

Mission Accomplished – The making of a CD

Southampton Concert Wind Band (SCWB) is a community band that was established in 1975. Initially a brass band, it converted to a wind band in 1994. Under the highly experienced musical leadership of MD Calum Gray (former army Director of Music) we have enjoyed a very stable membership, and with that, been able to develop considerable musical skills, qualities and discipline.

This is not a band that is meandering through performance life! Having thought we were improving and playing well, we decided to put it to the test. We entered the adjudicated performance arena by participating in National Concert Band Festival regional events in three successive years, achieving Platinum Awards each time.



There is an exciting programme of concerts with music that challenges, but as confidence grows, so does daring. We have had stunning performances playing with highly acclaimed guest soloists - Les Neish (tuba) and Brett Baker (trombone) for the last two spring concerts and we look forward to accompanying Steven Mead (euphonium) this autumn.

For the last three years, creating a professional standard CD had habitually been on our 'to do' list. Studio hire and music engineers do not come cheap. Having estimated what it may cost us, we had to look for some financial support to realise the dream of a CD. An application for a grant from the Arts Council was made, and rejected. The project was shelved. Two years later saw another application, modified to try and address the reasons for the previous failure to secure funding – and was rejected again.

The hope of making a CD, however, was an itch we could not stop scratching. Taking the budget apart, we looked at where compromises could be made with minimal impact to quality; how we could recover some costs from sales of the CD; activity to fund-raise for ourselves, and how much of band funds we could spare to support the project.

We found a school in Romsey that not only had a studio and equipment large enough to accommodate the band, but also a sound technician with the experience and expertise to record and produce the CD. Suddenly the sums added up, and the financial risk was well within the means of band funds. There was then an easy decision to make a go of it, as the possible net cost of producing the CD was well worth the experience it would give the band in the process of its creation.

The seven members of the committee were fired up and ready to go. All we had to do was co-ordinate the fifty other members of the band, to be in a studio for a weekend, at a time when the studio was free, in a part of our performance year that gives us enough time to work on the music. It sounds easy if you say it quickly, but it was a slow and painful process of finding a date that fitted all the criteria it needed to, and of course making the hard

decision of agreeing a date in the knowledge that some band members, keen as they were to take part, were not free. The decision to make the recording was taken in June 2015 and the date to make the recording was five months later, in November 2015.

After months of preparation, the weekend of the recording finally arrived. The studio was a small theatre attached to a secondary school which was being 'microphoned up' as we arrived. The recording engineer was in a room down the corridor, away from the studio, and linked to us by a speaker. We had two days to record 10 pieces of music. Our Musical Director, Calum Gray, has had much experience in the recording process from his days as a Director of Music in the Army and he had the foresight to ask an experienced retired Royal Marines Bandmaster to be his 'ears in the booth'. This allowed us to be sure we had enough good takes of each particular musical segment before moving on.

The actual process of recording the music was totally alien to most of us! To record a piece of music, we played it through first of all, and then played small sections – being satisfied that good versions of that section and the links were recorded before moving to the next section. A piece of music that runs five minutes top to bottom could easily take one hour to record. The entire band maintained concentration throughout, but the most pressure was on the MD, Calum, who had to not only ensure performance levels were kept high, but also tempi were perfectly reproducible between takes, corrections identified and dealt with, progress monitored to ensure we completed the task in the time available and that sufficient chops recovery time was had – oh, and provide high quality flapjacks for the breaks.

"The scariest moment for me was an exposed entry in Gallimaufry where I was anxious to express the character and rhythm correctly whilst overcoming the technical challenges around fingering so it was smooth and controlled. Recording in repeated takes gave the opportunity to play through the entry more than once, pick up detailed direction and improve the final take."

Jackie Swann, Clarinet

Time flew by, recording the pieces. Without exception, everybody felt they had achieved a huge amount from the weekend. We actually finished with an hour to spare. The band were paid the best compliment by Calum, who said that quickly into the process, he stopped treating us as a community band, and started to work with us as he would with a professional band, given the level of concentration, commitment and responsiveness he was getting from us all. Independently to that, the same thing was said by both the recording engineer and Don, our 'ears in the booth'. We went home that Sunday with our minds drained but our spirits high.

"It was always tense, keeping absolutely quiet and still during those couple of seconds at the beginning and end of a take, followed by either "That sounded good to me" or "There's something we need to cover again" from the recording room. We had wind blowing through a gap in the double doors behind me, and a bird flapping at a nearby window, but neither was picked up by the microphone. Maybe it happened on the beat?"

"There was a feeling of relief when we were told that everything was finished, and the pub round the corner must have had a spike in their accounts when most of us arrived shortly afterwards to quench our collective thirsts!"

Simon Morgan, Alto Saxophone

The hard work for the band was over, but the CD was far from production. Over the following three months, Calum and Gordon (the recording engineer) painstakingly went

through every take to identify the best example to use, listening to hours upon hours of music, leaving Gordon to 'stitch' the edits together to make a seamless performance. Both otherwise having full time jobs, this was something that had to be a labour of love, rather than enjoyment! While that was happening, I was getting quotes for the manufacture of the CDs. Luckily we have a player in the band who has made CDs before, and his recommendation was the one we went with.

It was at this point I started to explore how to purchase a licence that satisfies the copyright restrictions of using music, the intellectual property of somebody else. My guilty admission is that I forgot to include it in the initial budget proposal I presented to the committee, and was concerned that it was going to be an expensive and complicated addition to the workload. I needn't have worried, as it was a simple, on-line, process at a very reasonable cost. All performing bands will be very familiar of payments to the Performing Rights Society (PRS), who collect money and distribute it as royalties to composers. There is a similar scheme for when music is recorded. For CDs such as ours, which will not be distributed through third party retailers, there are two possible rates of Limited Manufacture (LM) licences, purchased from the Mechanical-Copyright Protection Society (MCPS). The rate relevant to us was the MCPS only rate. The was because we were only recording our own played music. If we also using others' pre-recorded music which was under copyright, the rate would have been higher, at the 'MCPS and PPL' rate. The rate payable increases depending on the length of the recording, and number of CDs that are being made. There is a cap to the total number of CDs that can be produced under the licence, different in each rate. The full explanations are covered well on the PRS website, which is mentioned at the end of the article. Once the correct payment was worked out, the certificate of payment was just a few clicks and a credit card payment away.

Once we had purchased the licence, we could get on and have the CDs made. We decided to have our CD in a standard jewel case, with an 8 page booklet, all kept fresh in a cellophane (ie impossible to open) wrapper. The sleeve notes were written by Calum, and my task was to create the cover artwork. Before the artwork, of course, a title is needed. Suggestions were taken from the band. Voting narrowed it down to three favourites, and a final vote from those three left us with a clear winner. The title of the CD was to be 'Mission Accomplished'. Inspired by the fact that one of the tracks was the theme tune to 'Mission Impossible', this title also reflected the completion of the mission of creating a CD, and doing it in such an accomplished manner!

With the title decided, I found an image on the web which I could pay for and use, royalty free, and started to

put the information together. As very much an amateur graphic designer, I had to use the tools to hand, which meant using a combination of MS Word, Publisher and Photoshop to get to the finished product. After much checking and changing, the finished documents

"The 'Mission Accomplished' project proved to be about so much more than simply making a CD. Initially, the committee deliberated long and hard, arriving at consensus on the many related administrative and financial issues. Each and every band member then worked their socks off during the recording weekend, bringing a tremendous feeling of togetherness through shared achievement. A real team effort - they did themselves proud!"

Calum Gray, Musical Director

went off to the manufacturer, the master CD followed to them within days, and two weeks later, five hundred CDs arrived in five neat boxes.

The CDs arrived just in the nick of time, as they went on sale the next day at our first major concert of the year, where our guest soloist was the trombonist Brett Baker. He, of course, took one home with him. At the time of writing, two weeks and two concerts have passed since receiving the boxes of CDs. In very round figures, the entire venture cost about £1,500 and we have recovered about £1,000 in sales so far. Mission Accomplished.

Top Tips!

- A community band making a CD takes a huge amount of preparation and planning, but can be achieved at a reasonable cost
- Identify all expenses in the budget planning, including PRS payments, deps and post-recording production work
- Consider local schools, and skilled staff within them, when looking for a recording studio
- Have an experienced musician listening to the music as it is recorded to identify takes that are acceptable, or need repeating
- Plan the recording sessions closely to be sure you keep to time
- Shop around for CD manufacturers, or take 'word of mouth' advice
- Creating a CD is a fantastic developmental experience for any band

Dr Chris James

Chairman, SCWB (Tenor Saxophone)

CD Details

Artists - Southampton Concert Wind Band; www.southamptonconcertwindband.org

Recording Studio - Lantern Theatre, Romsey, Hampshire

Clef Image for design – Shutterstock; www.shutterstock.com

Limited Manufacture licence - PRS, www.prsformusic.com

CD Manufacturer - Disc Makers; www.discmakers.co.uk

Retail price £8.00

CD Tracks:

1. Midway March

John Williams arranged by James Curnow

2. Walking the Dog

George Gershwin arranged by Derek Bourgeois

Clarinet Soloist - Ros Cooper

3. to 6. Second Suite in F (4 movements)

Gustav Holst

7. O Magnum Mysterium

Morten Lauridsen transcribed by H. Robert Reynolds

8. The Sun Has Got His Hat On

Noel Gay arranged by Philip Sparke

Tuba Soloist - Tim Norris

9. Titanic - Medley

James Horner arranged by Takashi Hoshide

10. **Mission Impossible Theme**

Lalo Schiffrin arranged by Toshio Mashima

11. **Gallimaufry**

Guy Woolfenden

12. **Against All Odds**

Phil Collins arranged by David Stout
Alto Saxophone Soloist - Jim Witcher

13. **Sinatra!**

Arranged by Stephen Bulla

Photos to accompany – below are low res thumbnails, with a dropbox link below to the full resolution (as the pictures are large files). A number have been included to give choice if you want to litter them around!!



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