



Rob (Robert Murray Gordon) McConnell

Though raised in Toronto, where he played slide trombone in high school, McConnell began his career in Edmonton in 1954 with the band of saxophonist Don (DT) Thompson. After working for three years with a brokerage firm in Toronto (during which time he began playing the valve trombone), he resumed his career first as a pianist with the drummer Alex Lazaroff's Rhythm Rockets, then (while studying 1958-62 with Gordon Delamont and playing in and writing for Delamont's rehearsal band) as a trombonist with Bobby Gimby. He also formed his own rehearsal band. McConnell worked in 1964 in New York with Maynard Ferguson's band then returned later that year to Toronto, becoming one of that city's leading studio players, active also as an arranger and composer. In 1968 McConnell formed the Boss Brass which became (and continues to be) one of Canada's most successful groups.

Throughout his career, McConnell also led small jazz groups with guitarist Ed Bickert as a constant in the rhythm section and Guido Basso, Ian McDougall, and Rick Wilkins variously on the front-line. It was through his leadership of the Boss Brass that McConnell emerged in the 1980s as one of the major Canadian jazz musicians on the world stage. His orchestral writing and valve trombone playing were complementary opposites: the former was subtle, controlled, ambitious, and occasionally whimsical, and the latter, brash, vigorous, and often broadly humorous.

In 1997 McConnell reorganized the Boss Brass into a tentet, emphasizing the instrumental talents of some of Toronto's best younger players, like pianist Dave Restivo and saxophonist Mike Murley. The band's first recording, *Tentet (Justin Time)*, won a Juno Award in 2001.

Concurrent with the downturn in studio work in Toronto during the early 1980s, and as a result of the frequency with which stagebands played his arrangements (including the eight compositions on *All in Good Time*, all published by Jenson), McConnell became increasingly active in the USA, Canada, and Europe as a clinician. He taught 1988-9 at the Dick Grove School of Music in Los Angeles.