just to name a few.

But when playing with each other, "it really is a democracy," says Barnett, referring to decisions about what and



From left to right:
Barnett, Parks, Wazanowski, Gaynor, Hara

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how to play. Prior to the 1950s, chamber music performed by a quintet was likely played by string musicians. Many pieces were composed with strings in mind. This requires brass musicians to make some interesting adaptations says Barnett. "The most enjoyable thing is being able to play what we want." Shows may include such contrasts as Italian renaissance music and some numbers from Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*.

As adjunct professors, Barnett's fellow musicians keep an active work schedule performing regularly off campus. He's mindful of this as he seeks to build a strong brass music program. Eventually recording a CD and performing in more concert halls is envisioned in addition to their current camps, workshops and school visits. They have also become a fixture at UW-RF commencements.

A recent performance occurred at Macalaster College in St. Paul to commemorate the installation of that institution's newly appointed president. Another performance put the quintet on stage with their campus protégés, the Cascade Ave. Brass quintet. And each performance is getting them one step closer to being known as the best faculty brass quintet in the nation. ■

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