

November Workshop 2009

at the Leros TAC

It was always my intention to run a workshop that would have a lasting effect on it's participants for all the right reasons. In order to maximise attendance I organised it as joint venture with the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment Territorial Army Band, the County band of the Kent Army Cadet Force and the Music for Schools Foundation, an organisation that delivers instrumental tuition to primary schools up and down the country. Despite these efforts, the total attendance was only 11 but they came from 8 different schools spread across the county including Ashford, Dover, Folkestone, Herne, Charing, Egerton, Ospringe and of course, Canterbury. The children were aged from 8 to 15 years old. There was some concern at the start from parents as to how their offspring would settle in with the unknown but this soon subsided as everyone got on extremely well.

An initial "full band" was formed and the concert music was previewed. There was nothing tame about my programme. The finale I had chosen was a rock version of Bach's "Tocatta in D" and I anxiously looked around for any tears afterwards but there were none, just remarks of: "Awesome!" and declarations of disbelief that we were really going to play this. Even the TA had their doubts, especially the xylophonist to whom I had handed the xylophone part and saw him retreat to a location where he could put in a couple of hours practice.

One of my objectives for this workshop was to create different ensembles so we soon split into brass and reed groups and moved into two quite separate locations. I spent the rest of the morning rehearsing the "Toccata" with the clarinets and saxophones helped by Mr Rick Guild of the TA and Rebecca Day of the ACF. I had altered the original music to make it a bit easier to play and the results were starting to prove very encouraging.



The brass were being rehearsed by our TA horn player Mr. Denis Haskew who had brought some music with him for the occasion. He was supported on trombone by Mr. Ian Harding, Bandmaster of the TA Band, on tuba by Rebecca Coster of the ACF and on trumpet, there was Aimee Day, also in the ACF. There were four visiting trumpet players and it was decided to start our concert with a fanfare using the long, straight fanfare trumpets that are often seen on royal occasions and were kindly loaned to us today, complete with banners, by the TA.

During our lunch break, the adults got together to discuss progress, which was going very well. The brass were still unsure of the viability of playing the toccata but I assured them that it would be great, hiding my real fear. The weather was atrocious, with heavy rain and strong winds so the xylophone player expressed his concern at moving the xylophone outside to get to the playing venue. I agreed but couldn't help noticing a degree of relief in his attitude.



After lunch, we continued for about an hour in two sections and the woodwind selected “Rockin’ around the Christmas tree” as their showpiece which meant that I had to grab a flute and join in. The TA and the ACF then rehearsed as an ensemble playing a selection of John Williams’ tunes after which the full band assembled in the concert position for a final rehearsal. By this time the weather had subsided, the sun was even trying to shine so the xylophone was wheeled in by a worried looking xylophonist and our other percussionist set his drum kit up as well.

There was time for a break before the parents arrived and the concert started promptly at the scheduled 3.30pm. The fanfare team marched on from the end of the hall and played “Reigate” with their trumpets right over the front row of the audience.



They smartly turned to their left and marched away to get ready for the first item of the programme which was titled “Here we go!” and was based on a famous Sousa march often heard sung at football matches.



The woodwind piece followed, conducted by Mr Harding as I was now on flute and this was followed by the full band playing “Reach” a tune that was apparently made famous by “S Club 7”. I knew I’d heard it somewhere! The brass demonstrated their techniques via a piece entitled “Old Mac’s Jazz” a play on “Old Macdonald had a farm” with many different sound effects being produced as only brass instrumentalists can.

The combined TA and ACF ensemble went next and this was followed by our finale, Bach’s “Tocatta in D”. The drumming was supplied by Mr Thomas Cripps of the TA and the excellent xylophone playing was performed by Mr Martin Griffiths, also of the TA. It went really well. I think the audience were quite astonished. I don’t know what all the fuss was about. I had some goodies from the “Corps of Army Music” in the form of wrist bands, pens and necklaces so I gave them all out and everybody then made their way home.

I hope to organise another similar workshop in about six months. I have already received feedback from parents expressing their delight and eagerness to attend what is hoped to be a regular event. Let’s hope that word gets around and the attendance will be greater in the future. I would like to thank everyone that got involved in this event, especially the parents without whom this workshop just wouldn’t have gone ahead.