

WINDS Magazine

Winter 2023



BASBWE

- British Association of Symphonic Bands
- & Wind ensembles



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Welcome to this edition of the Winds journal, as a Saxophonist myself, a particularly exciting edition! I have been in post as chair 18 months now and have seen wind band activity growing stronger and stronger as we have emerged from the pandemic. (how long ago those virtual recordings seem!) It is heart-warming to see how music has returned and in some cases stronger than before. Over the last year and a half I have enjoyed leading the BASBWE committee and helping to move our organisation forward. I feel we have made many significant improvements and the future looks bright and exciting. Unfortunately, due to personal circumstances, I have had to step down from the role of Chair at the start of 2023. Bill Connor has kindly stepped back into the position as a temporary chair and I shall remain on the committee, as keen as ever to help promote our message!

The British Association of Symphonic Bands and Wind Ensembles requires help and support. BASBWE are looking to augment our committee numbers to help us represent the entire United Kingdom via 'regional hubs' of committee members. We have a good spread of committee members across the UK, but require more membership on the committee to aid BASBWE in achieving its objectives:

- Acquiring articles and publishing our journal – WINDS
- Planning and delivering the BASBWE conference
- Offering opportunities for composers
- Promoting the genre and new works

BASBWE also has two vacancies for specific roles on the executive committee:

- Membership Secretary (position available immediately)
- Chairperson (position available from January 2023)

The BASBWE committee are a hardworking, forward thinking and enthusiastic group of professional musicians, teachers, conductors and composers. As busy professionals the committee requires more members in order to share the work load of running an organisation such as this. All posts are voluntary, with online meetings scheduled around one per six weeks. If you wish to become involved, we would be delighted to hear from you and welcome you on board!

With all best wishes,
Phil & the BASBWE Committee

Happy New Year to all our members!



PHIL SHOTTON





The North West Saxophone Choir

Saxophonist, Conductor and Educator, Phil Shotton set up the NWSC in 2017 and it has gone from strength to strength over the last five years.

THE NORTH WEST SAXOPHONE CHOIR



With over 30 saxophonists involved from across the North West of England, rehearsals are held in Aughton and Macclesfield. The choir is designed for amateur adult saxophonists who are looking for an outlet for their music making, often the members play in other groups but for some, this is their only opportunity for ensemble music making.



The NWSC enjoy collaborating with other groups, notably the Saxophone Orchestra Manchester (SOM) and the Yorkshire Saxophone Choir and have staged several large scale joint concerts. NWSC perform their own concerts 3 or 4 times a year and have raised a considerable amount of money for charitable causes.

The NWSC are very lucky to have several composers and arrangers amongst their ranks of saxophonists and have been treated to bespoke arrangements and brand new works as well as the published repertoire for saxophone ensemble which is growing all the time as the genre becomes more well known.

AN IMPORTANT ROLE

The NWSC plays an important role in our members lives, we all know the benefits of playing in a musical ensemble, one of our alto saxophonists explains what NWSC means to her;

'I've been playing the alto sax since year 5 in primary school (24 years!) very much as a hobby. I've always managed to play in a local ensembles alongside my busy home life to keep my hobby alive. Fast forward to 2022 and I'm a full time mum to two young daughters, I'm so grateful to be a part of the north west saxophone choir. It's often difficult for me to do anything of an evening, once the girls are in

bed, I'm too exhausted to want to do anything else. NWSC rehearse during the day, so I'm able to take a break from hectic mum life for just a few hours of a Wednesday and switch off, it does me the world of good! I love my Wednesday mornings, playing alongside likeminded sax players from all walks of life. We all get along really well, and I love the social side of playing in the choir too.'

Lucy Rodriguez

If you would like more information about the NWSC please email:

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“Studying Music at university and later the RNCM gave me ample opportunity to play in wind orchestras on soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxophones.

Thoughts on the role of the saxophone section within a symphonic wind orchestra

Until I was nearly eighteen, I'd never actually played in a wind band as my first experience of ensemble music making was as a brass instrumentalist. I'd learned the cornet at ten years old and later tenor horn because the local brass band gave free lessons and loaned you an instrument. It was a great way to get into playing an instrument at a time subsidised or free lessons in schools were become more of a rarity.

As a child there was a lot of classical music in the house. Both my parents had studied music and as an antidote to all the Mahler, I'd become very interested in the Syd Lawrence Orchestra and BBC Big Band cassette tapes that my grandparents had.



My grandad wasn't at all musical, but he loved Glenn Miller, and this started my love of big band music. As I progressed through secondary school, I'd noticed there was a spare tenor saxophone in the school cupboard and after much pestering, I was eventually allowed to take it home for the summer holidays. I was always more interested in it in the big band context as it was something different to the brass band genre that was so ingrained in me and fortunately, my school did agree to fund some saxophone lessons.



GLENN MILLER

To me at the time the saxophone was a route into the big band genre rather than the trumpet or trombone, as I felt the saxes got all the best bits to play but it also

opened so many other doors to me that I'm now able to make a living across a massively diverse range of styles. It wasn't until I went to a new sixth form to study A level music that I was given the chance to experience playing in a wind band as it was there, I met the director of the Derbyshire County Wind Band. Towards the end of my time at school, the county band needed a baritone saxophone for a competition and asked me to do it.

I stayed with the band until I left school and had a very enjoyable few months playing in the largest ensemble I'd ever played in and revelling in the sheer volume of sound so many instrumentalists could create.

Studying Music at university and later the RNCM gave me ample opportunity to play in wind orchestras on soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxophones and I've found the role of the saxophone to be an interesting one within the ensemble. The obvious scoring that crops up time and time again (which I often use myself when I'm arranging for band) is to double up with the horns. This combination

of the warmth and richness of the horn sound coupled with the vibrancy of the reeds can bring an almost string section-like texture to the middle of the band. The tenor saxophone can often work with the euphoniums or lower horns and is particularly good at strengthening soaring melody lines in the tenor register of the band. The obvious use for the baritone is to give some definition and bite to the tubas and to boost the bass clarinet and bassoon lines. Again, some interesting textures can be found by blending those lower voices together in different ways. For example, euphonium with the tenor and baritone saxes in unison (with the correct balance) can almost sound like a cello section. All four of the saxophones can be used as solo voices, presenting lyrical lines or punchy driving melodic material with ease. The section can also work as a quartet, providing chordal underscore for another solo instrument or simply playing as a quartet to break up the full band texture for a few moments. They can project their sounds above the ensemble when required or blend seamlessly into the ensemble texture.

The Saxophone is an instrument with such malleable sound capabilities that it can bridge the void between upper woodwinds and lower brass incredibly effectively and bring a sonic cohesion to the ensemble the few other instruments can.

Jim Fieldhouse



Playing saxophone in a symphony orchestra is, for me, a natural place. We all know the stylistic challenges of being a saxophonist, not knowing where we sit (metaphorically), in our short amount of time on the musical timeline. We have a limited, but expanding repertoire in the orchestra. Sometimes doubling (Vaughan Williams 6, Berg Violin Concerto, Bernstein On The Town) sometimes in a section (Richard Strauss Symphony Domestica), often as a soloist (Ravel Bolero, Rachmaninov Symphonic Dances, Mussorgsky Pictures at an exhibition) and also as a dance band section (Gershwin American In Paris, Rhapsody in Blue). We can also appear at the opera (Berg Lulu, Britten Billy Budd) and at the ballet (Prokofiev Romeo and Juliet). Tonally we sit between the clarinets in the winds and the Horns of the brass section. Musically, we can be anywhere between Bizet and Birtwistle, not ignoring our jazz heritage of course. It is fun to get turning heads from our string playing colleagues when a 'new' sound is heard from behind. Also to spend most of our time as orchestral players waiting for our moment (and going home early!) whilst our fellow orchestral musicians have pages of semiquavers to ponder over.

Playing saxophone in a modern symphony orchestra can be exciting, scary, exhilarating, challenging, requiring patience and humility. But most of all it really is fun!

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From the Top... the Orchestral Saxophonist

ROB BUCKLAND & CARL RAVEN





CARL RAVEN & ANDY SCOTT

the NCBF and Schools Proms). So many of the skills that are a core part of being a working musician come from those ensembles: the sight-reading, negotiating rapidly changing time-signatures, key signatures, changing style and sound to suite the repertoire, understanding when to follow a conductor, when to ignore them, ;-), when to blend as a section, or when to impose your own musical identity in solo passages, not to mention the camaraderie, teamwork, sense of humour, learning to give and take criticism and advice, the list is almost endless. Ironically, during the chamber music sessions on music courses with the county band that I played in, I had my first experience of playing in a quartet setting, and then moving onto study at RNCM, found that sitting with my quartet colleagues as part of the saxophone section meant that we were listening and bending almost automatically.

SONIC COHESION

It seems to me that the saxophone section really brings sonic cohesion to the whole wind orchestra soundworld - exactly as the original brief from the Garde Republican in Paris to Adolphe Sax suggested - a hybrid voice, bridging the gap between woodwinds and brasses - and the malleability of the sound of the saxophone, moving effortlessly between woodwind dexterity and articulation to brass power and energy, with a vocal quality that is almost human at times, really allows a high level saxophone section to have a huge influence on the overall palette of colours in the Wind Orchestra.

SO VERY FORTUNATE

I was so very fortunate to have grown up in a world of wind orchestras. From my earliest musical experiences as a 3rd clarinet in the school band, promoted to a rapid rise in the ranks as a fledgling saxophonist at 13 years of age (not on merit, simply because the school loaned me one of its two saxophones and told me to play it in the band) and soon being called up for local area and then Kent Youth Wind orchestra (in the heyday of county music service provision - free instrumental lessons, local, regional and county groups playing and touring, and competing at



It is inconceivable to imagine music such as the great Lincolnshire Posy, by Percy Grainger (himself of course a renowned soprano saxophone player) without the range of colours from the extended saxophone family bringing his witty music to life. Throughout my time at the RNCM, as a member of the iconic RNCM Wind Orchestra at the very peak of its powers under the legendary Timothy Reynish in the mid to late 80s, I found myself almost every week in a rehearsal or concert with living composers writing music for the group, attending rehearsals, inspiring us all with their vision and skill - Richard Rodney Bennett, Michael Ball, Philip Wilby, Tony Gilbert, Martin Ellerby, the list is too long to include everyone here.

I vividly recall the gala concert of the 1987 WASBE conference hosted at the RNCM, premiering a stunning programme of new music with an elite wind orchestra, with the Apollo Quartet as the saxophone section, and the brasses littered with members of brass chamber groups, including Murray Greig's Phoenix Brass, the percussion focussed around Simone Rebello's Backbeat Percussion Quartet, so many of the young musicians from that band have gone on to really important and illustrious careers as performers and educators, each carrying with them the burning torch first lit in that ensemble - commissioning, creating and performing at the highest level, taking no prisoners, giving 110%.



I have been fortunate to have been able to commission and premiere several concerti of saxophone and wind orchestra (from among others Michael Ball, Graham Fitkin, Andy Scott - all recorded with the RNCM Wind Orchestra on my 2014 'Gameshow' CD) and Quartet Concerti from among others our own Bill Connor. I/we still play these pieces around the UK and beyond, and still revel in the energy, dynamism and power of the sound of a wind orchestra in full flight.

During my career as an orchestral saxophonist, I have been privileged to play and record a significant proportion of the standard and not so standard repertoire for symphony orchestra which includes saxophones, from the early masterpieces

by Massenet, Bizet, Ravel & Mussorgsky, though works by Britten, Vaughan-Williams, William Walton, Leonard Bernstein and George Gershwin, to scores by Luciano Berio, Mark-Anthony Turnage (who always includes a saxophone in his orchestral works - thanks Mark!), John Adams and more. Every time the saxophone is used, the reaction is the same - why aren't more composers writing for saxophones in the orchestra as a matter of course? Of course, it's really a matter of economics as much as anything else, but slowly and surely we will get there - Gary Carpenter's colourful 'Dadaville', commissioned by the BBC Proms, featured a wonderful baritone saxophone part for example, and we all hope that this becomes more of the rule rather than the exception.



RICHARD RODNEY BENNETT



PHILIP WILBY



MARTIN ELLERBY



MICHAEL BALL



ANTHONY GILBERT




GRAHAM FITKIN

“

we still play these pieces around the UK and beyond, and still revel in the energy, dynamism and power of the sound of a wind orchestra in full flight.





“35 plus years into my professional career, and I remain a fervent and passionate believer in both chamber music and symphony wind orchestras.

Rob Buckland

It is interesting to look back at how we saxophonists are received by our orchestral colleagues these days compared to 30 odd years ago - I vividly recall that every time we played in the professional orchestras in the NW after graduating from college, most of the band would turn round in amazement at the saxophones every time we played - we were affectionately known as 'the novelties'. These days, we feel much more like an integrated part of the ensemble, the expectation is that we will be as virtuosic as the rest of the wind players - so I guess progress is being made after all! Certainly, it is much more common place to see a saxophone concerto being played as part of an orchestra's season, with

the instrument standing proudly alongside its more traditional colleagues, and we certainly have a much more engaging and appealing repertoire of concerti to perform these days.

But in terms of our ensemble development, until we have enough orchestral repertoire to cut our teeth on, (maybe in a hundred years time), the very best way to hone our skills in a large ensemble environment is to be part of the symphonic wind orchestra. And ideally to play in a chamber group too. Being in a quartet makes you a better section player, which in turn makes you a better chamber musician, and round and round it goes.

As both musical worlds - chamber music and symphony wind orchestras - live somewhat in the shadows of the orchestral world, the sacrifice and struggle to keep the movement developing, continually commissioning, premiering, broadening our repertoire, connecting with audiences and so on, will always be an uphill one, but 35 plus years into my professional career, and I remain a fervent and passionate believer in both. They have both indubitably shaped and enhanced my musical life in so many ways.

Rob Buckland

ROB BUCKLAND



CARL RAVEN



Apollo Saxophone Quartet

*Not many chamber music ensembles operate for 37+ years. That's what the **Apollo Saxophone Quartet** (ASQ) has done and continues to do.*

“*Tim marched into an ASQ rehearsal one day in about 1987 & threw down a score on the floor and said, “learn this!”*”



In this article for BASBWE I'll take us through some of the experiences on this magical journey, how the musical landscape has developed around us, and will offer suggestions to those of you involved in ensembles. The bottom line is that it's fantastic to make music with like-minded musicians, to create your own body of work, and to be in charge of your own musical identity!

“It's the first time that we've had four students in the same year who all play the saxophone. You can be a quartet, you'll rehearse in this room every Friday afternoon” so said the powers that be at the Royal Northern College of Music in September 1985. It was the first time that the RNCM had two first study saxophonists in the same year, Rob Buckland & myself, and we were joined by Tim Redpath & Jon Rebbeck, two fine clarinettists/saxophonists. So the journey begins.



There's a big element of luck with chamber ensembles, in terms of personalities never mind the music. Fortunately, the four of us got on and collectively there was a lot of positive energy.

In the 1980s the repertoire for saxophone quartet largely comprised Franco-Belgian original works and arrangements of light music. There were some notable British saxophone quartets (Krein, London, English, Myrha & Northern) who were introducing the medium to audiences and some commissioning new work, however the saxophone quartet in Britain was still in its infancy compared with today nearly four decades on.

After paying our dues with most of the existing repertoire the ASQ, now in its third year at the RNCM realised that we needed to be proactive and create our own repertoire. This moment coincided with the quartet meeting John Harle. In the late 1980's John was a saxophone pioneer in the UK, his teaching

methods and playing pushing boundaries, and inspiring composers to write for our instrument. Also, it was a time where the saxophone had in many cases been introduced into music colleges via a current tutor of clarinet, someone who doubled saxophone. This was an important introduction, in the case of the RNCM it was Neville Duckworth who played this role, inevitably though the saxophone found its own voice as a principal study instrument and this needed to be reflected in terms of tuition (as was already the case in countries such as France, Germany & America, who had more a more developed history of classical saxophone).

DISCUSS IDEAS

John taught us to think, and he is a strong personality, so it was good in the car or train travelling back from sessions in London to be able to discuss his ideas and to then adapt them for the quartet. A typical day with John was 9am-1pm individual lessons (open), 2-5pm quartet coaching, then John booked us rooms at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama 7-10pm to practice individually. The RNCM arranged that we could see John in London for 2-3 day intense sessions 3 or 4 times per year, in our 3rd & 4th years.

Head of Wind & Percussion at the RNCM at the time, Tim Reynish, led from the front with his passion for the wind band. During our period of study at the college (1985-1989) it seemed that we were sight-reading a newly-commissioned work on an almost weekly basis! We were very fortunate to play (as the saxophone section) in world premieres of works from composers of the calibre of Richard Rodney Bennett, Michael Ball & many more.

These experiences then led to the ASQ commissioning works from Richard & Michael. Tim marched into an ASQ rehearsal one day in about 1987 & threw down a score

on the floor and said “learn this!”. It was the fiendishly-challenging Concerto for Saxophones by Tristan Keuris (commissioned by the Rascher Saxophone Quartet). We spent 6 months learning this incredible work, auditioning for an opportunity to perform the piece with the RNCM Symphony Orchestra, were successful, the college then flew Keuris from his home in Holland to work with us before we gave the UK Premiere of his work. The challenge that had been set in this case really pushed us individually and collectively, and moved the ASQ to a new musical level.

LEARN ABOUT MUSIC

Let’s face it though, you’re studying at a music conservatoire, so you have all the time in the world to play your instrument and learn about music. We were regularly rehearsing for 6 hours a day, then rehearsing with the wind band & big band and having a ball. Then you graduate and the real world hits you!

Whilst also being warned “not to put all of our eggs in one basket” as a saxophone quartet, the fact that we largely did proved a good move musically and practically. In the early 1990’s the Apollo Saxophone Quartet was winning competitions

such as the Royal Overseas League, Tunnell Trust & Tokyo International Chamber Music Competition, accepted onto schemes such as Live Music Now, and receiving funding from the Countess of Munster Trust and North West Arts. This resulted in a decade of opportunities; commissioning works, world premieres, tours worldwide, recording and record deals.

There were some funny moments along the way with what is the first stage of the Apollo Saxophone Quartet. Virgin Airways had introduced in-flight entertainment on its UK-USA flights. In return for free tickets all we had to do was play on the plane for 15 minutes mid-flight! The reality was that everyone was sleeping mid-flight as we unpacked our saxophones & started playing, and the turbulence didn’t help! What Virgin Airways didn’t tell us that we were on standby for a flight home. For three days flights were full and we slept on the floor of JFK Airport, with money running out (pre-online banking & mobile phones) we rationed ourselves to water and dry cream crackers. Finally we made it home. Oh yes, the reason we wanted to go in the first place was to play in a competition that we applied for in New York City. We weren’t accepted, but went anyway!



APOLLO SAXOPHONE QUARTET 1986
TIM REDPATH, ROB BUCKLAND, ANDY SCOTT
& JON REBBECK



APOLLO SAXOPHONE QUARTET 1995
TIM REDPATH, ROB BUCKLAND, ANDY SCOTT
& WILL GREGORY

FIRST & FOREMOST

An important moment and experience for the ASQ was recording our second album, this time with Decca/Argo at Abbey Road Studio 2 in 1994. John Harle was instrumental sorting the record deal and I remember a meeting in the main Decca Records offices in London. The fellow there actually said “the album won’t buy you your first Mercedes, but it will go a long way towards it”. Can you believe that some of these people trotted out such crass lines? However, it was a great experience, two 12-hour days recording, staying next to Abbey Road in the musician house. We were greeted by a huge fridge full of beer, but we were too exhausted to get involved with that. The album, titled ‘First & Foremost’ was a success, selling well and reaching number three in the UK classical charts, and more importantly was a good calling card whilst continuing our mission to commission, record and perform.



JON REBBECK

A NEW DIRECTION

Those of you that play in chamber music ensembles will appreciate this next section..... Things change, times change, opportunities change, and in the late 1990’s the ASQ experienced our first personnel change. Jon loved flying

as well as music, and having gained his pilot qualifications was offered a job flying for Dragon Air in Hong Kong. A new direction beckoned for Jon, and an uncertain time for the quartet. With a personnel change also comes opportunities and we were extremely fortunate that the incredible musician Will Gregory accepted an invitation to join the group! We had worked with Will a lot (with London Saxophonic) and loved his sound, approach and quirkiness. It was a true baptism of fire for Will, a concert at the Vale of Glamorgan Festival in Cardiff that included world & UK premieres of works from amongst others Graham Fitkin & Louis Andriessen!

The composers were at the gig, and at one point midst Andriessen (the unrelenting ‘Facing Death’) I looked to my left at Will, and his long hair had covered some of his face, going under his glasses, and sweat was everywhere! Some of our programmes then were more like a physical work out!! Fortunately, Will stayed with us and brought his experience and knowledge to benefit us all. It’s fair to say that each person who has played with the ASQ during the current term of 37 years has brought something special and individual to the ensemble; with Will it wasn’t only his sound and style but also an encouragement to compose music ourselves. Will wrote and continues to write very successfully for TV and film, and he instigated our ‘Journey Across the Impossible’ programme – music that we composed that accompanies black & white film, and which we develop with new films and scores to this day!

Paul Mitchell-Davidson and Bill Connor



PAUL MITCHELL-DAVIDSON



BILL CONNOR

*Special mention goes to composer / guitarist **Paul Mitchell-Davidson** who supported the ASQ by composing nine works over two decades, and **Bill Connor**, who with ‘After the Picture Show’ & ‘Oodunnit?’ gave us invaluable opportunities to perform with orchestra & wind band.*

By commissioning, recording and performing the ASQ was creating its own musical identity, expanding the repertoire, which not only benefitted us but which also benefits the many new saxophone quartets that form yearly.

COMMITMENT

Around the year 2000 Will was in such demand as a composer that his work with the ASQ couldn't continue, as we have always had a 'no dep' rule, given the nature of our repertoire and gigs. We treasure the time with Will and welcomed the brilliant David Roach to the baritone chair of the Apollo Saxophone Quartet. Dave brought a discipline and commitment to the group, spending days rehearsing in the North West, away from his London home and family. Rob Buckland & I have always said that it takes five years to develop an ensemble sound (with the same players) and it does, however good and experienced that the individuals are. The balance of sound varies, the centre of the collective sound, the shape of the sound pyramid varies, and everyone has to listen constantly with deliberate and instinctive changes being made that benefit the whole. Intonation, feel, time, articulation, dynamic variation, interpretation, all elements have a magnifying glass over them. It's this detail with chamber ensemble music that is the magic, coupled with having the quality of repertoire available to an ensemble that allows the musical imagination to flourish.

From an early stage with the Apollo Saxophone Quartet we recognised the need to collaborate; with fellow musicians, artists, poets, composers, dance companies, with film & more. Why? Because we were thinking about our audience, being aware of variation both musically and visually, plus also ensuring that our musical minds were always active, experiencing

something new. Variation of saxophones as well, programmes might open with a work that is scored for four soprano saxophones. Fabulous pieces composed by Keith Tippett, Luis Tinoco, Barbara Thompson & Barry Guy make use of scoring colours away from the standard soprano, alto, tenor & baritone saxophones. The Quartet that Richard Rodney Bennett wrote us is a masterpiece, also hugely popular worldwide with saxophone quartets are ASQ commissions such as 'July' by Michael Torke, 'Songs for Tony' Michael Nyman & 'Serenade for Seikilos' Michael Ball.

A fellow founder member of the ASQ, Tim Redpath, sadly had to leave the ensemble in 2008. His contribution playing soprano saxophone was huge, and we have had some great experiences together in his 23 years leading the group! At a similar time, maybe a couple of years later, the curse of the baritone sax chair returned, with David Roach parting ways with the ASQ. This time was a big challenge but to play in a chamber music ensemble requires some determination and grit, and Rob & I were delighted to welcome firstly Carl Raven and then Jim Fieldhouse to the ASQ. It provided an opportunity for Rob to move from the alto saxophone chair, which he had occupied since the formation of the group in 1985, to the soprano saxophone chair. Carl (after a brief spell playing baritone saxophone) plays alto saxophone with the ASQ, myself (from day one) playing tenor saxophone, and Jim playing baritone saxophone in the group. This personal is still the line up in 2023.

Different challenges arise at different times with a chamber music group. It's all a new and exciting adventure in the early days, then the reality of the real world kicks in, then competition and award days are over, families appear, time has to be carefully allocated and financial pressures emerge. I guess that this is why not many chamber ensembles have particularly long lives, couple with the fact that you all have to get on and be prepared to commit to the cause! What is the cause though? If you choose to refer to it this way then it's an unrelenting commitment to music, new music, making music, being musically open-minded, listening to opinions and thoughts of others, digesting information and finding a plan and pathway that works for a particular music group.

ADAPTING

In my introduction I mentioned about a changing musical landscape and adapting to these developments. One clear and obvious development since 1985 is the huge increase in the number of saxophone quartets worldwide. The RNCM for a number of years now has a saxophone department of 15 to 20 students. Therefore each academic year sees the start of 4 or 5 quartets, multiply this at similar institutions worldwide and we can understand the saxophone explosion! Many of these quartets will fall by the wayside after a few years (for reasons covered earlier in this article), but whilst they exist they need repertoire (that reflects life itself as well as the general technical advances of saxophonists) and long-established saxophone quartets

such as the Apollo, Prism, Aurelia, Amstel, Habanera, Delta, Clair-Obскур, Rascher and more have all contributed hugely to enabling a vastly-expanded repertoire that benefits all.

The most recent 15 years for the Apollo Saxophone Quartet has seen some hugely creative projects. We met the Artvark Saxophone Quartet on a tour of South Africa in 2014. We bonded as people and musicians and collaborated on a project that saw each of the eight musicians composing a work for the octet, which was recorded on an album and toured pre-covid. Also, some of the musicians that we have collaborated with are sadly no longer with us, Barbara Thompson, Richard Rodney Bennett & Keith Tippett in particular. Any saxophone quartets reading this article, I would encourage you to check out works for us from Keith, Richard & Barbara, wonderful music!

WORLD PREMIERES

In November 2022 the ASQ gave a self-promoted concert in Manchester (a strategy that we used in the 1990's) which featured a programme of world premiere performances.... That's right, a full programme of world premieres! Composers Dani Howard, Grace-Evangeline Mason, Claire Cope, Jenni Watson, Adam Caird, and Bill Connor have written some gems of pieces!! It is increasingly challenging to source funding to commission composers and we are grateful to several individuals that funded this project. The success of this event has encouraged us to make this an annual event that features at least one world

premiere. An audience member and supporter of the ASQ at the November premieres concert offered to fund a commission that will enable a world premiere in Autumn 2023! Maybe this is an advantage of experience.... people have followed you and continue to follow you on this journey, trust you musically and would like to step aboard the journey?

LOOK FORWARD

September 2025 will see the 40th year of the Apollo Saxophone Quartet arrive, there's a lot to be achieved before then, and with the support of everyone around us we aim to celebrate this milestone, with new recordings, commissions, collaborations and performances! As ever, we aim to encourage anyone that has a passion and love of music, we strive to improve ourselves (individually and collectively), driven by imagination and creativity. It's important to acknowledge and respect how we come to be in a position that we are in today musically, and also to look forward (especially now after a torrid few covid-ridden years).

A GOOD LAUGH

Finally, you do have a good laugh sometimes.... I remember when we opened a music society gig with a walk on piece of music. Tim, Rob & I made it to the stage but there was no sign of Jon. We looked around (whilst playing) and saw him trying to find the break in a full length stage curtain that would enable him to make it on stage. We and the audience watched this for a good minute or two whilst improvising on stage, it was like a scene from a Morecambe & Wise Show!! Here's to a positive 2023 everyone!

www.andyscott.org.uk



The Saxophone's Role within the Wind Band

Anthony Houghton

Percy Grainger described the saxophone as *“one of the loveliest of all wind instruments – human, voice-like, heart-revealing...”* and bemoaned the fact that the instrument is not generally part of the symphony orchestra, despite its advocacy and use by Berlioz, Bizet, Richard Strauss, D’Indy, Villa Lobos, Ravel, etc.

However, the Wind Band, perhaps because of its roots in the Military Band and outdoor performance has always included the saxophone family, the modern symphonic and one-to-a-part wind orchestra iterations reinforcing this inclusion in their orchestrations. The value of band participation for educational and community development was recognised particularly in the ubiquitous American school band programmes of the twentieth century where the whole variety of wind, brass & percussion instruments, including all the saxophones, were actively encouraged and catered for in the orchestrations and teaching.

Persuasive voices such as Percy Grainger, a powerful influencer early in the twentieth century, when his scores emphasised all the members of all the families of instruments in his writing and concept of sound, added to this increasingly universal thinking and practice.

The local wind bands around the world have developed their own different and distinctive sounds by including wind, brass and percussion instruments from their regions. So, in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries the Russian, Bavarian, South American and even the German and French bands all had their own flavour but all used saxophones. Over the 20th Century as the amateur and community bands thrived and grew away from the military

model and adventurous composers were reinventing the genre, there was some standardisation, as well as development of the instrumental forces, the percussion section particularly was expanded and developed well beyond the scope of the more

conservative symphony orchestra whose composers are only now beginning to use this new resource of sounds pioneered by the Wind Bands.

Adolph Sax’s wonderful invention of around 1850 was soon taken up as a serious classical study in the Paris Conservatoire and very soon began to be used in Military Bands. However, the 1870 Franco-Prussian War which devastated Europe caused the cancellation of the Paris Conservatoire Saxophone Class, only reinstated in 1942 by the pioneering artist Marcel Mule.

This hiatus in the saxophone’s acceptance by the musical establishment could well have prevented the composers of that

time realizing the potential and beauty of the instrument: but nevertheless, the ever-increasing use in the military allowed the saxophone to travel across the world and eventually to the USA, where the legendary Rudy Wiedoeft popularised the instrument and bridging it, through ragtime, into the Jazz age... and its future was assured.



PERCY GRAINGER (1882 - 1961)










ADOLPHE SAX (1814 – 1894)

ADOLPHE SAX (1814 – 1894)



Sax patented (in 1846) his new instrumental family of no less than eight sizes(!) – Contra-Bass to Sopranino, but despite Grainger's powerful advocacy for the full vocal range of Bass, Baritone, Tenor, Alto and Soprano the now standard for wind bands has stabilised as the quartet of two E \flat Altos, a B \flat Tenor and an E \flat Baritone. This is a very satisfactory and harmonious ensemble in itself, but it does seem slightly odd that the well-established classical saxophone quartet of Soprano, Alto, Tenor & Baritone, with its rich repertoire, was not the choice. This could be explained by the fact that there is already an abundance, almost, some would say, an over abundance of soprano tones (Flutes, Clarinets, Oboes, Trumpets, Cornets...) and the 2 Alto, Tenor & Baritone selection avoids adding to that to some extent and provides an alternative colour and strengthens the middle harmony range. The Baritone is a dextrous and powerful bass voice, an area also needing reinforcement and variety in bands.

Sax's Complete Family of Saxophones

		
Soprillo	Sopranino	Soprano
		
Alto	Tenor	Baritone
		
Bass	Contrabass	Subcontrabass

How does the Sax Family fit into the overall tone-canvas of the wind ensemble?

All the saxophones, big or small are equally fluent, and match the other woodwind in this regard, and can take dynamic and expressive solos; as virtuosic or singing as any other.



Saxes have a more powerful individual or combined voice than the other woodwind and have a large range of dynamics from sub-tone ppp – fff. In competent hands they can project their melodies over the ensemble as well as blend and harmonically support.

The band's sax quartet can be used to fill and enrich the inner harmonies and texture, imitate the Big Band sax section to give a modern groove or rhythmic bite to the ensemble; the Alto and Tenor, with their distinctive voices are natural soloists and the Baritone can add a funky edge, particularly in its low register (usually this instrument now has an extra

semitone taking it down to its low A – concert C). Many composers, having heard Gerry Mulligan perhaps, have exploited this instrument's special qualities for the wind band.

The saxophone brings a very vocal quality of sound to the wind band: from smooth straight horn-like colours to a reedy brashness of tone and soft articulation through to sharply punchy and incisive attack. All the family members have the same characteristics and behave similarly within their own tessituras, which is why the saxophone quartet is so perfect a blending chamber ensemble on a par with its string equivalent.

As a conical bored instrument (like the oboe) the lowest notes are harder to control and in inexperienced hands have a tendency to blurt out (though this is less of an issue with the Baritone) – composers for beginner bands need to be aware, and conductors have patience! ...but, as with everything, in talented hands those bottom four semitones have a special timbre and a unique voice to be relished – when asked to shout or to whisper...



RUDY WIEDOEFT (1893 – 1940)



Rudy Wiedoeft popularised the Saxophone and bridging it, through ragtime, into the Jazz age.

“

*The
saxophone
brings a very
vocal quality
of sound
to the wind
band*

The Soprano



This member of the family used to be vilified as a rare instrument that was usually out of tune and badly played, but in the modern era this is not the case; it has become popular and there are many fine players. Jan Garbarek's beautiful recordings with the Hilliard Ensemble may be responsible for the change of attitude towards it and there are many lovely examples of its beautiful and effective use in the recent wind band repertoire.

The Bass



Despite being Adolph Sax's prototype (filling the immediate need then for bass reinforcement, to replace the obsolete ophicleide, etc.) has become a rarity perhaps because of its inconvenient size and is not normally available despite it being asked for by Vaughan Williams, Holst, Grainger, Milhaud, Respighi and others in some of their compositions.



Early use of the saxophone in bands was often to double the horns and fulfil a similar filler role. As the skill of players (for all instruments) developed, composers began to exploit the unique qualities of tone, articulation and dexterity that the saxophone section offered and in the 21st Century the status and possibilities of the instrument are further developed by such saxophonists as John Harle, Rob Buckland, Jess Gillam, the Apollo Quartet, Chip Wickham and countless others; Band members now demand more interesting and challenging parts to play and so the possibilities for composers to create more sounds, textures and roles within the symphonic wind orchestra, concert, school and community bands are fascinating and infinite.

Some notable examples of inspired use of saxophones in the wind band

Florid Textures

Peter Meechan	Fire in the Sky
David Bedford	Ronde for Isolde
Michael Torke	Javelin
Richard Rodney Bennett	Morning Music

Sustained Textures

Nigel Hess	Catskills from East Coast Pictures
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Solo Alto or Tenor Sax

David Bedford	Ronde for Isolde
George Lloyd	Forest of Arden
Gustav Holst	Suite II Movt. 4
Camille Saint-Saëns	Orient & Occident Movt. 2
Martin Ellerby	Paris Sketches Mvt. 3

Use of Soprano & Bass Sax

Gustav Holst	Suites I & II
Percy Grainger	Children's March
Darius Milhaud	Suite Française
Ottorino Respighi	Huntingtower

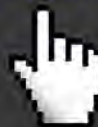
More Wonderful Sax Section Writing

Robert Russell Bennett	Suite of Old American Dances
Paul Hindemith	Symphony in B \flat
Frank Ticheli	Blue Shades
Guy Woolfenden	Gallimaufry
Bill Connor	Tails Auf Dem Vood Viennoise
Bill Connor	Dastardly Dances
Bill Connor	Fictious Folk

ASTUTE MUSIC

Astute Music plays a significant role providing quality music for saxophonists!

www.astute-music.com



MARCEL MULE (1901 – 2001)

The Lochaber Silver Fling

Robin Gillies. Chairman of LCWB

On Friday 1st and Saturday 2nd April, 30 Brass, Woodwind & Percussion Players from all over Scotland and beyond, ventured to Lochaber in the wild and beautiful Scottish Highlands.

They had been invited by the Lochaber Community Wind Band to come and join them for a weekend of music making at the foot of Ben Nevis and to celebrate their 25th year of operation, under the leadership of guest musical director Mr Vaughan Fleischfresser of Peebles, in the Scottish Borders. As community band conductors all over the country will know from experience, it's hard to pick music for an unbalanced ensemble with players of widely disparate musical abilities and tastes. Playing in such a group is also a very different experience from playing in a full band. The "Lochaber Silver Fling" set out to provide an opportunity for members of relatively small, unbalanced bands to take in the thrill of playing in a 55-piece band with players on every part, and with sufficient numbers of experienced players to take the pressure off the novices.

Repertoire was chosen for the weekend, based on our firm conviction that musical

development is achieved through grappling with challenges. At the start of 2022 repertoire was sought of a wind band grading up to 4 / 5 and included new compositions alongside standard repertoire. An emphasis on British based composers or arrangers was the main element of the weekend, from the concert programme.

All fears of the challenges ahead were allayed the moment Vaughan lifted his baton. With just the right mix of laid-back congeniality and concentrated musical focus, he coaxed and motivated, insisted and encouraged, with what appeared to be an instinctive ability to sense where his efforts would be best spent.

Fully appreciating that the weekend was more about musical challenge and experience than putting together a flawless concert, Vaughan and the band worked through the repertoire at the all-day rehearsal on the Saturday and again on the Sunday morning.



JOHN WHYTE





At the concert on Sunday afternoon, Vaughan fronted a band of players who were red-cheeked with excitement and smiling from ear to ear, at having overcome what had seemed insurmountable challenges only the previous morning. With the help of John Whyte the Lochaber band M.D, Vaughan transformed the Silver Fling group from a tentative scratch band to a musically assertive and attentive ensemble.

We are well aware that what we witnessed in Lochaber that weekend was teaching excellence at work and will forever be grateful to Vaughan for giving so generously

of his talent for our collective and personal benefits. We had such great fun at the weekend and the large and appreciative audience lifted the whole occasion to great heights. The weekend was an outstanding success.

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of organising such an event is acquiring funding and we were delighted that the British Association of Symphonic Bands And Wind Ensembles (BASBWE), the musicians who attended and the audience had generously contributed towards the educational and organisational aspects of the weekend, through

financial and in-kind assistance. We would like to take the opportunity to thank Mr Vaughan Fleischfresser, all the musicians for coming along, the wonderful audience and Alistair Gibson from BASBWE, for their outstanding contributions towards our Silver Anniversary celebration. With the experience of Covid we had not performed a concert in over two years.

We had initially hoped to celebrate our 25th anniversary in September 2021, but due to the uncertainty of Covid we postponed the event till April. The event exceeded all we had hoped for and then more, much more.

BASBWE

- British Association of Symphonic Bands
- & Wind ensembles

Repertoire

The following
music was
played at our
concert . . .



Concert Prelude

A Symphonic Portrait

Cajun Folk Songs

Clachaig Ceilidh

Australian Up-Country Tune

Pentland Hills March

Windows Of The World

Robbie Williams "Swing When You're Winning"

English Folk Song Suite

Selections From Chicago

The Glenfinnan March (commissioned for our 25th Anniversary)

Duelin Xylos

Philip Sparke

A.L. Webber (arr Jerry Nowack)

Frank Ticheli

John G Whyte

Percy Grainger

James H. Howe

Peter Graham

Frank Bernaerts

Ralph Vaughan Williams

(arr Ted Ricketts)

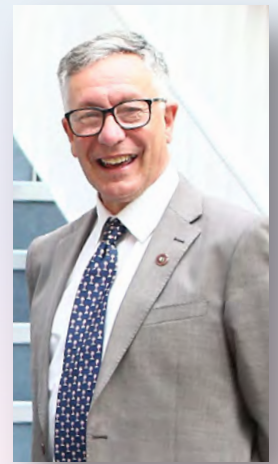
Alan Fernie

Arthur Smith (arr Richard Saucedo)

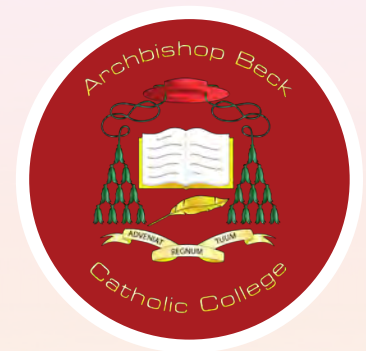


A Musical Life Bruce P Hicks

**Emeritus Director of Music
Archbishop Beck Catholic College
Liverpool UK**



There have been two common denominators throughout my career in music education.....



Firstly, the music I have studied, prepared and conducted, and secondly the people I have met along the way.

One such piece of music has been Declaration Overture by the American composer Claude. T Smith. I met Claude when he was one of the first clinicians to be part of the then recently formed Australian Band and Orchestra Directors' Association.

Claude was working on a new composition to be called Declaration Overture. He travelled with a small keyboard, and I heard the embryonic piece taking shape all those years ago. I look back and think no music technology back then!

In 1988 I relocated from Sydney, Australia to Southport, United Kingdom. I left Christian Brothers High School Lewisham after a tenure of more than 15 years, as the Founder Director of their Brass Band programme, joining the staff of another Christian Brothers School at St Mary's College, Crosby Liverpool.

Rolling up my sleeves at St Marys College, Crosby, Liverpool I started the band programme from scratch. Sixty recruits signed up to begin their early instrumental

studies and so began a fantastic journey for young people, parents and the school community. One such person who totally believed in music education was the then Headmaster of the Junior School, Brother Tom Kelly cfc, an educator, way ahead of his time!

CLAUDE. T SMITH



The group remained strong, vibrant, and fully focused and over the next few years developed into a fine ensemble, winning many awards. I knew the time had come to introduce Declaration Overture for the first time. A major challenge for the musicians and the conductor at this time. I soon realised that a baton did not make a conductor!

Declaration Overture was ready for festival and the result was amazing. The young musicians knew they could do it and gave a stunning performance. Following this we went on to other great pieces of music by Holst, Vaughan Williams and Derek Bourgeois Serenade for Wind band.

Declaration Overture emerged at regular intervals over my 10-year tenure at St Mary's College. My final concert featured Declaration Overture at their Last Night of the Proms concert.

On to pasture new, the band programme was commenced again but as this was a year 7 to year 11 school, I soon realised that for a programme to be successful primary school pupils were the key. Also, a major factor in a successful



programme is to have a school with a 6th form.

With this in mind after five fantastic years at St George of England High School, Bootle, Liverpool (a school that was situated in one of the most deprived areas of the country and at that time the European Union.) I left to become Director of Music at Archbishop Beck Catholic College, also in Liverpool.

Once again Declaration Overture was used as a wonderful work to teach young students the many aspects of being a member of a good ensemble. One of my roles in the new position at Archbishop Beck Catholic College was to develop band programmes in partner primary schools and this laid the foundations for quality musicians to be nurtured, developed and taught over many years.

One of the major music events at Archbishop Beck Catholic College each year was our very own *Last Night of the Proms* where 500 to 600 parents and friends of the college would attend the final concert of the year. One of the parents of the cohort of young musicians who commenced in the primary school Band programme eight years previously contacted me to ask if she could make a request to be played at the Last

Night of the Proms concert. In fact, her daughter's final concert before going to university. Thinking it would probably be the latest chart stopper I was delighted to learn that the request was for the programme to include Declaration Overture.

The lesson that was reinforced to me was what I had known all along, do not waste young musicians time or

any musicians time for that matter on poor quality repertoire. As my good friend, Dr. Randy Navarre once said, "give them a good music diet and do not waste their time".

Throughout my career I have had the opportunity to attend the Midwest Band and Orchestral Clinic in Chicago USA and I had the privilege to meet and chat with such people as the late great Dr Fredrick Fennell, John Paynter and Dr William Ravelli to name a few.



I had the honour to be part of the 70th Anniversary of this amazing gathering of music educators not only from across the USA but across the world.

My colleague and friend Chris Tratt also attended that conference, where I was able to catch up with three long standing Band Directors Bill Alles, Greg Stefanak from the USA and Don Shearman, Australia.

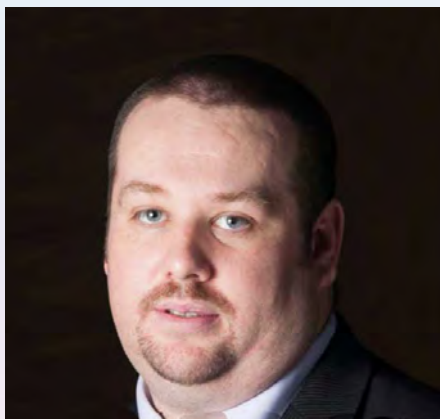
BRUCE WITH CHRIS TRATT
AND DON SHEARMAN





“

***I left to become
Director of Music
at Archbishop Beck
Catholic College.
Around this time, I
became editor of
the Winds magazine
for the BASBWE
association, a role
I continued in for a
number of years.***



PETER MEECHAN

An enduring lesson learnt attending the Midwest Band and Orchestra clinic in Chicago, USA and the annual Texas Music Educators conference in San Antonio, Texas was the realisation that good music students and ensembles just don't happen, but they must be taught by competent conductors and lifelong learning music educators, who place their student's music education and also their own learning education at the forefront of their musical life.

At a local level I became a member of the British Association of Symphonic Wind Bands and regularly attended the conferences at the Royal Northern College of Music Manchester. Thus began a lifelong friendship with Dr Tim Reynish and his wonderful "band of brothers".

DR. RANDY NAVARRE



Our paths crossed many times where support, encouragement and friendship were always given in abundance.

In the early years of the association, I remember Fred Mathias as a strong and committed member of the group. A BASBWE former chair, Peter Meechan also became a lifelong friend. I heard Peter's atmospheric composition "Epitaph for Hillsborough" at the annual BASBWE conference held at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester. I knew my students would want to perform this amazing work which was so poignant to them.



BRUCE WITH ANNE JAMES

The Archbishop Beck College wind ensemble gave this reflective piece its Liverpool premiere at St Francis De Sales Church, the closest Catholic Church to Anfield with Peter in the audience. Following the success of this collaboration the college community commissioned several compositions from Peter. One such commission was "Maiden Voyage, Hymn to a 'Ship of Sorrows', commemorating the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. It had its premiere at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, performed by the outstanding musicians of Archbishop Beck Catholic College.



CRAIG HAMILTON

Having been a member of the Association for several years I became a committee member meeting many wonderful British musicians. These included the fantastic Bill Connor and Dr. Anne James from Liverpool Hope University. In addition, Professor Craig Hamilton from Ouachita Baptist University. (The same university that at one time had Francis McBeth as Director of Bands). I also had the privilege to be Editor for the "Winds Magazine" for several years.

BILL CONNOR



So, thank you Declaration Overture for a fantastic journey and for being such a wonderful friend to myself and my many students over many years. Thank you to the wonderful people I have met along the way. I would not have wished to have taken any other pathway.

The Joy of Sax Quartets

Julie Collins (Saxophonist in The North Cheshire Wind Orchestra and The North West Saxophone Choir)

"Sax Day" at Archbishop Beck Catholic College, Liverpool



I recently organised two very successful and enjoyable saxophone ensemble play days in Liverpool. These events brought together about 35 saxophonists each time to play in a range of small ensembles throughout the course of a day. Each player had the experience of playing in a larger saxophone choir, a saxophone quartet and two different quartets or smaller ensembles (quintets, sextets, septets, octets). Although the majority of the players had participated in saxophone quartets before, for some players

it was their first experience small ensemble playing. For the established quartet player the day provided a great opportunity to explore new repertoire and to play with different musicians. The inspiration for organising these events was the joy I have found in playing in saxophone quartets and small ensembles over the course of many years.

I consider playing in a saxophone quartet to be as essential a part of a saxophonist's education as playing in an orchestra is for a

violinist. There is no better place for a saxophonist to develop the musical skills needed to play effectively in an ensemble, and I can't think of a musical setting where I personally have ever experienced more satisfaction from playing (except of course in a big band sax section!)

A great saxophone quartet functions in much the same way a great string quartet does. Although the various sizes of saxophone differ in their range, they all share a similar tonal quality which allows their sounds to blend very well. Because all the players perform on instruments of the same family, they understand one another and are able to accommodate each other in a way that many other mixed chamber groups might find more difficult. The flexibility of the instrument also allows for an astonishing array of textures, colours and volumes. It's truly a dynamic medium for chamber music which also offers an enormously varied range of repertoire.

Chamber music participation can benefit your band too

Its common in wind bands to have large numbers of saxophone players (particularly alto saxophone) and as a result individuals often lack accountability and fail to gain experience in “going it alone” with a part.



The sooner saxophonists learn to play in a quartet, or other small ensemble, the sooner they will learn the discipline and maturity required to play well in a larger setting. Small chamber group work will naturally encourage good teamwork and confidence can be built in what can be a less intimidating setting.

Development of leadership skills can be facilitated by playing in a small ensemble. The highest part player (usually the soprano sax) might be considered leader de facto, however, in a good ensemble the role of leader emerges from the score and any player could take on the lead at any given moment.

OTHER BENEFITS

Saxophone ensembles of various sizes can provide an opportunity to play soprano saxophone. Very few wind band pieces are scored for soprano saxophone but quite a lot of saxophonists may well own a soprano (perhaps due to it being relatively inexpensive compared to the other saxophones). Playing soprano in an ensembles can do wonders for the development of a player's intonation and listening skills.



The juxtaposition of composing or arranging and then playing your pieces with others is such a privilege.

In my experience the small saxophone ensemble also offers an opportunity for budding composers or arrangers to have their compositions played. My quartet is lucky enough to have a keen composer / arranger as a player and so we have the chance to play lots of original compositions and bespoke arrangements. Pauline Gordon is now a published composer (with Forton Music and Sempre music) for saxophone ensemble and continues to compose for various sizes of sax ensemble. I asked Pauline Gordon why she enjoys writing for saxophone ensembles; “The juxtaposition of composing or arranging and then playing your pieces with others is such a privilege. The feedback is immediate and is so useful in order to make all parts interesting and playable.”

Of course writing for saxophone ensembles could be a good stepping stone in the journey towards writing for wind band.

SAXOPHONE QUARTET COMBINATIONS

Quartets exists for various combinations of the most common saxophones ; S (soprano), A (alto), T (tenor) and (B) Baritone

SATB - *This is the most common combination for published quartet repertoire. The difference between the highest note on a soprano saxophone and the lowest on a baritone saxophone is just over 4 octaves, therefore this combination allows for a huge range in pitch. It's possible to find pieces that range from beginner level to advanced for this combination. Most of the key saxophone quartet repertoire tends to be written for this combination.*

AATB - *This combination is very common amongst the published repertoire and can sometimes accommodate a slightly less challenging second alto part. With this line up it is also possible to source repertoire that is suitable for beginners through to more advanced players.*

AAAT - *This is very useful for school groups that may lack a baritone and have a surplus of alto saxophones. It's much less common to find published music for this combination but it is possible to find a good range of easy to intermediate pieces.*

AATT - *A rarer combination to find published music for and it is more likely to range from beginner to intermediate pieces.*

AAAA - *This combination is mainly, but not exclusively, found in more accessible arrangements that will suit early beginners to intermediate players.*

ORGANISING A SAXOPHONE ENSEMBLES PLAY DAY

For those who would want to consider organising such an event I would like to share my experiences. A good starting point is to get together your own small ensemble, albeit a quartet, quintet or sextet with players of a similar standard. Players who have participated in quartets before are likely to have some pieces of music already. These will probably need to be pooled together to build up a collection.

Build up a collection of suitable music ranging from quartets to octets (AAAT quartets, quintets and sextets are very useful as they accommodate a larger proportion of the more commonly played saxophones)

Test out music to check its difficulty with your own group of players if possible. I collected a range of music of different levels of difficulty for various types of quartets, some for quintets and some for sextets and octets.

Organise music into folders (same combination of saxes and about the same level of difficulty) I grouped about 7-9 pieces which occupied players who were sight reading for about 60-70 minutes. Beginner players will get through the music at a much slower rate than this.

Find a suitable venue with enough rooms to house the number of ensembles you envisage accommodating. (I have used 7 rooms for 35-38 players in the past).

Plan the timings of your day. Consider how many playing sessions do you want. Allow breaks for changing rooms and swapping over folders of music.

Recruit players with the right types of saxophones. I tend to look for approximately one baritone per room and one soprano per room then you need to think about how many altos and tenors you could accommodate with the music that you have.

Recruit some flexible players. It's very useful if you have players who have more than one saxophone and are willing to play any of them as requested on the day. For my sax play days I have about 4 or 5 players that I know are flexible like that and this really helps to arrange the various combinations.

Consider how beginner groups can be supported. Inexperienced players will benefit from being led by a more experienced player who may just take on a coaching role rather than playing a part themselves.

Once you have recruited enough players you will need to plan out all of your groups that will be formed on the day, matching players with players of a similar standard and then providing them with suitable pieces of music (it helps to ask about grades and amount of experience when you recruit players).

BEYOND QUARTETS

Saxophone quintets are most commonly SAATB combinations but sometimes feature two tenors rather than two altos. There is some repertoire written for a big band saxophone section line up of AATTB, which can be useful. Sextets, which are most commonly scored for SAATTB,

allow for a richer harmonisation and players often find these larger combinations more satisfying to play as a result. I often play in a quintet or sextet and still find the group size manageable without the aid of a conductor.

Of course, two SATB quartets together can form an octet. Saxophone octets are commonly

found in the published repertoire. These tend to be of an intermediate or more advanced level and the octet is a more difficult size to manage without the aid of a conductor. Larger groups than eight form a saxophone choir which goes beyond the realm of chamber music.

If you are intending to charge a fee for the day then this will allow you to purchase more music of the types that you will need to give the right music to the players. I have found the following publishers and suppliers to be good sources of appropriately varied and good quality repertoire.

- Forton Music (www.fortonmusic.co.uk)
- Jon Halton Music (www.jonhalton.co.uk)
- June Emerson Wind Music (www.juneemersonwindmusic.com)
Stocks an enormous range of saxophone ensemble music
- Saxtet Publications (www.saxtetpublications.com)
- all available electronically to download as pdfs
- Sempre Publications (www.sempremusic.co.uk)

Finally, if you haven't listened to saxophone quartets before a good starting point would be to seek out recordings by The Apollo Saxophone Quartet, Marici Saxes and Artvark Saxophone Quartet.



Widening the Repertoire



In 2005 I was appointed as Musical Director of the Bloomsbury Woodwind Ensemble – an adult amateur group of perhaps 15 members who faithfully met on Tuesday evenings in the London School of Pharmacy in central London.

www.bloomsburymusicgroup.org.uk



The group had been set up over ten years earlier, by Graham Lyons, inventor of the 'Lyons C Clarinet'. There was certainly a strong sense of community there and the library consisted of just over a hundred flexible five-part arrangements. They included all the classics you might expect with shedloads of Handel and Mozart!

These arrangements were OK, and we managed to fill some interesting evenings, but it became obvious to me that if we were to build upon what Graham described as "probably one of London's oldest-running wind groups", I'd need to start widening the repertoire. Upon a little bit of research, I found that the wind publishers Maecenas had a few pieces for "woodwind ensemble with saxophones". We bought those scores and got stuck in with those along with Philip Sparke's Overture for Woodwinds, published by Anglo Music Press. The group really enjoyed them but there were parts we didn't have players for – leaving them in suspense as to know what these pieces really sounded like!

The group started to be more pro-active about attracting new members and at concerts, we did all we could to fill those missing parts. This all started to give a bit of flavour to what we might achieve in the future. The ambitions of the group grew, and we started to look at opportunities for funding. We commissioned our first piece in 2006 with funds from the PRSF.

The key moment came as the group applied for the Adopt-a-Composer scheme run jointly by Making Music and the SPNM. We were paired with the composer Christopher Hussey, and it was an immediate that Chris understood what we were about and, perhaps more importantly, how we should grow and develop. It was interesting perhaps because the Adopt-a-Composer scheme was all about writing for the exact forces of an amateur group – but rather than write music for the group, both Chris and I wanted to shape the group around the music. By the time we came to the end of the scheme and gave the world premiere, we had everyone on side, a sold-out premiere in one of

London's most prestigious venues and a shedload of optimism – just as much as the piles of Handel and Mozart we started with (don't get me wrong, I think both created some of the best music ever written!). We knew we had hit on something special when we attended a Christmas party just after our concert. Members were clearly pumped up about what they had been allowed to achieve.

Fast forward 12 years to 2020 and something completely strange happened – the Covid-19 Pandemic. Just before we went into lockdown, I had a sizeable budget to commission an amazing panel of arrangers and composers to write new works. The last of these was a commission by Judith Bingham, a hugely respected figure. As the lockdown appeared in March 2020, we were almost ready for a concert and... well you all know how it goes!

As of 2022 the landscape is now very different for musicians. As a father to two amazing kids, I had to think about all my responsibilities and evening work was becoming



more and more difficult. I took the decision to step down and allow a fresh and new opportunity to arise for someone else. But in doing so, the latest proposed recording is perhaps a chance to take stock and curate and celebrate some really innovate and interesting new music that I commissioned with BWE in my 16 years of service to them.

Outside of the Bloomsbury Woodwind Ensemble connections, the woodwind orchestra is something of a virtually unheard-of genre. We all know and accept the brass band as a genre, and it has always been my belief that we might just be able to get the woodwind orchestra to a better understanding. People describe this ensemble in many ways: woodwind ensemble, wind ensemble, even woodwind ensemble with saxophones – isn't a saxophone a woodwind instrument? I guess it's just a label!

Chris and I always felt woodwind orchestra was perhaps more fitting. Sure, the music is made up of 19 woodwind players, but

the word orchestra has a bit more meaning, perhaps even nuance. The best musical scores are ones which are written orchestrally – written skilfully, with instruments added for their timbre, character and colour – not necessarily a homophonic block of sound with no distinguishing characteristics. Our forthcoming recording with the woodwind section of the Czech Philharmonic is all about new textures, timbres, sounds, palettes and soundscapes. We want to draw every little nuance out and when you are working with musicians as amazing as the Czech Philharmonic, it's not hard to achieve. But of course, once the recording has taken place, the arduous task of mixing starts and that is perhaps where my story comes full circle with Chris – over our 16 years of working together, we know how what we want to achieve together – perhaps we did on day one but we now have more repertoire to choose from in order to achieve our goal.

In the recording sessions we will have a Decca Tree taking the overall mellifluous sound, but

we will complement this with individual close mics. This will allow us to get ever closer to a rich, deep and sonorous – dare I say it – orchestral sound.

It is with great thanks that BASBWE have supported us in this latest recording and its Chair, Bill Connor. Making any kind of commercial music just isn't financially viable, least of all niche concepts like the woodwind orchestra! But somehow it all makes sense, maybe that's the power of music and I've got shedloads of energy for that!

Shea Lolin

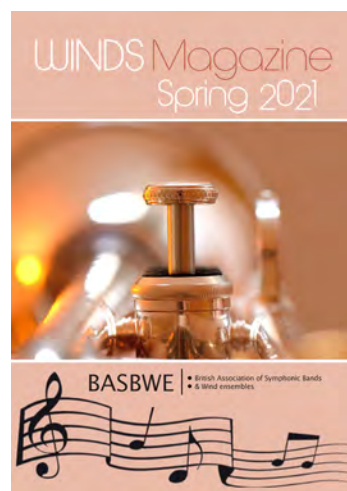


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