

Composers on Composing for Band

Edward Gregson

A. Biography

Edward Gregson was born in Sunderland, County Durham, England, on 23 July 1945. He was educated at Manchester Central Grammar School, the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) and the University of London.

On leaving the RAM he combined part-time teaching and composing for a number of years before becoming a full-time lecturer at Goldsmiths College, University of London (1976). He became Head of Composition, followed by appointments to two research posts: Reader and then Professor of Music (1989 – 96). In 1996 he was appointed Principal of the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, a post he still holds.

He studied piano and composition at the Royal Academy of Music from 1963-67 and won five prizes for composition, including the coveted Frederick Corder Memorial Prize for his *Brass Quintet* (1967), a work commercially recorded by the Hallé Brass Consort and broadcast by the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble. This was his first important success as a composer and led to a publishing contract with Novello, who remain as his main publisher today.

Since leaving the RAM he has worked only to commission and his music has been performed, broadcast and recorded worldwide. He has written for all genres including orchestral, wind band, brass band, chamber, instrumental, vocal and choral. His major orchestral works include *Music for Chamber Orchestra* (1968), *Contrasts: a concerto for orchestra* (1983 rev. 2001), and concertos for tuba (1976), trombone (1979), trumpet (1983), clarinet (1994), piano (1997), violin (2000) and saxophone (2006). In 1999 he completed an extended work for mezzo soprano, choir and orchestra entitled *The Dance, forever the Dance*.

His music has been performed by major orchestras around the world including: the London Symphony, Royal Scottish National, the five BBC orchestras, Hallé, and Bournemouth (in the UK); Detroit, Louisville, Atlanta, and Albany (in the USA); and many others in Europe and the Far East.

Of particular significance in his output is music for the medium of wind and brass. Among his major works for brass band are *Connotations* (1977), *Dances and Arias* (1984), *Of Men and Mountains* (1991) and *The Trumpets of the Angels* (2000). In the field of Wind Band and Ensemble his major works include *Metamorphoses* (1979), *The Sword and the Crown* (1991), and *The Kings Go Forth* (1996). He has also used wind ensembles in works such as his *Missa Brevis Pacem* (1988) and *Concerto for Piano and Wind* (1997). His wind and brass music has been performed and recorded by many of the leading ensembles worldwide.

He has occasionally written music for other art forms, including film, television and the theatre. In 1988 he was nominated by the British Academy of Composers and Songwriters for an Ivor Novello Award in the category of 'Best Theme from a TV or Radio Programme' for his theme music for BBC Television's Young Musician of the Year programmes. In the same year he also embarked on a major commission from the Royal Shakespeare Company to write the music for an epic series of five history plays produced in Stratford-upon-Avon and London.

Edward Gregson is an Honorary Professor of Music of Manchester University; he is also an honorary Doctor of Music of both Sunderland University and Lancaster University and an honorary Doctor of Arts of Manchester Metropolitan University. He is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal College of Music as well as Dartington College of Arts. He is also active in serving on various important boards connected with the music profession and music education.

Edward Gregson has been married to Susan Smith since 1967. She has written a number of texts and poems which he has set to music. They currently live in the small hamlet of Pott Shrigley, on the edge of the Peak District near Macclesfield, Cheshire, England. They have two grown-up sons: Mark, an actor, and Justin, a musician in the popular field. His brother, Bramwell Gregson, who lives in London, Ontario, Canada, is a well-known conductor, clinician and adjudicator in the field of brass music and is also music director of both Intrada Brass (Toronto) and Brass Roots (London).

You can find out more about Edward Gregson and his music through his website:
www.edwardgregson.com

B. The Creative Process

I was once asked to take part in a series of interviews by an academic psychologist who was undertaking some research into *The Psychology of the Creative Process*. I found this to be both illuminating and daunting. In a series of discussions I undertook, I started to understand more about my creative process, something which perhaps had been hidden at a subconscious, or even subliminal level. Most composers I know find it difficult to describe how it is that ideas come to them. The more laborious process of working on a composition once the ideas have been formed is, of course, more predictable. At this point, the composer's own experience on a technical level comes into play, using all the skills that he or she has acquired in terms of melody, harmony, counterpoint, rhythm and orchestration. Alas, whilst the original ideas are the really exciting part of being a composer, the rest is blood (metaphorically speaking), sweat and tears.

I am a traditionalist in the sense that I still work with pencil and paper. I find that the idea of actually composing on a computer to be an anathema and I probably will never go down that path, even though I have acquired the necessary software skills to be able to set my music on computer if required. I am fortunate, however, in that I still have publishers who are willing to have the music set from my manuscript, and for that I am very grateful.

When I embark on a new work it is the structure and form that I try to map out first of all. I am one of those composers who requires a fairly long gestation period in order to let the ideas evolve slowly, whilst making sketches as necessary. This is usually followed by the writing of a three or four stave short score, sometimes with indications of orchestrations, but usually not as I have a clear sense of the orchestration when the ideas come to me. I do not dream music as Stravinsky is reputed to have done (I only wish I could – life would be so much easier!) but I often have a strong sense of being in a quasi-subconscious state, where ideas seem to be working themselves out without me being aware of it. This subconscious process seems to me to be rather mystical and certainly flies in the face of intellectual control.

As to the ideas themselves, I often start with a small set of pitches which will often form the basis of the entire material of the work. From this evolves both the melodies and harmonies. However, a melodic idea will sometimes come to me in an almost complete form and then the process will evolve in a slightly different way. In any

case, for me, melody is pre-eminent and always has been. It is nearly always at the emotional core of the music.

I suppose if I try to look objectively at my music, it might be described as a mixture of a strong rhythmic impetus together with a colourful harmonic palette (a fondness for intervals of the 2nd, 4th and 7th). At certain times I have incorporated elements of the twelve tone technique into my music and indeed have written a few pieces using that language fairly strictly, but I mainly compose within an expanded tonal context as I find the building blocks of tonality to be pivotal as far as the structure is concerned. Within a piece, however, there are often times when the harmony is non-tonal, or at least non-functional, and for me this adds tension and contrast. I have also used some aspects of aleatoricism in my music and, more recently, minimalism. Here, I am attracted to its essentially textural process and in some ways to its simplicity.

Like most creative artists I am affected by the world around me and although little of my music is programmatic there have been times when I have used overtly programmatic ideas. In addition I am strongly attracted to other art forms, such as poetry, the visual arts, architecture and the theatre, and find them to be stimulating for my work.

C. The Approach to Orchestration

I always seem to have had a strong sense of colour in my music. This comes through most obviously in my approach to orchestration, which displays a preference for primary colours. In this sense I am attracted to the Russian (or French) approach to scoring as opposed to say the German. I admire Tchaikovsky for his transparency, Debussy and Ravel for their sophisticated inventiveness in timbre, texture and colour, and Shostakovich for his darkly-hued and individual sense of instrumentation.

To expand for a moment on my liking for primary colours: I often compose using pure colour as opposed to mixing or doubling these in order to thicken the texture of the music. I also like using chamber sonorities within a large canvas, similar to the way in which Mahler does in his symphonies, and exploiting solo instruments in less usual ways (for example, low flutes or high tuba). I find that this not only provides a telling contrast of texture and timbre, but also a more individual approach to writing for one's musicians.

I am attracted to the challenge of handling a large symphony orchestra, or a Symphonic Wind Band. One American critic referred to me as 'a pin-point orchestrator', probably a back-handed compliment but nevertheless indicative of my approach to orchestration. Obviously the more monochrome the genre is (for example a brass band as opposed to say an orchestra which has the added palette of wind and strings), the more inventive you have to be to search out new colours. Here, I have explored the use of the multiple division of instrumental sections (e.g. tubas into four parts) or using many different kinds of mutes.

The challenge of writing for wind band is immense as it is often uncertain as to how many players will be performing the music. As we know, there can be anything between 35 and well over 100 players in a band, with multiple players on some parts, (particularly, of course, flutes and clarinets). The art of orchestration is in one sense linked to the aural process of hearing the exact details in your head, including the ability to balance textures. This requires knowing the number of musicians who are going to be performing the work, and I find this aspect to be somewhat problematic in writing for the wind band. In the end, one has to rely on the judgement of the conductor in reducing numbers (i.e. doublings) at certain times. Nevertheless I agree strongly with the sentiment expressed by a previous writer in this series (*David Maslanka in Volume 2*) that if a composer specifies the exact number of players required that is what should be adhered to – no discussion!

Finally, a word about my use of percussion. When I first started writing for brass band [in the UK] during the early 1970s I was often criticised for writing too much percussion in my scores. Admittedly, this was within a rather traditional world, where even timpani had only recently come to be accepted. However, in works such as *Dances and Arias* I wrote for over 20 percussion instruments, creating in the process sonorities new to the brass band – this was exciting! Many of my works for wind band, especially my two large scale symphonic suites *The Sword and the Crown* and *The Kings Go Forth*, use a wide array of percussion instruments in dramatic and somewhat different ways. But then the genesis of these works came about as music written specially for the theatre where the musicians sometimes played on stage, mainly as a dramatic commentary on the action (for example, the various battle scenes).

The sheer range and diversity of percussion instruments available to today's composers makes for an exciting and colourful component of orchestration. In addition, the performing standards of today's percussionists are so high that composers are able to write for them in a virtuoso manner – if they so wish.

It is a far cry from the days of the bass drum, snare drum and cymbals!

D. Views from the Composer to the Conductor pertaining to Score Study and Preparation

The preparation and realisation of a score is down to the skill and experience of the conductor in charge of the process. Within the wind band world, essentially an amateur music world despite the fact that the best university and college ensembles are at a professional standard, the quality of conductors can be variable, to say the least. This can present a real problem in that if a conductor does not possess an adequate level of knowledge then he or she will be confined to a rather narrow and conservative spectrum of repertoire. As a result, if the conductor is working within the educational field, this will be to the detriment of the young players who need to develop as musicians and well as technicians and who need a constant flow of different kinds of challenging music (and here I do not just mean on a technical level).

A conductor should be endlessly curious, exploring and studying works outside his or her immediate field. This will lead to a wider acquisition of technical knowledge, as well as a greater musical understanding. For example it is pointless trying to interpret a work like Stravinsky's *Symphony of Wind Instruments* if you haven't studied other works by Stravinsky, something which would lead you to a wider view of his language and style. In my own case, a work like *Metamorphoses*, where I dabble with electronics as well as aleatoric techniques, requires an understanding of time/space notation, and a good starting point for this would be to study the works of Lutoslawski or early Penderecki. Having done this, a score like *Metamorphoses* immediately becomes simpler to realise and interpret. In a work such as this there is also a certain amount of intuitiveness required not only from the conductor, but also from the performers, because the duration of any particular repeated small block, or the space (silence) between the articulation of certain figurations, requires a musical 'feel' that in a way is intuitive. However, with adequate rehearsal, it can be a successfully managed.

As a conductor myself I know what a responsibility it is to prepare a score for performance. There is an added responsibility if you are to conduct the premiere of a brand new piece – after all you can assist in making the birth pangs more tolerable for the composer! I have conducted many new works over the past 30 years or so, and my guiding principles have remained constant. I shall try to summarize them as best as I can here:

1. Try to understand, through rigorous study of the score, the music's structure and form. In other words, try to analyse the architecture of the work. Only then can you start to deal with the detail.
2. Be true to the score in every detail, particularly with regard to metronome, dynamic, and expression marks. However, do take into account that the composer does not always get tempo markings right (and I speak here as a composer as well as a conductor). I have often found that a particular metronome marking will change when the composer hears the music in *real* time rather than in *head* time!
3. Try to get to the emotional heart of the music, but also remember that it can be self-indulgent to put over too much of yourself in an interpretation (in other words, let the music speak for itself). A process of distillation has to take place in this regard and this is not always easy.
4. Finally, having studied the score meticulously, organise the rehearsals in a meaningful way, varying between full and sectionals. Don't talk too much (musicians are easily bored!) but do say something about the music itself and, if possible, enthuse about it (even if you don't like it too much). Only then will the pathway be prepared for a successful first outing.

Of course, there are many aspects of conducting that will challenge the band conductor. Not least among these will be the sheer range of music and styles within the repertoire and the skill, musicianship and experience required to meet this challenge effectively.

Even in my own output for wind there is a huge variety of works which require different approaches from the conductor. *The Sword and the Crown* and *The Kings Go Forth* are the most traditional in the context of the mainstream of wind band music (*Festivo* would also fit into this category). That is, they are showy, dramatic, quite virtuoso, require lots of players, and are generally 'good fun' for the performers (and hopefully the audience) – and there's nothing wrong in that!

However, in works such as *Metamorphoses* (referred to above), *Missa Brevis Pacem*, *Celebration*, and the *Concerto for Piano and Wind I* I attempt to explore a different sound world and, in the case of the Mass, a richer emotional landscape. In the *Missa Brevis* I set to music the Latin words of the Mass and a poem in English specially written by my wife. It is scored for a large children's choir as well as a solo

baritone voice. Thus the band conductor is entering new territory as regards the additional skills, experience and musicianship required. Some experience of choral direction would seem essential here, or, at the very least, a desire to learn more about that particular skill. Incidentally, in this work I am specific about the numbers of players to be used (with no doublings). It is essential that this is adhered to by the conductor.

My *Concerto for Piano and Wind* and *Celebration* are both orchestral wind pieces. Nothing new here then as any band conductor should absorb themselves in the study and direction of the great classics of the orchestral wind repertoire, whether they be Mozart, Strauss, Stravinsky, Hindemith, or any others. Here, subtlety in the blending of ensemble, control of phrasing and dynamics, as well as an understanding of the structure of the music at both a macro and micro level, are the main considerations and come to the fore even more than in the large-scale wind band works.

A good starting point for the study of both the above works of mine would be Stravinsky's two great classics: *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and *Concerto for Piano and Winds*. Also, my *Missa Brevis* takes as its starting point Stravinsky's *Mass* of 1948 with its strong sense of ritual and objectivity. Has there been a better writer for wind instruments in the 20th century than Stravinsky? I can't think of one!

E. The Relationship between the Composer and the Commissioning Party

From my experience, the relationship between the composer and the commissioning body is usually a mutually satisfying one, although it can sometimes be fraught with some difficulties along the way. The first challenge is to establish the nature of the composition itself (that is the requirements as to duration, orchestration, context, venue and date of first performance). The next, at least for the composer, is the small matter of the commissioning fee. If I have to deal with this myself I find it to be somewhat embarrassing. When my publisher is involved, it is often the case that they will achieve a higher fee. In any case, most composers find it difficult to negotiate their own rates. In the UK most professional composers use the *Guidelines for Commissioning Fees* produced by the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers & Authors. Whatever the final outcome of this negotiation, it is important for the composer to feel that he or she is being properly rewarded for what is a very time-consuming and emotionally draining process (and if you think for one minute that composers don't really care about the money then just read the letters of Mozart,

Beethoven, Stravinsky, Richard Strauss, and many others, to convince you otherwise!).

The next potential difficulty is, of course, the completion of the work itself within the agreed timeframe. To be professional in this matter is very important, because it is vital to be fair to the conductor and performers so that they have adequate rehearsal time in order to give a good first performance. I, like others, have been guilty in the past of breaking this rule and pushing soloists and conductors to the limit. I remember the case of my Violin Concerto in 2000 when Kent Nagano, who was conducting the première with the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, had less than three weeks to study and learn a 30 minute score – this was definitely unfair! Fortunately, I had worked closely with the soloist during the various stages of the composition and so she at least had adequate preparation time. In the event, soloist, conductor and orchestra produced a wonderful first performance.

I can honestly say that during my forty years of writing to commission there have been very few occasions when my relationship with the commissioning body (or person) has not been both amicable and fruitful. Indeed, we composers should be indebted to the organisations, ensembles, and individuals who pay us to write music (no one owes us a living, despite the fact that some composers seem to think the opposite!).

Musical history is full of examples of important long-term relationships between composers and their patrons. One only has to think of Haydn and Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy (even if this was more in the mould of a master-servant relationship), Tchaikovsky and Nadia von Meck, or more recently the great American conductor Sergey Koussevitzky, who commissioned and conducted so many works by contemporary composers including Stravinsky, Ravel, Hindemith, Bartok, Copland, and Gershwin to name but a few.

It would be good to believe that that same tradition is alive and well today, because composers need the continuity of patronage to sustain their creative imaginations without the pressures of commercialism which seem so rampant in today's musical world.

F. Views on the Teaching of Composition and How to Mentor the Young Composer

The old adage that composers are born and not made is one with which, on the whole, I agree. The main reason why composers go through a process of study is for the acquisition and enhancement of certain skills (in other words a compositional technique). However, it is impossible to help with the actual creation of ideas. That is something that comes from beyond our understanding. If you were religious you might say it comes from God. But wherever it comes from it is the kernel of being a composer.

It is important to mentor students about the pitfalls of being a professional composer - in other words the 'do's and don'ts' of being a composer such as: producing your music on time with adequately prepared parts which are edited and checked; being courteous and respectful to your performers as without them you are nothing; not letting your ego take into the realms of fantasy! – and a host of other similar pointers.

In my day as a student I had to write out by hand my parts. These days, with the multifarious computer software programmes now available, the extraction of parts is a formality, although parts still need careful editing and checking with regard to detail, for example, the matter of where the page turns are. So, although life for today's student composer is easier in one way it is, conversely, more difficult in another. As a young composer straight out of college I was fortunate in securing a distinguished publisher (Novello). Today's publishing world is very different and it is now almost impossible for a young composer to secure such a deal.

Much of the craft of musical composition can be taught – equally it can be self-taught as there are so many fine books on the subject. But there is no replacement for studying with an experienced composer who can be both pedagogically intense and inspirational – at least most of the time! One can empathise with the situation of Vaughan-Williams, who studied at the Royal College of Music in London and had more than one page of his music ripped up in front of him by his highly critical teacher, Charles Villiers Stanford. Not perhaps an example to recommend to any aspiring teacher of composition!

I was fortunate in being able to study with the English composer Alan Bush (1900 – 1995). He combined the virtues of a huge intellect and an impressive musical personality. He had studied composition with the English composer John Ireland, and piano with Arthur Schnabel (in Berlin). However, he had a problem being a

composer in post-2nd World War England, in that, having been converted to Marxism in the late 1920s in Berlin, he experienced real difficulties with the British musical establishment over some of the subjects of his operas, which contained overtly left-wing political ideas and texts. Never let it be said that that the Soviet Union was the only state to instigate censorship! In Britain it was more covert – in America there was McCarthy!

As a teacher Bush was indeed inspirational. He was strict, in that he put me through a rigorous period of study in traditional harmony and counterpoint (rather like Schoenberg did with his students), truthful in his criticisms, but always encouraging in his comments. I tried to emulate this later on in my own teaching.

I taught composition at the University of London and the Royal Academy of Music for some 20 years and found the experience to be a mixture of stimulation and frustration. Some student composers were rather lazy, others diligent and hard working. However, it is not always the case that the lazy ones fail to become successful composers. Lazy composers can still produce brilliant ideas, whilst a hard working composer might produce everything immaculately but have no original ideas at all – life is unfair!

G. Individuals who have been especially influential in my development and career

My parents were not particularly musical and I certainly did not grow up in a musical environment at home. However, they did encourage me to have piano lessons from the age of 8 and tried their best to understand my early ventures in composition (my piano teacher was not quite so understanding as I often failed to practice what I should have done for my lessons!).

From a very early age, I had the opportunity to perform in public (I was brought up in the Salvation Army) and to try out some of my early compositions, naïve as they were. I was also fortunate in coming into contact with some really fine church musicians, albeit amateur ones, and this gave me the experience of hearing my music and learning what worked and what didn't.

When I went to London in 1964 I came across a wide variety of people who were hugely influential in my life. During my studies at the Royal Academy of Music in the mid-60s I was particularly fortunate in mixing with student performers and composers who were destined to become some of the top professionals in their field. I also

came under the influence of some fine teachers, including Alan Bush (already mentioned in the previous chapter), and Frederic Durrant, who gave me my first real grounding in harmony and counterpoint.

I also remember experiencing inspiring conducting from Sir John Barbirolli, who was at that time the principal conductor of the College's symphony orchestra. In particular, I recall one very moving experience when, on hearing the news of the death of Sir Winston Churchill in January 1965, he began the concert he was due to conduct that day (and after a hastily arranged special rehearsal) with the slow movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony – there wasn't a dry eye in the house! Incidentally, the concert also included Elgar's First Symphony, which for an Englishman is the apotheosis of Englishness, if you see what I mean, and was therefore a most fitting tribute to a man who did so much for the British nation, particularly in helping to defeat Nazism.

Finally, as I look back on my time as a composer, there is one person who has been there almost from the beginning – my wife Sue. Her understanding and patience in living with my idiosyncrasies has enabled me to fulfil the many commissions I have taken on. For this alone I am indebted to her. However, she has also given me much more, including a much deeper view of other aspects of life; and her intuition, perception and creativity, has helped my own creativity in countless ways.

H. Ten works I believe all Band Conductors at all levels should study

B Minor Mass J.S.Bach

One of the great works in the canon of Western Classical Music. The human voice is one of the most moving of all musical instruments and in this monumental work Bach combines intellectual control of a high order with musical expressiveness to match. Conductors will gain much from the study of this work, not least an understanding of large-scale musical form. It is also a wonderful example of the High Baroque at its zenith.

The Six Suites for unaccompanied cello J.S.Bach

Music here is stripped of harmony (although it is always implied) and thus melody and rhythm reign supreme. In the hands of a great performer this music can melt the heart (try Casals or Tortelier). It is important to study music such as this, music that is stripped down to its bare bones and yet so highly expressive and personal.

Serenade in B flat for wind instruments (*Grand Partita*) K361 Mozart

A masterpiece, not only in the way Mozart uses the sonority of winds but also in its sheer inventiveness and beauty – what a genius!

Symphony No 2 (*The Resurrection*) Mahler

Conductors must have a firm grasp of large-scale form and this is a supreme example of the way in which a great composer can control temporal relationships. On an emotional level, the supreme affirmation of its final movement is something which never fails to uplift me when I hear it. If there is a divine being, then this is music which is close to him (or her!).

Daphnis and Chloe Ravel

For sheer brilliance of orchestration and sensuality of melody and harmony this music takes some beating. In a telling performance (on CD try the Montreal Symphony under Dutoit) it is an opportunity for the band conductor to discover what wonderful wind writing can sound when played to perfection. Ravel's evocation of dawn is particularly stunning and is one of the best examples of picture painting in music that I know.

The Rite of Spring Stravinsky

One of the great radical works of the 20th century, and one which has endured the test of time. Not only is it ground-breaking in its approach to form, rhythm, instrumentation and orchestration, but it is still rather awkward to conduct. Any aspiring band conductor would do well to beat their way through this without faltering!

Symphonies of Wind Instruments Stravinsky

Ground-breaking in its chain-like block structure and instrumentation. Every band conductor should have this work at their fingertips. It is also wonderful training for accomplished young wind players and will help them considerably in their development as musicians. It is a masterpiece in wind writing.

String Quartet No 3 Bartók

This is a model of concision in the art of musical composition. An analysis of this work will provide a conductor with an understanding of how music can be organically conceived and realised within a concise musical structure. Other fine examples of compression in form and content would be the 4th Symphony of Sibelius or the Webern Symphony.

Cello Concerto No 1, Op 107 Shostakovich

All band conductors are bound to accompany a concerto or a smaller work for solo instrument and band. Thus, it is important to understand concerto form.

Shostakovich's first cello concerto is a supreme example of wonderful writing for a solo instrument, combined with highly individual scoring, particularly for the wind instruments. The slow movement is as beautiful as any I know – simple but poignant.

***The Lincolnshire Posy* Percy Grainger**

I have only included one wind band piece in my list, but what a piece! This is one of the great masterpieces of the repertoire. It is highly original, orchestrated most inventively, and yet never fails to communicate to performers and audiences in a compelling way. No doubt the use of original folk tunes help in this communication but it is also Grainger's offbeat and sometimes eccentric compositional style that really sets it apart.

I. Ten composers whose music overall 'speaks' to me in especially meaningful ways

I could have written a fairly predictable list of ten composers whose music I consider to be amongst the greatest ever written, and which move me beyond words. This would have been Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Stravinsky and Shostakovich.

However, I am going to cheat and have an alternative and somewhat less predictable list. Their music is still highly original and certainly inspires me:

Vivaldi, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Debussy, Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Elgar, Sibelius, Poulenc, and Tippett.

J. The Future of the Wind Band

I worry about the future of the wind band in the same way that I worry about the future of all amateur music making. It is not that I believe that people will still not wish to express themselves through music, but with life being so hectic and with so many other ways of spending leisure time, it will be increasingly difficult to persuade people to give up their time for rehearsals. Of course, within education it is much easier to maintain the wind band tradition, but even here there are so many other

distractions and temptations for the young musician that the expectation of practice and rehearsal time is becoming increasingly difficult to fulfil.

However, on the positive side, standards are higher now than they have ever been, and it is quite extraordinary to hear some of the best university and conservatoire wind bands performing (I am fortunate in being the Head of such a conservatoire). Their ability to take on challenging music, both technically and musically, and to perform to such high standards is astounding. This has clear benefits for wind band composers, in that we can now express ourselves, both in terms of musical complexity and technical virtuosity, with the assurance that the music will be realised effectively.

The challenge is to keep these young players interested in playing after they have left school and university. Thus the whole amateur wind and brass band tradition stands at something of a crossroads and the next decade is going to be important if we are to maintain the large number of wind and brass bands performing in Europe and the USA. However, I remain optimistic and believe the wind band will survive, nay flourish!

I believe that composers have always led, and will continue to lead, the way in the development of wind bands. They are the ones who extend the boundaries, whose expectations are new and challenging, whose demand for technical advancement is a major factor in the development of performers. Alas, much of the music being published for wind band these days is mediocre, written by composers with an inadequate technique and with few original musical ideas. This is worrying and something which has been exacerbated by commercial factors, namely publishers who publish for the quick buck, rather than taking a long-term view. Fortunately, there are still enough publishers willing to take the risk in publishing works of high quality, even though they might not achieve a decent financial return for many years.

K. Other facets of my everyday life

When I was young I had two great passions – music and sport. Music satisfied my cerebral and emotional aspirations while sport satisfied my physical ones. I played cricket (that strange game practically unknown to Americans), soccer, and later, squash. I was also a keen athlete. Sadly all of this physical activity has been somewhat diminished by age and although I am still a great fan of sport it is mainly watched from the armchair I'm sad to say.

As my wife and I had children as soon as we were married (two sons), we were quite involved with the process of bringing up a family whilst I was trying to pursue a pathway as a composer. This presented me with a huge dichotomy and one which I probably never fully satisfied. However, I am immensely proud of my two sons and we continue to be a close-knit family. We have three dogs (Bolognese - an Italian breed) who are great fun and encourage me to take to the countryside for long walks along with my wife.

As I am finishing this article I have playing on my hi-fi Mozart's *Gran Partita*. It reminds me of the power of music in being able to touch the human soul, to transform lives, to give profound joy, happiness and fulfilment. I shall certainly continue to try to touch people through my music – because that is what gives me the greatest satisfaction of all.

Edward Gregson 2006

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