

**WEST Lothian Schools Brass Band celebrates 30 years next week and one of its former members, KATRINA MARZELLA, has been looking into its illustrious history.**

THIS year marks the 30th anniversary of our most successful youth outfit, West Lothian Schools Brass Band (WLSBB) and a special concert will be held next Saturday (22nd) at St. Margaret's Academy in Livingston, where ex - members will reunite and join with the current WLSBB on what will be a most auspicious occasion. Elucidating the history of the WLSBB has invoked a certain amount of nostalgia and reminiscence as I am, myself, an ex-member of the 'county band'. In anticipating next week's concert (and post-concert party!), it was both interesting and enlightening to speak with several notable personalities from the WLSBB. They were all eager to share noteworthy facts and statistics about the band, as well to reminisce about other anecdotal tales.

Revered by many as one of the most successful youth brass bands of its time, the WLSBB has flourished throughout its 30-year history in its home in central Scotland; here, a rich brass band heritage and mining tradition have always been prevalent. Additionally, West Lothian school pupils have always been fortunate enough to receive free instruction and instruments under the region's exemplary musical education system. As such, West Lothian proved to be a fertile breeding ground for young brass players.

In 1975, it became apparent that there was a need to provide opportunities to encourage a plethora of players. Hence, under the watchful eye of Tom McMillan, Music Advisor for the area at that time, the WLSBB was established to fulfill these particular musical aims. One name that is synonymous with brass teaching in the area is Tom Martin and he chatted about his own involvement in the WLSBB's very first rehearsals and concert: "Jim McCafferty, Jim Anderson, Bob Spowart and I led the very first rehearsal in Balbardie Primary School in Bathgate. There were three bands at that time: the 'A' Band, the 'B' Band and the Training Band. We worked with them in preparation for our debut concert, which was held in Blackburn Academy with guest soloist, Martin McHale, a Stirling lad who, at that time, was a cornet player with Brighthouse and Rastrick and went

on to become a freelance musician in the Welsh orchestral scene." Tom reflected: "Our first band had some great players in it. Looking at the band photograph now, it contained musicians like Andrew Duncan, Sandy Smith, Kenneth Rhynd (now with the Lisbon Symphony Orchestra) and Martin Wilson, who is principal trombone with Ulster Orchestra."

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the WLSBB continued to meet on a weekly basis, under the musical instruction of Messrs. Martin, McCafferty, Anderson and Spowart. In retrospect, one can appreciate that the strong foundations of the contemporary band were laid during this time and the proud tradition became instilled within West Lothian's youth music scene. Competition never played an important part in the band's existence at this stage, but gradual progress ensured that this was about to change.

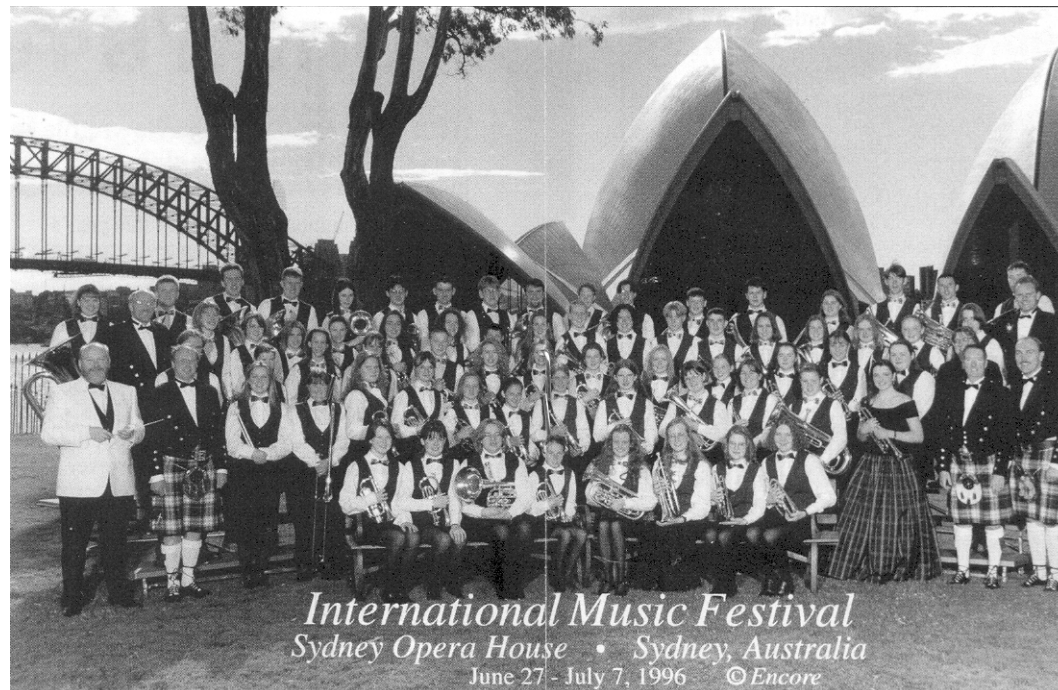
In order to enhance the musical experiences of the young players, the tutors mentioned above occasionally invited guest conductors to lead the WLSBB through weekend courses. What has turned out to be the most important invitation was that which was extended to Nigel Boddice, at the time principal trumpet of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and musical director of CWS (Glasgow). Following his debut concert with the WLSBB in St. Michael's Church in Linlithgow, Nigel was invited back to conduct the band on weekly basis. This appointment marked an enormously important juncture, signifying the WLSBB the start of the next chapter in its history.

Under Nigel's direction, the WLSBB

## West Lothian's pride of youth enters fourth decade

travelled to London in 1984 to make its first appearance in the National Youth Brass Band Championship of Great Britain. The following year, it secured its historic first victory at the Championship with a memorable performance of Philip Sparke's Music for a Festival. As part of the prize for becoming 1985 National Champion, the WLSBB was whisked across town to the Royal Albert Hall to redeliver its winning performance in the intermission between the contest and the results at the 'adult' National Final. Playing in the renowned venue on this illustrious occasion remains a highlight for many players in this particular generation of the WLSBB, none more so than Alan Edmond, current European Sales Representative for Besson Musical

Instruments Ltd. Alan, who played solo horn in WLSBB during this era, commented: "What a prize and what an experience! The atmosphere at the Albert Hall was electric, which I think was the result of holding all sections of the National Finals and the Youth Championships on the same weekend." Alan noted: "Since 1985, the county band has gone on to win the Championships ten times in 20 years and has consistently featured highly in the prizes." Statistics show that no



other youth band has had such a sustained record at the event. Nigel Boddice also recounted a particularly memorable 'National' in our discussion: "In 1990, I had an orchestral job on the night before the contest and planned to get the

participate." Nigel suggested: "Why not involve EBBA in this? The youth contest could run alongside the main European festival, perhaps on a biennial basis."

As the WLSBB tallied up increasing numbers of Scottish, British and European

'sleeper' down to London. However, the train suffered excessive delays and the bad news that I would be missing reached the band early the next morning, much to the disappointment of the players. In the meantime, I had taken a taxi overnight from Scotland to London (to the complete disbelief of the driver!) and arrived just in time to conduct the band. The children were all shrieking with surprise and delight when I arrived and, incredibly, we went on stage and ended up winning the contest!"

In 2005, the WLSBB made history in securing its first hat trick of victories at the 'National Youth Finals', which took place at the Royal Northern College of Music in April. This commitment in maintaining such high musical standards results from the staunch pride that band members feel when representing West Lothian and, indeed, Scotland, at this particular contest. The tremendous camaraderie inherent in the WLSBB is similarly prevalent at these events and is conveyed in no greater way than in the unrelenting singing on the coach! Whilst Nigel admits that he enjoys the festivities at the competition, he explained that contesting was by no means the main focus of the band's agenda. Nevertheless, he did note that there is one particular contest that he regards to be immeasurably important. "I would like to see the reinstatement of the European Youth Brass Band Championships in the near future." The WLSBB was victorious at this event in 1999 - the last time it took place. Nigel explained: "I see great importance in holding this contest. It would be a great loss if the event goes completely into demise, as it provides important cultural, social and musical experiences for all the children who

When the WLSBB was 'Down Under', it performed at many of Sydney's famous landmarks, including Darling Harbour, Sydney Town Hall and the awe-inspiring Sydney Opera House. I was privileged enough to participate in this tour and, despite being only 12 years old, I can distinctly remember the incredible atmosphere to this day; it truly was the trip of a lifetime. The tour culminated with a thrilling concert in Sydney Town Hall, where the band was subsequently presented with a Gold Award for its participation in the Festival.

Such an impressive array of competitive successes and other musical achievements is a credit to the dedication of those associated with the band. Firstly, Nigel Boddice's venerable work has always been complemented by the excellent team of instrumental tutors in the area. One also cannot fail to mention West Lothian Council Arts Manager, Brian Duguid, who has, in the last decade, proficiently co-ordinated support from the Council and pioneered many important band projects. Similarly, without other administrative and organisational staff, and the new Friends of the Band group, many plans would have not come to fruition. Furthermore, these successes would not have been possible without the commitment of the WLSBB's players themselves. To enumerate all the great players who began in the WLSBB is almost an impossible task. Over the years, a myriad of the band's talented brass players have disseminated into the Scottish and British brass band fraternity, whilst many others have taken up professional appointments in the country's

experiences that they would never get otherwise. I sincerely hope it continues for years to come."

So what for the future of the WLSBB? Nigel Boddice simply hopes that it is "business as usual." He wishes for the band to continue to progress as it does at present and comments: "I would be happy if the band continues to develop and grow as it always has done. We want to represent Scotland in the best manner that we can, whilst continuing to provide a platform for the next generation of brass musicians from West Lothian."

Nigel continued: "I also want to challenge the band musically, primarily through performing exciting new music and, on occasion, by commissioning works for it." This is something in which West Lothian has excelled, with both Nigel Boddice and Brian Duguid taking a pioneering role in commissioning original band music, arrangements and solo items from numerous Scottish musicians such as Bruce Fraser, Adrian Drover, John Gilmore, Eddie McGuire and ex-band member, Andrew Duncan. In turn, the WLSBB has now contributed an entire collection of new and challenging music to brass repertoire. Kay Mackenzie, ex-soprano cornetist with the band, who was recently awarded an M.Mus (composition) with distinction from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, is the latest composer to write for the WLSBB. Her new work, Little Wooden Head, will be premiered at the 30th anniversary concert next week.

On that night, there will be further call for

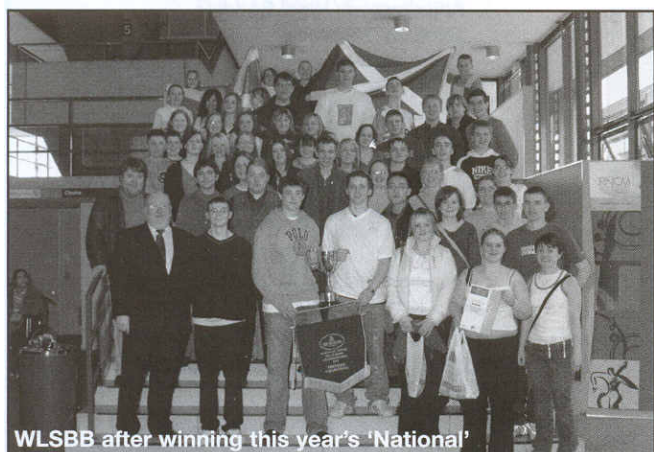
top orchestras. Even BB's Editor, Kenneth Crookston, was in one of the earliest bands!

For me, it seemed important to converse with one particular player who remains somewhat iconic in WLSBB folklore; Angela Whelan worked her way through its cornet rank and is now a respected freelance trumpet soloist and member of the Fine Arts Brass Ensemble. Angela became a member of the band in 1985 and held the principal cornet chair for six highly distinguished years. She was regularly featured as a soloist, most successfully on the band's first recording in The Flying Scat and at two consecutive European Championships, where she won the Best Soloist Award. She continued her association with the WLSBB as a soloist even after leaving the band, particularly wowing audiences during the tours of Australia and America.

Angela reflected: "I can honestly say that if it wasn't for the county band, I wouldn't be where I am today. The experience and exposure I received was invaluable. My mentor, Nigel Boddice, was an absolute inspiration for me." She added: "The WLSBB is a shining example, towards which other youth brass bands should aspire. I personally think that the free tuition in West Lothian is the main reason behind its success because it provides some kids with opportunities for amazing

celebration due to the recent announcement of Nigel Boddice's inclusion in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. He was awarded an MBE for his work towards developing youth music in Scotland and believes that his West Lothian friends, to whom he is eternally thankful, spearheaded this.

In summation, there seems to be plenty to celebrate at the 30th anniversary concert and there can be no better way to pay homage to this exceptional youth brass band. Whilst numerous ex-members and old friends are expected to attend, this almost seems a subsidiary matter and I am certain that the songs, laughter, pride and, most importantly, the music of the West Lothian Schools Brass Band will resonate in our memories for years to come.



WLSBB after winning this year's 'National'



WLSBB at the 1998 European Youth Championships