

Groundbreaking European consortium commission announced



Edward Gregson will celebrate his 75th birthday in July 2020, and in a unique collaboration between five European partner countries the composer has been commissioned to write a new work for their National brass band competitions in 2020/2021. It is a fitting tribute to the impressive contribution he has made to the brass band repertoire over the last 50 years.

The five partner countries are Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the UK (British Open). The première performance will take place at the British Open in Birmingham in September 2020, followed by National premières in the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland in the same year, and Norway in February 2021. The five countries will have exclusive rights to the work until its general publication in March 2021.

It is clear from this collaborative commission that Consortiums of this kind will play an increasingly important role in the future, and this is the first step to closer cooperation between the organisers of major National Brass Band competitions.

Speaking to British Bandsman Edward Gregson commented: "I am delighted to have received this commission for such an impressive array of brass band competitions in Europe. I am very grateful to Jappie Dijkstra for coordinating the project so effectively - no easy matter for something of this magnitude. I hope to write a work that lives up to the quality of the many bands and conductors involved, whilst not forgetting that the audiences will expect a work that they can listen to and enjoy many times over. Quite a task!

Edward Gregson continued: "The commission was something Jappie Dijkstra and I discussed some time ago. He thought it would be an appropriate way to celebrate my 75th birthday; he also wanted the challenge of trying to involve at least four European countries. In the end he managed five, so great credit to him. It did take some time to iron out all the details with the five participating countries, but they have all been very positive and helpful, and I'm very grateful to them and to Jappie. He's a mover and shaker, as his major involvement in persuading EBBA to take the European competition to Lithuania in 2020 aptly demonstrates."

Although the concept of this piece is yet to be revealed, the composer did have this to say: "I can't say too much about the piece at the moment

because it's still in its early stage of composition, although I have completed a rough first draft. However, if I say that a number of my brass band works use variation form, that might give you a clue! Its subject matter will also have an historical link."

Asked to what extent the various governing bodies have offered input in terms of content, Edward Gregson commented: "The governing bodies haven't requested any liaison, nor have they had any input apart from a request regarding duration. I think they trust me enough to write a work that will satisfy all their requirements i.e. be musically and technically challenging, but will also communicate with their audiences.

"After all, I'm hardly a beginner at this as I hope my track record shows. But forget the tag of 'test-piece' to this commission - first and foremost it has to be a piece of music in its own right - a work that will hopefully stand the test of time. It's reassuring to know that my first major 'test-piece', *Connotations* (1977), is still being performed all over the brass band world. I'll try very hard not to let anyone down!"

Commenting on whether he expects this to be the type of collaboration we expect to see more of in the future, he said: "I think it will be the only way that European competitions (including the UK) will be able to afford to commission major composers in the future. I could say a lot more about that, but now is not the time or place to discuss it further. Suffice it to say that composing is not a hobby, it's a profession!"

Further details will be released during the course of 2019. ■

Gray and Black to head up conducting seminar

Bathgate Band have announced that Russell Gray will lead a conducting seminar weekend in collaboration with the band, the eighth time he has hosted the event. It will take place on the weekend of 23 - 24 March at the band's headquarters and will culminate with a concert featuring the conducting delegates at the Regal Theatre in Bathgate on Sunday 24 March at 7.30pm. On the Saturday, Russell Gray will work with delegates on the Championship Section test-piece, *Seascapes* (Ray Steadman-Allen), which will have been used at the Scottish Championship a fortnight previously.

Russell Gray commented: "There will be a warm welcome and the band is experienced to aid the delegates in front of them. We will enjoy a highly enjoyable and productive weekend with plenty of friendly banter leading to a great concert." A conducting foundation course led by Stuart Black will take place at the same time, aimed at new and inexperienced conductors seeking to develop their skills.

Talking about the initiative, Stuart Black commented: "This is about sharing experiences and challenges and working on improvements. Conducting at this level is also about encouragement and giving the delegates confidence in front of their own bands."

Delegates will get the chance to work with the Bathgate Junior Band on basic baton technique and rehearsal preparations, whilst those taking part will also conduct the band at the Sunday evening concert.

For more details about either course, please contact: rusgray@btinternet.com (Advanced) Sblack.flugel@gmail.com (Foundation) ■