

## **Musical Director's Report AGM - September 2003**

My first term as Director has, in my judgement, been a successful one for the band. Membership and rehearsal attendances are higher than they have been for a long time. We have been able to field about 30 players on several occasions this year, and played concerts that really were very good in terms of preparation, quality and (most importantly) enjoyment for ourselves and our audiences.

The St Matthew's Hymnfest and Catholic College concerts in particular were a credit to all the players. The band has been improving steadily for the last three years and I have no doubt that we are continuing to develop. Our standard before Ballarat this year was the highest it has been since I joined the band.

Our contest performance contained many fine moments, but random tempo changes and some rhythmic inaccuracies caused a few problems. I learned a great deal more about conducting in those few minutes on stage than I had in the previous six months. All of us, me included, need to learn how to relax when on stage.

We will prepare our own choice, hymn and march for the Bright Autumn Festival next year. That should allow us to present a more confident contest program in 2004. I have no doubt that we have achieved a solid C grade standard on several occasions this year. I am looking forward to a good result in 2004.

One vital aspect of playing any musical instrument is the ability to hear the right sound in your head before you play. This clearly includes the correct rhythm and pitch, but also the tone quality and intonation. You should all have the sound of a "hero" in your mind.

Who is your favourite player? For cornet players this may be Richard Marshall or Roger Webster. Horn players should know the sound of Sheona White or Sandy Smith. There are CDs available that highlight solos for all band instruments. Perhaps there is an Australian player whose sound you enjoy, or someone right here in Wodonga Brass who inspires you. Whenever you practice you must strive to make the most beautiful sound possible.

Listening to top bands at live concerts or on CD is particularly valuable. I was disappointed with the number of members who chose not to attend the A grade concert in Ballarat. Darebin and Hawthorn played well, providing fine models for lower grades to follow. I would encourage all members to watch the top bands whenever possible. It is only by emulating their sound that we will ultimately improve. It's not just fast fingers and tongues that will make us better, it's the quality of the sound we produce in the slow parts.

There are hundreds of fine CDs available. This year I have begun playing recordings to the band during rehearsals while members follow their parts. I think this is a very valuable exercise. I believe that all band members should work towards building a CD collection of band music.

Groups such as Grimethorpe, Fodens, Yorkshire Building Society, Cory and Black Dyke should be household names to every player, along with the names of their conductors and soloists. Chris Earl has a large stock to choose from, and has also released highlights of all the Australian National Championships since 1988. These are highly recommended.

My point here is simple - your tone will improve if you have an aural image of your favourite player in your head as you play. Never be content with the sound you are making now. Listen to the best bands you can and try to match their tone and intonation with every note you play.

The future of any band lies with its beginners. I will be approaching all the primary schools in the Wodonga area seeking enrolments in a Sunday morning learning program that will begin in term 4 this year. There has been a movement in the brass music world to produce

good quality teaching materials for junior brass bands and we have already purchased some key items.

Many of our current members began playing as children, enjoying what they were able to achieve and the friendship they found within the band. These people have continued their hobby into adulthood.

Word of mouth is a powerful promotional tool. Do you know any youngsters who would be willing to give brass playing a try? Please encourage your own children, nephews, nieces and family friends to attend our next concert, or just turn up one Wednesday night. Perhaps there are some you know who already play in their school bands and would like some extra playing time with another group.

There are many compelling reasons why playing in a brass band is a worthwhile hobby.

1. It's inexpensive - \$2.30 per week, including an instrument, coat, hat, tie and bus travel. There is no other family activity that offers this low level of financial commitment. It costs more than this to rent a DVD and stay home for the night!
2. It's suitable for all the family - Where else can two or three generations of one family enjoy a night out in a safe friendly environment with everyone participating to achieve a cooperative and enjoyable goal?
3. It feels good - I think all the deep breathing helps here, and there is something most satisfying about making loud noises with a brass instrument. The smiles on your faces when you know you have played well says it all.
4. It builds skills - The ability to read and play music at a high level is a great treasure in these days of prepacked mass media tunes. The level of self discipline and cooperation required to prepare for a recital is far above the requirements of any sport. Not a lot of teams require 30 players to be perfectly synchronised in their actions!
5. It's rewarding - There is nothing quite like the sound of applause from an appreciative audience. We make a difference in a positive way to our community. We bring structure and dignity to public events, entertainment to concert audiences, and enjoyment to ourselves.

The outgoing committee has prepared an advertising pamphlet for distribution to schools, local councils, churches, big businesses and community organizations over the next few weeks. Now that we have a solid membership and a rapidly expanding repertoire it is time to "blow our own trumpet" and tell people about us in a much more proactive way. These pamphlets can be produced at a minimal cost - if you want more copies just ask me.

The pamphlets, however well designed and informative, will not be much good unless John Q. Public also knows what we sound like. Our fundamental reason for existence is to provide the citizens of Wodonga and surrounding areas with entertaining high quality music. When daylight saving begins this year the band will be involved in regular Wednesday recitals in parks around the Wodonga area. This process was begun last year and I think showed great promise.

I am keen to undertake the tasks ahead as your Musical Director. Congratulations on all you have achieved this year and best wishes the great achievements that are still to come.

Best Regards

Gregory Lewis