

Surrey Brass Chairman's Report for year ending 31 December 2006

As I reflect upon my first year as Chairman of Surrey Brass 2006 strikes me as a year of learning and development for the ensemble in which we made considerable progress in a number of important areas but with some uncomfortable learning experiences along the way.

Seven major concerts were staged during the year, in addition to a number of ad hoc smaller ensemble engagements. These have varied greatly in nature – from the traditional classical brass ensemble programmes to the complexity and wide ranging Brass Massive project in conjunction with Surrey Schools. This has enabled a diverse musical offering to be presented – from the Saint Saens Organ and Brass version of the Organ Symphony to Allen Vizzuti's Rising Sun showcasing the virtuosity of International Soloist Rex Richardson, one of the musical highlights of the year.

Organisationally, the ensemble has matured with a better understanding in roles and responsibilities although much work remains to be done before we achieve the feeling of a well oiled machine in pre concert preparation. Indeed, one learning from 2006 is that attempting two concerts with very different programmes at a busy time of year with only 2 weeks rehearsal between is probably one step too far at the moment with regular gaps in rehearsal coverage, much at little/no notice - a problem which continues to plague us. Our Achilles heel of efficient music librarianship also remains with us although the efforts to change the game from Cyril Stoneham have been greatly appreciated in the latter stages of 2006. A permanent librarian coupled with extra personal discipline in the areas of rehearsal scheduling and sheet music care would pay great dividends for not a great deal of extra effort in 2007.

Thanks also go to Mike Chapple for a sterling effort in arrangements during the year - he assures me his Sibelius arrangements hinge on the click of his mouse finger and clearly many long hours spent practicing first finger trills have paid benefits here in terms of speed. An increase in accessible arrangers would assist greatly here in reducing the personal burden on Mike and increasing the variety of repertoire on offer. Thanks again to Cyril for facilitating some new arrangements as the year progressed.

Financially the group has benefited from financially successful concerts such as the Brass and Organ and the Guildford Spring Festival on the back of the traditionally successful Christmas concert. I now believe we have a more professional approach to pre concert budgeting and concert approval. However this will require constant and vigilant attention into 2007 as audience attendance remains our biggest uncontrollable challenge. In the absence of permanent sponsorship a balance needs to be struck between concerts that support what we want to achieve musically as a group and those which balance the books. In a world that seems to increasingly forgo the finer classical music for instant gratification via the digital TV box the area of concert partnership as a route to audience development seems to represent our best chances of achieving the latter.

We also enjoyed five different MDs for the concerts this year. Whilst this in itself is a source of learning for the group, benefiting from a range of musical input and style I believe the lack of a regular MD has offset some of the progress we otherwise might have made. Much of the group style and identity is set from the podium and I believe that establishing a permanent regular MD must remain a priority for 2007. A note of thanks must go to Tom Hammond and Richard Stubbings who have filled the MD breach during the year, often at short notice.

Finally, in this season of goodwill, my thanks extend to the considerable support to Surrey Brass from the members, from the formal responsibilities to the simple assistance in pre and post concert duties. We are a diverse group, which in itself brings a richness and value to our cause if harnessed properly.

A special note of thanks has to go to John Goodwin who, in an incredibly busy professional year personally, remains the heartbeat of Surrey Brass.

May I wish all at Surrey Brass the very best individually and collectively for 2007 and thank them for their considerable support during 2006.

Steve Dawes, Chairman