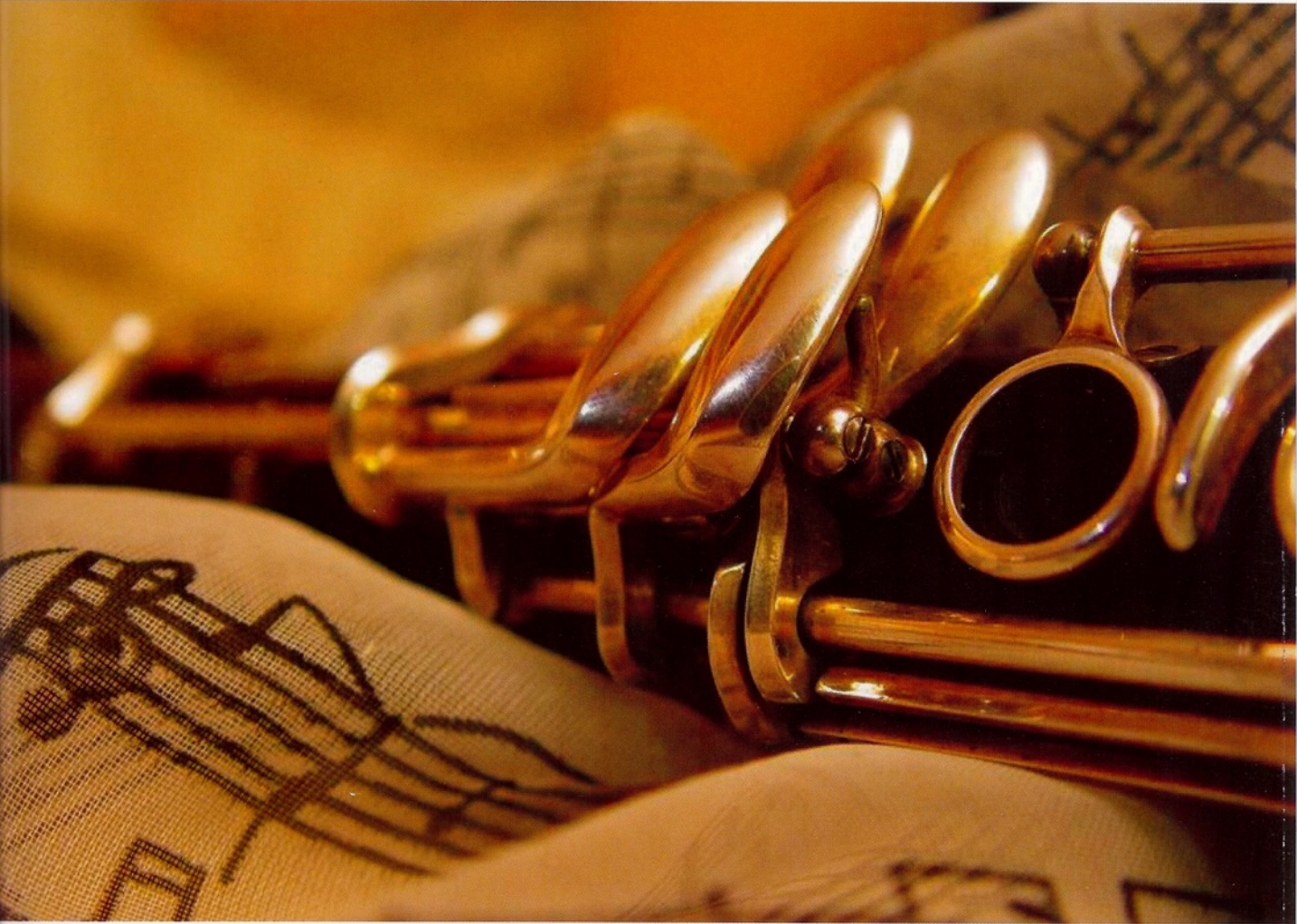


WINDS Magazine

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BASBWE |

- British Association of Symphonic Bands
- & Wind ensembles



EYNSFORD CONCERT BAND

Eynsford Concert Band is a symphonic wind ensemble that has been based in the small Kentish village of Eynsford since 1972.

The band has 50 playing members from all over the South East of England that aspire to attain the highest standards of musicianship within a social and friendly environment. Eynsford Concert Band has gained an international reputation having toured Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Netherlands, Malta, Spain and Belgium as well as playing aboard cruise ships in the Fjords of Norway and the Mediterranean, providing on-board entertainment.

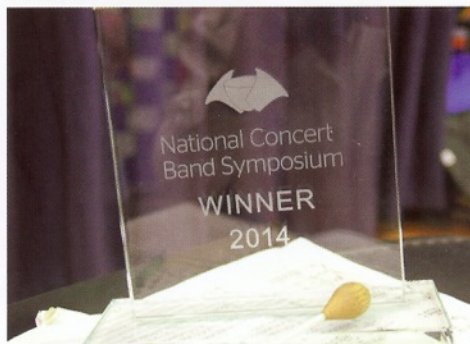


The band enjoys performing a wide range of concert band repertoire from popular music arrangements and orchestral transcriptions to classic and modern wind band works. They have recorded three CDs, releasing *Heritage* in January 2010 that featured a Suite by Nigel Clarke written especially for the band. The band is firmly rooted in its local community, supporting local events and raises substantial amounts for local charities.



Michael Smith BA(Mus) LRSM, took up the Musical Directorship of Eynsford Concert Band in 2012, their 40th Anniversary year. Mike was born in Warwickshire and joined the Army as a clarinettist, serving in England, Northern Ireland and Cyprus before being selected to attend the three year Bandmaster Course at The Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall. He graduated in 1996 winning the Commandant's Prize and the coveted Worshipful Company of Musicians Medal for best all-round Student Bandmaster of the year whilst completing his Bachelor of Arts Degree and gaining his Licentiate of the Royal School of Music in Conducting. In October 2010 he was appointed Director of Music The Band of the Corps of Royal Engineers in Chatham, Kent. After just 8 months with the Engineers Band he was asked to take up the much coveted appointment of Director of Music the Band of the Grenadier Guards in June 2011. In July 2013 Michael left the Band of the Grenadier Guards to return to Headquarters Corps of Army Music in a staff officer post and also taking on the role of Corps Secretary, Corps of Army Music.

In April 2015 he was appointed Chief Instructor at The Royal Military School of Music where he is responsible for the training of Army Bandmasters and Musicians. In July 2014, Eynsford Concert Band was crowned National Champion Concert Band following their performance at the National Concert Band Symposium (NCBS) held in Canterbury. This was followed by accepting an invitation to host the 2015 NCBS Gala Concert. In May 2016, the band will represent the UK in the first European Championship for Wind Orchestras, to be held in the Tivoli Vredenburg concert hall, Utrecht.



To provide some insight to

'life with Eynsford Concert Band'

we interviewed a number of members of the band to get their thoughts on to what being a member means to them.

Those interviewed were:

Paul Gould (PG): *Founding member, Trombonist and former long-standing Chairman of the band*

Wendy Eaton (WE): *A teaching assistant from Tonbridge, Kent. A member for 39 years playing Clarinet*

Graham Bell (GB): *An Investment Business Director and founding member from Crowborough, Kent, playing Saxophone*

Nigel Keen (NK): *A Flute and Piccolo player and founding member now based in Bristol*

Pete Ringrose (PR): *A BBC Sound Engineering semi-professional jazz double-bass player who also plays trumpet for Eynsford Concert Band, joining in 2012 with his wife Sue who plays Flute*

Alicia Newitt (AN): *A French Horn player from Sidcup, Kent, who has been with the band for nearly three years and is a student currently undergoing teacher training*

Alan Simpson (AS): *The band's most local member and principle Oboist for the past 8 years, working as a music tutor in local schools*

What are your earliest memories of the band, and how did you get involved to start with?

PG: I started playing the trombone when I moved to secondary school. I had intended taking up the cornet, but none were available, so I ended up with a trombone that was virtually as tall as me. I enjoyed playing it straight away and practised every night (not something I can say I do now), but had to limit the music I played since I could not reach far enough to get 6th/7th position (I always seemed out of tune on those notes, but I guess nothing's changed there!) A couple of years later, I joined Kent Brass Band where I met another trombonist...Robin O'Connell, the band's founder.

WE: I can't remember the day I joined, but I do remember how much I relied on my parents to ferry me to our rehearsals, competitions and Sunday afternoon bandstand concerts. I also remember us squeezing onto the stage in the Eynsford Village Hall and I still don't know how we did it!

GB: I joined the band shortly after it was formed and remember because I had applied to join the Dartford Youth Orchestra and was put on the waiting list. In the meantime, the conductor of DY0 had heard of a new wind band in Eynsford and suggested I go along...and here I am, 40 years later!

PR: Looking for a new musical challenge, I started playing the trumpet eight years ago and before I realised what a difficult instrument it is. With perseverance I reached a suitable standard to consider joining a band. I joined Eynsford Concert Band in 2012 for a probationary period, sitting on the end playing 6th trumpet, trying to keep my nose clean and not playing in the gaps. After the three months had expired I received a welcome letter disguised as a demand for subs, so I knew I was in!

AN: I first got involved with the band through Carol, our principal horn player. One of my earliest memories with the band was my first ever concert with them - a Christmas concert at St Nicholas Church in Sevenoaks.

AS: I first encountered the band during a visit to Farningham; I was visiting my now partner, who was familiar with the band, and suggested I went along to check it out. I remember being very impressed by the standard, and from that meeting I decided I would join as soon as I moved down to Kent. I believe I played clarinet on that occasion, and I'm not even sure it was mine!

How have you seen the band change since you have been involved with it?

GB: Invariably, as everyone has got older with work and family commitments, keeping the social connection with all of the band's members is difficult, which is why our band tours are so important. We used to take on many smaller events - school fêtes; park concerts; performing at the Cutty Sark; and even the odd wedding, but now as we have other commitments we now tend to focus on a smaller number of larger events.

WE: Over the years, as the Musical Directors have changed, so has the selection, and standard of music, which in turn has developed the musicality of the members of the band to where we are today.

PG: The dynamics of the band changing due to none of us being as young as we used to be.

AN: Some new faces and a wider variety in the music we play and perform

AS: I'm not sure how much the band has changed. I think we still play at a high standard when we are on show, and the audience reaction backs that up.

What was the hardest piece you have personally had to play?

NK: What, other than "Short Ride in a Fast Machine"?!

WE: The Clarinet part to "Bach's Toccata and Fugue". More recently, "Captain Marco"

PG: There're all getting pretty hard now days, but probably the most difficult to date was Looking -In By Tom Davoren

GB: Difficult one. I would have to say "The Cowboys", and "Peterloo"

AN: La Mezquita De Cordoba by Julie Giroux - it is a fantastic piece of music although it does have some tricky passages.

AS: I think one of the more difficult pieces to play, in recent memory, has been Captain Marco. There was a lot of time spent rehearsing it, and some hairy moments while we rehearsed, but the end result spoke for it's self as it won us the National Championship

There must have been some very funny moments over the years, especially on tour - what has made you laugh the most?

PG: Over the years there have been many memorable and funny occasions, performing to a packed audience at a festival in Valencia at 2.00am is always one that sticks in my mind. But there is a strict rule of „what goes away on tour, stays away on tour“. Many other events that come to mind are not in the public domain and shall stay that way...but rest assured, they were fun all the way!

GB: There have been so many...playing a concert on a football field in a small village in the Catalan mountains, with a bonfire as light and being attacked by thousands of flying ants; arriving at Malta airport and not being able to get the Timpani through the doors in the arrival lounge; walking through the villages in Malta on an Easter parade for seven hours and being given a fried egg sandwich at the end of it; or arriving back to Roedean Girls Schools from a night out in Brighton to realise the next morning that someone had parked my car on the front lawn!

PR: Two years in came my first tour, and I managed to smuggle my wife Sue into the band on flute, making us one of three married couples in the band. Eynsford Concert Band is the only band in the world with a pair of identical twin tuba players, and before we could tell them apart Sue and I would while away many a happy hour playing the party game 'Brian or Steve?' The band is a wonderful mix of musical discipline and social lack of it. Nowadays some of the funniest moments happen on the members' social media pages.

AN: My first ever band tour was to Malta back in 2014 and there were so many fantastic memories. But having childish and silly pranks played on me by my fellow French Horn section seems to be the memory that sticks and makes me laugh the most.

AS: I have only been on one tour with the whole band; to Malta two years ago. It was a great experience, made even better, by a performance of "It's raining Men", by the brass players of the band in a restaurant, as I celebrated my 50th birthday. Absolutely brilliant and totally unexpected.

What has the band done that you are most proud of?

GB: The recording of our CDs and the support for charities, servicemen and the local community is certainly something I think we should all be proud of. I also will never forget the performance we gave in Valencia, Spain, at 2,00 am in the morning.

PG: We had a number of high profile concerts, including several returns to the Queen Elizabeth Hall, but for me none more so than performing at the Royal Albert Hall in 1984. Who would have thought that a village concert band would have a chance to play with the London Philharmonic Orchestra at such a prestigious venue?

WE: The competitions which we often took part in, the excitement and pride in the band when we did well - which I remember was also quite often. One other memorable band trip for me was to Cyprus playing on BFBS radio on the British Air Base open day where the Red Arrows also provided a fabulous air demonstration.

PG: Another memorable moment was our "Grade-1-Athon" when the whole band took up different instruments to pass a Grade 1 exam for charity. We raised nearly £15,000 for ChildLine with that one event: what an achievement! I even learnt to play the Alto Sax...but I won't be giving up the day job!!

NK: The Royal Albert Hall concerts in 1984 - the highlight of my playing career. Two full-on Friday nights in the popular NatWest Bank Classics for Pleasure concerts in the run up to Christmas, co-starring with the London Philharmonic Orchestra - some memorable moments and some scary moments too!

AN: Winning the National Concert Band Symposium of course!

AS: I think the charity work, the band undertakes is a thing that we should all be very proud of, as well as the £18,000 it has raised with the Grenadier Guards band for SSAFA. I think if it is a musical context; winning the championship is an obvious choice, and being asked back to play the gala concert.

What does being a member of the band mean to you?

PG: The band has been a major part of my life, even changing what college course I attended during my training so I could be free on a Tuesday night for rehearsals... and I would not have changed it for the world. To be part of an organisation which has achieved so much and still has further to go... and to make so many friends has been priceless.

GB: Having been in the band for 40 years now, it has been and continues to be an important part of my life. I have been in the band for longer than I have done anything else (work, education, etc.) Like other dedicated people in the band I have worked for long periods both in the UK and abroad. It would have been simple to leave due to other commitments, but although I have always enjoyed music, enjoying music in ECB is the most important thing. It's not a hobby or interest to me, it's quite simply a way of life.

PR: The recent success of the band is down to our brilliant musical director Mike Smith. He is the clearest conductor I've ever seen, and he inspires the sections to compete for those elusive compliments. My proudest moment was winning at the National Concert Band Symposium in 2014, and I believe this was down to Mike's choice of programme and the fired up way he conducted us. But I'm also proud of the large amounts the band raises for charities each year.

AN: It means a lot. Although I haven't been in the band for a huge amount of time, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time so far.

AS: Being a member of the band gives me an opportunity to perform at a high level, and to play challenging music in a variety of genres. It also means performing at prestigious events and providing entertainment for our audiences. I enjoy the camaraderie in the band and the knowledge that there is always support within for those who may need it.

What does being asked to represent the UK at the European Championships mean to you?

PG: Coming from a Brass Band world I thrive on festivals/competitions and was pleased to take part in the national Concert Band Symposium last year and best of all to win. To take this further to the European Championship is exciting and I hope we are able to achieve the same result...World Championships here we come !!!

GB: To represent one's country internationally is an honour not many people are fortunate enough to experience. So I feel very privileged to have this opportunity in 2016.

WE: From humble beginnings joining a little village band as a child 40 years ago, I consider it quite an achievement to progress to representing my country doing something I enjoy.

PR: The prospect of the European Championships is both exciting and daunting too. For a band from a tiny Kentish village, I fear we will feel like a small fish in a very big sea!

AN: Another chance to go away with some great people to play some fantastic music, and bragging rights of course.

AS: Being asked to represent the UK at the European Championships is a high honour, indeed, and I look forward to hearing the band rise to this even greater challenge, and possibly even return victorious. If not; the experience of the event will be another fantastic musical memory, that will stay with me forever.

Mike Smith - MD



How did you get involved with ECB?

I was attending a BASBWE Festival in Bromley in late 2011. ECB were performing at the event and had placed an advertisement in the programme for a new Musical Director as their MD John Hutchins was moving on. Nigel Clarke, who I had met through my work at The Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, had links with the band having written his piece Heritage Suite for them so I asked him a few questions and he introduced me to the chairman, Brian Bennett. Following a brief chat he invited me to audition for the post, which I did, and was delighted to be asked to take on the role in May 2012.

How have you seen the band change since you have been involved with it?

Under John's guidance ECB was already a very capable band so there was little need for me to make any major changes. Probably the most noticeable change over the last couple of years has been the band members own analysis of the band's performance and their expectation of what it should be producing musically.

What has been the most difficult piece you have conducted?

The first run through of any new major work for the band is usually a test for all. If I was to mention a specific piece, strangely I'm currently finding conducting the coda of the transcription of Tchaikovsky's Waltz from Sleeping Beauty a challenge.

What has the band done that you are most proud of?

Winning the National Concert Band Symposium in 2014 was a very enjoyable experience but I have got the most satisfaction from the way the band performs in a concert. They have come up with superb performances on every occasion, in particular their performances in the 3 combined concerts we have done with the Grenadier Guards Band are something I can look back on with a sense of pride. The fact that the concerts have helped raise £18,000 for SSAFA has been an added bonus.

What does being asked to represent the UK at the European Championships mean to you?

It's a great honour and a challenge both I and the band are looking forward to taking on.

What do you enjoy about the band?

The weekly banter in rehearsals is excellent. There are some great characters in ECB which makes Tuesday evening rehearsals for me a very pleasurable experience.

Why did you take on the role?

I had recently returned to mainland UK from an assignment to Northern Ireland where I had been involved with a couple of civilian bands in addition to my military role. I was missing 'banding', or the 'craik' as they call it in Northern Ireland, and was on the look out for any suitable opportunities close to home. Something that would challenge me and help develop my own musical and leadership skills. ECB fit the bill on all fronts and I was very pleased to be invited to take on the role.

What was your first impression of the band?

Very good. Their performance at the BASBWE Festival was confident and polished so I was very keen to become involved with them.

What has been the biggest challenge?

Getting the band to change key! I'm still working on that one.

What has been your greatest achievement?

I hope it will be doing well in the European Championships for Wind Bands in 2016. Getting the opportunity to share the stage with some of Europe's finest wind orchestras is a great achievement for a small band from a small North Kent village.

What are you most nervous about?

Forgetting what I am going to say to introduce the next item in a concert. Remembering the names of band members is not one of my fortes which can be a little embarrassing if they are a soloist and you're giving them a big introduction.

What is your weekly routine/preparation before each rehearsal?

Score preparation for me is the key to a successful rehearsal. If I know what I am doing and where the difficulties within a piece are for the players I can prepare a rehearsal schedule of main aims I want to achieve during a rehearsal.

Where does your inspiration for concert programmes come from?

Most of my concert ideas come whilst out walking my dogs. I make a note of pieces that could work together, sometimes I will have a particular piece in mind for a finale item and base the programme around that one piece. This was the case for the bands latest concert with the Grenadier Guards called 'For Queen & Country' where I wanted to use Jupiter from The Planets and specifically the 'I Vow to Thee My Country' section. Other times I will think about pieces that fit a particular theme such as our Americana and Inventions concert. I have been known to use some tenuous links for justifying a pieces inclusion but to ensure you have a balanced programme you sometimes need to push the boundaries.

What is your ambition for the band?

For us all to keep enjoying making music and entertaining our audiences.

What are the main differences between working with ECB and the Grenadiers Guards Band?

The Grenadiers are a professional, full-time band so planning a programme of music and rehearsals can generally be left until a little closer to an event. With ECB, because we only get together for a couple of hours a week, planning for concerts, especially if you want to feature any major new wind band works, takes much more time and forethought.

Mike Smith