



Her Majesty's Coldstream Guards Band

In this article, it is my intention to give you a brief insight into what the band have been up to during this year, what new and exciting innovations have taken place and what new ventures are waiting ahead. To begin with I would like to take you back to the early days of how this worldwide, highly acclaimed band began life.

The Regimental Band was formed in 1785, when 12 German musicians were enlisted by His Royal Highness the Duke of York, Colonel of the Regiment, and were sent to England to replace the eight civilian performers who were hired by the month for the sole purpose of playing the King's Guard to the palace and back. This ceremonial duty which is still performed today, was performed by a band consisting of two oboes, four clarinets, two bassoons, one trumpet, two horns and a serpent. They were led by Music-Master Christopher Eley, remembered today for his slow march, *Duke of York*. Mr Eley was succeeded in turn by John Weyrauch in 1800 and by James Denman in 1815. By this time the band had been augmented by flutes, key bugles and trombones and now numbered 20 performers.

Moving slightly forward, on the 18 June 1944 a section of the Band conducted by Major Windram was playing for the service in the Guards' Chapel, Wellington Barracks when a German rocket crashed through the roof and exploded, wrecking the Chapel. Amongst those killed were Major Windram and five of the musicians; a further twelve members of the Band were injured, and all the instruments destroyed beyond repair. As a memorial to Major Windram and those killed fellow musicians



presented a beautiful conductor's stand, which can be found in the Guards Chapel, whilst a plaque was laid in the Chapel at Kneller Hall. The establishment today is 49 plus the Director of Music and with all the instruments that you would expect to find in a modern wind band.

'To entertain and keep the army in the public eye' is what we set out to achieve and did at the beginning of this very eventful year. The main focus of the Band's efforts, apart from plenty of public duties and a starring role in Raymond Gubbay's production of *La Bohème* at the Royal Albert Hall, was the preparation and execution of a series of concerts around the country.

This took the band to North Wales, East Anglia, Yorkshire and Gloucestershire. A number of demanding and stimulating solos were rehearsed and Major Graham Jones ensured that the core repertoire was of a suitably scintillating standard. Thus armed, the band set forth to bring the public in and knock them out of their seats.

First stop was Skegness. The concert opened with a mixed marching display/fanfare which involved quick and slow precision drill from the brass 'in Bearskins' to Richard Waterer's *Royal Salute*, moving into place for James Curnow's *Fanfare and Flourishes* and bringing the National Anthem to the audience via Gordon Jacob. The band's magnificent image and warm, exciting sound really had the crowd onside from the start. Next up, and a featured piece for the whole tour, was *The Red Machine*. This is a new composition from the pen of Peter Graham, newly appointed composer in residence, written especially for the band, that has its main theme derived from the Hymn Tune *Ein Feste Burg* which features every year at the Trooping of the Colour in the Quick Troop *Les Huguenots*. Right from the beginning, the music grabs the attention with sparkling effects and driving energy and finishes in similar style with an interlude featuring the various principals passing melodies around and showing off the quality of the band. The title is inspired by the nickname for the Coldstream Band adopted by the former Garrison Sergeant Major WO1 'Perry' Mason. After other pieces of equally challenging music (which I will describe as we travel around the country) the Band's soloist trombonist, Sergeant David Desmond, performed a beautiful arrangement by Adrian Drover of *My Funny Valentine*. His easy control in the upper register and sensitive musicianship brought an air of intimacy to the concert. Supported by the band in authentic style and with Dave finishing on a high lip trill, the applause from the audience took some time to die down.

The very next day saw the band in Lowestoft and, after much scrabbling around for eagerly craved cod 'n chips, the band set about the business of bringing music to the masses. Clarinettist, Colour Sergeant Gareth Preston, wowed the crowd with endless technique and bravado in his performance of Rossini's *Introduction, Theme and Variations*. The piece really takes the instrumentalist to extremes and Gareth responded with elegance and panache. The second half of the programme brought a real treat to the assembled crowd with a performance of Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story Dance Suite*.

Two days later and we were in Buxton, Derbyshire for the third and probably most challenging instalment yet. The band was achieving yet another first and, at the same time as entertaining a large audience in the quaint and delightful setting of Buxton Opera House, the band recorded a DVD of the live performance. There was plenty of work that day with all the technical angles covered by the production team from 'The World of Brass'. More sterling work from both band and Director meant that the public's enjoyment was not diminished in the slightest by the presence of cameras and sound engineers. Another regular musical feature of the tour and, particularly well received in Buxton, was musician James Scott's efforts, as vocalist for the band, of Wing Commander Bob Wiffin's

arrangement *Songs of World War II*. Between the fine arrangement of songs such as *I'll Be Seeing You* and *A Nightingale Sang In Berkeley Square*, and the slapstick treatment of *Kiss Me Goodnight Sergeant Major*, James's smooth vocals, to quote the brass band reviewer *4 Bars Rest*, had the audience 'eating out of his hand'.

With not much time to recover, we arrived at St George's Hall in Bradford. A selection of Beatles songs was played in medley format called *Echoes of an Era* that showcases the band's large reservoir of performing talent and capacity for broad, rich sounds. Lance Corporal Richard Evans sizzled on the piccolo trumpet solo in *Penny Lane*, Musician James Scott showed a budding ability in improvisation on the flugel horn and Sergeant Dave Desmond rocked the house with more assured licks from his trombone in *Hey Jude*.

The band presented a moving performance of Alfred Reed's version of *Greensleeves* at Rhyl. This must surely be a challenge to any arranger, as the tune is so well known. Reed's treatment is masterful and delicate, swelling from a gentle exposition of the tune, played with maximum sensitivity by Musician John Storey on euphonium, to a grand majestic statement followed by a haunting diminuendo. The Band relishes this sort of music and played with passion and richness. The combination of a true 'bass-end' acting as engine room and the balanced, quality of tone from the middle of the band, provided the listener with music that made the hairs on the back of the neck stand on end.

Before the last concert in Cheltenham Town Hall, the band travelled up to the University of Salford to play in a joint concert with the students. This was the inaugural concert in recognition of a special relationship with the university, as the Coldstream Guards Band took up as 'Band in Residence'.

The concert included all of the previous highlights and more. The finale that Major Graham Jones chose was the fourth movement of Gustav Holst's *The Planet 'Jupiter'*. From the opening clarinet flourish through to the grand *tutti* statement at the end, the band was responsive and right inside the music. Major Jones made mention, in his preamble, of the difficulty of living in such dark times as these and the selection of *The Bringer Of Jollity* was well placed especially because of the emotive and very British tune *I Vow To Thee My Country*. Thus encouraged, the audience departed reassured and entertained by the professionalism and ability displayed by the band and looked forward to many more years of concerts from the Coldstream Guards Band.

The band has also been in the recording studio during the year, recording the wonderful and exciting music of Peter Graham and we have also recorded some great traditional wind band gems from the pen of Gordon Jacob.

The Coldstream Guards Band under Mackenzie Rogan was the first British Army band to visit one of the Dominions, when they toured Canada in 1896; they were also in 1907 the first Guards Band to visit France at the invitation of the French Government, having gained the approval of King Edward VII. In keeping with tradition the band will be visiting Canada and America at the beginning of 2005 and later on in October the band will be undertaking a tour of Japan.

If you are interested in keeping up to date with the band's whereabouts and future activities, visit our website at www.coldstreamguardsband.co.uk.

Perhaps you might be interested in a varied, thrilling and rewarding musical career. If so please contact the bandmaster for more information via email at bandmaster@coldstreamguardsband.co.uk or call 0207 414 3299 or alternatively write to:

Bandmaster, Coldstream Guards Band Wellington Barracks
Birdcage Walk London SW1E 6HQ