

Surrey Brass AGM 7th January 2007 - Secretary's Report

2006 was a very eventful year which started fast and furious with a large number of concerts in the first quarter which were organised at very short notice. Organisation was not made easy by regular business trips by the Secretary and Chairman. Enormous thanks are due to our Vice Chairman Michael Chapple for stepping in, filling the organisational gaps, and producing numerous instant arrangements, something he did repeatedly throughout 2006!

Attendance at the eight shows we did varied significantly. "Versatile Brass" and "Brass and Organ Masterpieces" were full, as was the Hambledon village Christmas party (with Impact Percussion). We had middling audiences for the rest, although they were always enthusiastic. The Christmas concert was only half full, despite larger marketing efforts than usual, which was a disappointment since it was the finest show to date. Next year it has been suggested that it may be a good idea to have a "big time" household name as MC to provide more of an audience pull.

Although it is hard to draw reliable conclusions, the previous trend that "working with kids/others guarantees an audience" does not seem to hold as much as it used to. This is a pity from several viewpoints – we like playing to large audiences of course, but also large happy audiences create a momentum and spread our reputation, which helps to sell tickets next time. We were hopeful that the "Brass Massive" audience might have reappeared later on in the year but there is no evidence that this happened. Although we do have regular repeat supporters, we have yet to find our solid hardcore audience in the numbers that I believe we deserve, and unglue them from the TV. Partly as a result, concert revenue has been challenged and it is harder for us to balance the books, and take risks on the more interesting concerts. This leads me to my first conclusion – **WE MUST IMPROVE MARKETING**. To tackle this, I suggest that a committee member is dedicated to this important role.

It's also been good to observe that Consistency and Quality of performance has improved again this year, with no obvious "ouch" moments in any show. Congratulations to all, this is a significant achievement – and one we can improve upon further in 2007. This milestone has in part been due to careful selection of music, and improved rehearsal scheduling, with the more challenging pieces being identified early to permit the necessary rehearsal time. It is also due to noticeably increased player commitment.

Concert planning is improving but still behind where it ideally needs to be. At the beginning of 2006 we did have a reasonable outline of the year's events, if not the detail, and as a result had the opportunity to market events, even if we were not fully effective at doing so. Ideally, we need to plan 18 months in advance so that we can tell our audience what is coming up, and meet various publishing deadlines. This leads me to my second conclusion – **WE MUST IMPROVE PLANNING**. To tackle this, I suggest that slightly more frequent committee meetings are needed to keep on top of things.

Attendance at rehearsals has in general been good, has suffered the usual outages. Thanks to the efforts of our Chairman Steve Dawes the impact of non-attendance both in rehearsal and

concert has been lessened considerably with only two rehearsal cancellations this year. Thanks are due to all players who have provided notice of non-attendance in time for him to do something about it. Next time fix your own dep!

Player membership has been stable, but we probably now need to attract a couple of new members to keep our regular “player pool” full and enable us to counter rehearsal dropouts better.

Richard Ward has complained that rehearsal discipline has been poor, specifically too much talking and inattention, an issue which has noticeably irritated several other MD. We have limited rehearsal time and we could get more and better playing done if we blew more and talked less, not to mention being professional and encouraging MD to work with us. So why don't we do that next year?

Although Richard Ward is our appointed MD his professional commitments have proven to be incompatible with our schedule on several occasions. Thanks are due to Richard Stubbings and Tom Hammond who stepped in at short notice several times. We are now effectively in the position of not having a regular MD. The experience of this year suggests that at least one deputy MD would also be a very good thing to have.

Financial aspects have improved, thanks to the Chairman and Treasurer taking a more active role to control costs. However, we still rely on goodwill far too much and do not pay viable amounts to attract people of the calibre we deserve. We are unable to commission new works without making getting grants. We are unable to take risks and put on more spectacular concerts without such support. We also need to spend more on marketing to counter audience decline. I therefore believe that we are underfunded, which in time will inhibit our stability and development.

This leads me to my third conclusion – **WE MUST IMPROVE SPONSORSHIP.** To tackle this, I suggest that an appointed committee member is dedicated to this important role.

Looking ahead for 2007 we have plenty of ideas for great concerts, a choice of good venues, and some exciting new music to play. Most important, we have the opportunity to add something new to the programming we have established and repeated over the last three years which has now become a little staid. We need to turn ideas into a set of booked venues and frozen programmes *now*, and inform the general public of the innovation and entertainment that is Surrey Brass.

John Goodwin
Hon. Sec. Surrey Brass 3rd January 2007