

# Pursuit of Passion...

## NOW, the making of a CD!

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MP3s, digital, downloads, laptops, PCs, hard drives, rip, burn. Hey this is fun, easy, cool radio station give-aways, magazine freebies.

Great music, not so great music, loads of stuff for free, some easy to steal... Who wants to buy anything?

Yes, welcome to the modern age where technology can so easily turn us into crooks, pirates, thieves and who will know about it?

You may remember the Musicians' Union slogan 'Keep Music Live', but what are we doing? I hope we are not changing the letters around so it reads Keep Music Evil! Are we destroying the very artists that inspire us, teach us, and yea guide our very musical existence!

### General Perception amongst Musicians and Public

Wind bands are not as popular as brass bands and both fall miserably behind the orchestra, partly because the wind band can so easily be a noisy out of control beast; with a dynamic range that starts from a rough forte and ending at a very distorted out of tune *ffff* with every conceivable and inexpressive calamity between. A spectrum of horror not colour! These bands are barely fit for the park, a natural forgiving acoustic where some can get away with it; but never, ever for the concert hall and certainly not recording. Did I really say, recording? Bah, yuk, totally unthinkable!

### The Revolution

However like technology, the wind band, as you know, has in fact moved on and is now thankfully far removed from those outdated perceptions in some quarters. But due to our free download, rip and burn mentality we may



be in danger of stifling its complete and justified transformation into an exciting and uplifting concert hall experience on a level with the symphony orchestra, with gentle and transparent tones as well as brilliant bright colours, generating a 'must-see' attitude in concert goers and the general public alike.

### NOW's Landmark CD!

Northamptonshire Orchestral Winds' main band, a brand new community wind orchestra established in October 2005, has just produced its debut album in the backdrop of this unforgiving modern digital age. Why?

The CD is called *Celebration!* and was reviewed in the last issue of *Winds*, hailed as an outstanding and extraordinary achievement. The album's music is predominantly of living composers; Guy Woolfenden, Adam Gorb, Philip Sparke, Frank Ticheli, Thomas Doss, all quite easy listening. On the very popular side, it also has Jemima Clarke in her debut as violin soloist in Williams's evocative theme from *Schindler's List* and it includes Gustav Holst's wonderful *First Suite in Eb*, written ironically to popularise the wind band in 1909.

The group is an ordinary community band but has music education strongly at its heart; not only learning new music but the instrumental technique that supports the playing of great music. The main band started with only nine players about 17 months ago, with the training and beginner bands following some seven months later.

### Produce a CD?

Producing a CD with a new unknown wind band seems a completely barmy and very risky undertaking these days – and looking at it logically, well yes, it is! But on the other hand pioneers in the past have gone out on a limb which has cost them everything for the sake of humanity, suffering ridicule and abuse from the very people who will benefit! There was a time when most people actually believed the Earth was flat and if you sailed far enough you would just fall off! Thankfully somebody believed otherwise and was prepared to fund that very risky expedition. Jolly good job too; you cannot change the world unless you take risks!

### It Takes Passion To Produce a Good CD!

Passion is at the heart of all good music making. Passion is what drives us. Yes, a very strong compelling motivation is therefore required to complete the process.

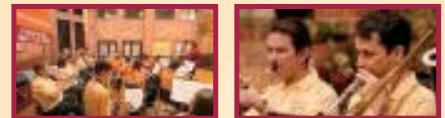
Once you believe in what you are doing without doubting, having strong reasons and conviction then you can think about the obstacles, as it will use up a great deal of time and energy, consider your motives carefully.

### Why I Wanted To Produce a CD

I, amongst others, want to help change perceptions of the band in our society, as well as raise awareness of the group, so here is a brief outline of what motivated me.

Recording a CD will:-

- show what musical and professional sounds can be achieved with a group of disparate adults (amateurs) in such a short space of time, with the right training
- introduce new and beautiful music to existing band players and conductors
- raise awareness of new music, which will appeal to a wider public
- help increase the membership of all NOW's bands, and NOW as an organisation
- help give a sense of satisfaction and achievement for participating members
- help the group to 'raise its game' and perform at a higher level



Since NOW produced its debut album we have performed in a showcase concert at The Anvil, Basingstoke in the London International Wind Band Festival, resulting in an invitation to play a showcase concert at the New York Wind Band and Orchestra Festival, March 2008, USA. NOW was awarded gold in the open class at the recent Midlands Region National Concert Band Festival for their performance of Philip Sparke's *Between the Two Rivers*, and has been invited to perform in the Gateshead national final and the BASBWE RSAMD IWF.

### Money and Organisation

So having got the passion how can the recording be achieved? What do you do next? There are two sides to this - money and organisation.

### Money

This is the biggest risk of all for me not having any external funding. All in all it cost nearly four and a half thousand pounds to produce the CD. The main costs are for the recording engineers. I used Doyen Mobile recordings because they are one of the best in the



business. You can get everything else right but if the recording and editing are done by a 'cowboy' you can't 'lasso' your money back! Before you decide on who to use it is essential that you listen to one of their demonstration CDs and talk to them about the process and if you don't like the sound of anything don't use them, go somewhere else! They can have very good intentions but if you spend upwards of £1000 on sound engineers and it sounds awful, it's no use swearing! And if they are useless at editing and don't have the very best equipment, ouch! Editing can take more than twice as long as the recording process and is absolutely vital. Then you must decide of course how many CDs you want pressing. We had a thousand and have sold only about one hundred in six months! I gave loads away mainly to radio stations like Classic FM; having sent one to each presenter none are prepared to play it. I don't think they will even get it out! Maybe you could ring them up and suggest a track...

The hope of recouping back all that financial outlay in a hurry is very slim because of the reasons outlined already:

general lack of interest in bands and their repertoire (even radio presenters);

the propensity for people to rip, burn and download for free (i.e. no incentive to ever buy anything again!)

There is no point in hiring a cheap hall, under a flight path, for example, a real waste of time and money! Every time you have done a great take it can be destroyed by noise from elsewhere, so give consideration to a quiet location. I chose the Brooke Weston Technology College in Corby for a weekend during the school holidays. The theatre is in the centre of a large campus in the middle of nowhere. It was ideal, and of course Doyen has state of the art mobile recording equipment.

Other main costs were on the much needed percussion section. We didn't have regular percussionists at the time of the recording or regular access to percussion instruments. Fortunately two schools helped us out on this, Northampton School for Girls and Northampton School for Boys, and one of our adult percussionists let us use some of his equipment. We are also grateful to the two percussion students hired from Birmingham Conservatoire. All the sheet music is owned by NOW and forms part of our growing library.

Costs for us included:-

- Recording engineers
- Hotel stay for engineers
- Hire of premises and site staff
- Van for percussion and fuel
- Hire of percussion players
- Music
- Refreshments

### Organisation

Preparing the community band for anything is challenging at the best of times as attendance can be quite poor. However where there is passion you will find a way, however daunting.

You need to prepare this ensemble very well as there is no real time to rehearse on the recording days as time is indeed money. It is unthinkable to start getting cross with people during recording sessions. It will only make your players nervous and will lead to a poor final result. Only record what will go on the CD!

Plan a schedule that you will attempt to work to; we gave an hour to every six to seven minutes of music for example, and more time to more difficult movements or sections. Think about pacing your players particularly brass – you don't have to record in order of the final product. Bear in mind you have only 60 minutes of CD space. It is therefore imperative you don't attempt to record any more than is required. Choose your repertoire carefully and remember why you are making the CD.

### Repertoire

If we just record what everyone else has heard why produce the CD? Well if you are very famous and have an audience base of well over 20,000 and are pretty sure you'll sell CDs, 500 – 1000 say in the first three months then you can put any old rubbish on there and it will sell! But stop! Is that going to help the future of bands and promote new music? No!

If you have that sort of control please think

about our living composers, other bands and the work of the British Association of Symphonic Bands and Wind Ensembles that this magazine represents. While choosing repertoire you could look down the BASBWE list of commissions for example, and make sure you have at least one new work in your usual concert programme. As far as recordings are concerned it is essential that new music is used, after all how can others learn to appreciate the sound of the modern wind band and what's in the minds of these extraordinary composers if we don't make it known. If we don't act now we may lose the will to continue commissioning!

- Choose repertoire very carefully
- Try to achieve a good musical balance and mix
- Always put new music in
- Prepare the band thoroughly
- Warm up well on the day
- Plan precisely what you will do on the day (six minutes/one hour)
- Take advice from recording engineers

### Summary and Conclusion

If you want to make a CD please bear in mind...

- What motivates you
- What you are going to put on it!
- Are you prepared to lose money?
- Employ a good sound/recording engineer
- Hire a good quiet space where you will not be disturbed
- Be well prepared
- Once there enjoy it and don't waste time

Finally please spare a thought to the cost, process and composers in this digital age! And don't forget to buy our *Celebration!* CD, you're sure to enjoy it even more NOW!!!

**Andrew Bassey** is the Musical Director of Northamptonshire Orchestral Winds [www.now4band.co.uk](http://www.now4band.co.uk) and BASBWE Midlands Regional Representative

