



History of the Brass Band Repertoire

Dr. Roy Newsome

Part 11

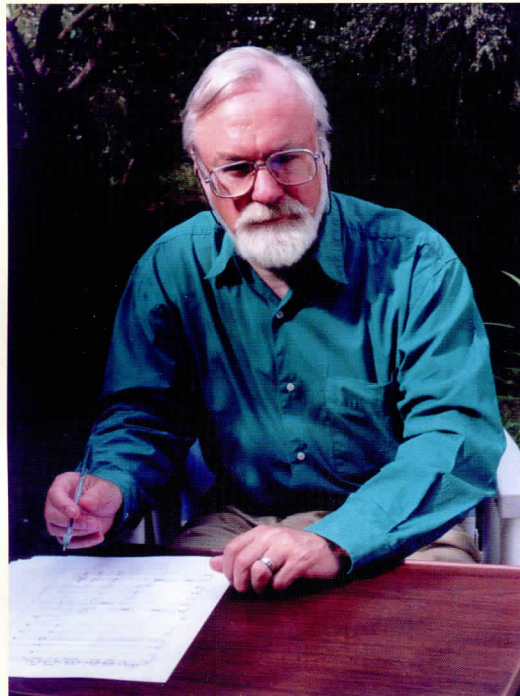
The Serious Repertoire - 1981-2000

As I've shown earlier, up to around 1960 most original brass band music came into being through the demands of the contest. Since then there's been a growing amount of music commissioned by bodies not connected with competitions, though many of the works thus created have also served as test pieces. However, there was, from 1980, an escalation in the number of commissioning bodies as well as in the number of composers being commissioned. In contest terms there were, in addition to the Nationals and the British Open Championships, the European Championships, dating from 1978 and the All England Masters in Cambridge, founded in 1989.

But there was also, now, a host of other commissioning bodies, including the B.B.C., the British Federation of Brass Bands (B.F.B.B.), Brass Band Heritage Trust (B.B.H.T.), Butlins Championships, contest organisers in Australia, New Zealand and several European countries, and some organisations in the U.S.A. Even bands were now almost queuing up to commission new works. These included Black Dyke, Cory, Desford, Britannia Building Society/Fodens, Leyland, C.W.S. (Glasgow), Skellerup Woolston in New Zealand and the Brassband Berner Oberland (B.B.O.) in Switzerland. For good measure, the National Youth Brass Bands of Great Britain, Wales and Scotland and Hampshire Youth Band were also in the field, as well as some individuals, including euphonium virtuosi Steven Mead and Wendy Picton. Repertoire also expanded through developments in the Salvation Army. Until the mid-1980s there was a positive 'us and them' relationship between S.A. bands and the contesting movement. The situation began to ease in 1985 when the 'Army' conceded that its bandsmen (and women) could play with non-S.A. bands, as long as this didn't interfere with their commitment as Salvationists. There was a further relaxation in 1989 when some S.A. music was made available to church and school bands. Finally, in 1992, all restrictions on the sale of their music to non-S.A. bands were lifted. Though there had already been a certain amount of 'pirating', this latest development placed a whole new world of music at the disposal

of 'outside' bands. It also enabled S.A. composers to write test pieces without fear of any repercussions.

Over 30 British composers wrote original works during this period, as well as a number from America and mainland Europe, some of whom wrote tests for the European Championships. Let's deal first with some composers mentioned in Parts 6 and 7 who also produced works during these last 20 years of the 20th century.



John McCabe.

Gregson and Howarth had dominated during the seventies. Both now took back seats, whilst still producing a small number significant works. The former followed up his earlier test pieces with *Dances and Arias* - composed for the 1984 National Finals, and *Of Men and Mountains* - a 1990 commission for the Netherlands Championships. This was then announced as the test piece for the 1992 National Championships of Great Britain but, because of its length, was withdrawn and used as the Area test piece in the following year - to the dismay of the composer. Not until 2000 did he write another major original brass band work. This was *The Trumpets of the Angels*, premièred by Fodens.

Howarth also composed three major works during this 20-year period. These were *In Memoriam R. K.* - a 1982 work composed in the style of Richard Strauss, as a tribute to the great German orchestral conductor Rudolph Kempe, an idol of

Howarth's and famed for his interpretations of Strauss; *Songs for B. L.*, a B.B.C. commission used as the test piece for the 1995 Nationals, and *Hymns at Heaven's Gate*, commissioned for the European Championships of 1997.

Following the mixed reception accorded to his *Images*, John McCabe's *Cloudcatcher Fells* - a musical portrayal of parts of the composer's beloved Lake District - met with immediate approval and remains one of the most successful compositions of all from this period. This was the test at the 1985 Nationals. It was followed by the less-successful *Salamander* - the British Open test in 1994.

Derek Bourgeois was a lecturer in music at Bristol University and one-time conductor of Sun Life Band. He displayed great facility in his immensely popular *Blitz* (Nationals, 1981) as well as in *Diversions* (commissioned by New Zealand's Skellerup Woolston Band in 1985 and selected as the test for the National Championships of Great Britain in the following year) and *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Nationals, 1993). This facility was further demonstrated in his instrumental features - the *Concerto Grosso* (1981), *Trombone Concerto* (1989) and in a *Euphonium Concerto*, commissioned in 1991 and premièred by the youthful Wendy Picton. Bourgeois' ability to write for bands of varying technical standards was demonstrated in *A Barchester Suite* (Area 3rd section 1985) and *Forest of Dean* (1992), a Swiss commission, used as the test for 1st section Area contests in 1993.

Arthur Butterworth (mentioned in Part 5) had composed his *Caliban*, described as a 'Scherzo Malevolent', in 1978. This was performed at the 1981 Europeans Championships. Butterworth composed a characteristically bleak *Odin - from the Land of Fire and Ice* to a Black Dyke commission in 1986, which was selected as the test for the Nationals three years later. His *Passacaglia on a Theme of Brahms* was commissioned by Desford in 1990 and later used as a 1st section Area test piece. The rather complex *Maoriana* was commissioned for the New Zealand Championships of 1992. In this same year, Butterworth was commissioned by the N.Y.B.B.G.B. to write a concerto for trumpet and brass band, and his *Concierto alla Veneziana* was premièred by the band and Maurice Murphy.

Gareth Wood produced two more notable

lower section test pieces in 1981 with *Hinemoa*, composed for New Zealand and *Margam Stones*, written for the Butlins Youth Championships. *Five Blooms in a Welsh Garden* was the 'European' set test piece at Cardiff in 1992, but perhaps his greatest contributions to the repertoire lay in his instrumental solos: *Dance Sequence* (for trombone, 1981), *Tuba Concerto* (1994) and the *Trombone Concerto*, commissioned by the N.Y.B.B.W. in 1999.

The problems of Wilfred Heaton's *Contest Music* were mentioned in Chapter 6. Though now recognised as one of the greatest of all brass band composers, he was reluctant to return to composition after this latest disappointment. We must thank Paul Hindmarsh for bringing Heaton's earlier music to light and Howard Snell for coaxing further compositions from this highly original mind. Amongst the earlier pieces is a *Partita*, taken from an orchestral suite composed in the 1950s and first performed in its new format in 1984. Snell's reward for his persistence lies in two masterly instrumental works, a *Sinfonia Concertante for Cornet and Brass Band* (1991) and a *Concerto for Trombone* (1992). These virtuoso works were both premièred by Britannia Building Society Band, under Snell's baton, the soloists being Martin Winter and Nicholas Hudson. Wilfred Heaton died in the year 2000, in his early eighties.

In Part 7, I referred to Joseph Horowitz's landmark *Euphonium Concerto*. He had also composed a fine 2nd section test piece, *Sinfonietta*, in 1977. In 1983 came his immensely successful *Ballet for Band*, composed for the National Finals. He returned to the same event in 1994 with *Theme and Co-operation* (commissioned by the Co-op). There is also a very attractive *Concertino Classica* - for two trumpets or cornets, composed in 1985 and a *Tuba Concerto* (1988), premièred by James Gourlay and conducted by the composer.

Philip Sparke took the movement by storm in 1980 with *The Land of the Long White Cloud*. He was to build on this foundation during the next 20 years (and more) with an impressive list of test pieces for bands of all levels. There are also many concert pieces, including an equally impressive array of instrumental solos.

Sparke may be called 'The Bandsmen's Composer'. He has given enormous pleasure to bands when preparing their performances and to audiences when listening to them. Major test pieces include *The Year of the Dragon* - with its tantalising trombone solo (Cory commission, 1984), *A London Overture* (Netherlands commission, 1984), *Variations on an Enigma* (Desford



Philip Sparke.

Variations (B.F.B.B. commission, for the European Championships, 2000).

Amongst a vast array of concert pieces by Sparke, the following three are worth singling out: *Jubilee Overture* (G.U.S. commission, 1983), *Prelude, Toccata and Fugue* - a fusion of serious and popular musical styles (Salford commission, 1986) and *A Pittsburgh Overture* (commissioned by the River City Brass Band, Pittsburgh, 1990).

There are solos for most band instruments. Again I've selected three: *Song and Dance* (for cornet, 1981), *Pantomime* (for euphonium, premièred by Nicholas Childs; 1986 with piano, the band version appearing in 1991) and *Masquerade* (for tenor horn, premièred by Gordon Higginbottom in 1988).

In Part 12, I will continue this summary of serious music 1981-2000 with a look mainly at composers who wrote for the first time during this period.

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