FASTER, HIGHER, LOUDER: THE EFFECTS OF COMPETITION ON THE BRITISH BRASS BAND MOVEMENT FROM 1913-2013

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Abstract

This thesis examines the effects of the centrality of competition on the British brass band movement from 1913-2013. Competition has been an important activity for British brass bands since the 1860s, when the concept of an all brass band was still in its infancy. The brass band contest maintained a recognisable form from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day. The consistent contest structure based around sections allows for the identification of changes to levels of musicality and technicality in players, the idiom of brass band contest performances and stylistic influences on test piece composition. This is possible in a more detailed and accurate way than is possible for other competitive arts movements. Since the commissioning of the first original test piece in 1913, the composition of test pieces has dominated serious and long form composition for brass band. The constraints placed on test pieces that made them suitable for their use in contests, the requirements for length and technical difficulty that vary by section, helped to create a repertoire of music that is unique. However, the brass band movement has not been examined through the lens of its contesting activities despite being the subject of both social history and musicological studies.

My primary sources are records of test piece use and results for individual sections of the National Finals and British Open contest series in The British Bandsman archive, supplemented by other primary sources from the brass band media. I have used this evidence to construct a database of test piece use and contest results that I was able to analyse statistically. This has enabled me to track the standards and styles of playing demonstrated by the selection of test pieces for different contest sections at different times. These patterns of test piece use were presented to leading figures in the brass band movement and their thoughts and reactions captured in seven interviews with players, conductors, composers, adjudicators and journalists. These interviews provide contextual evidence to identify the reasons behind the changes demonstrated in the test piece database and are supported by additional sources from the comments sections and contest reviews in The British Bandsman and brass band news website 4barsrest for the latter period of my research.

This combination of new material from archival and oral sources provides new insight into the brass band movement and its role as the premier form of amateur music making in Britain during the twentieth century. The thesis analyses the test pieces used in contests, selecting the twenty-nine most frequently used and dividing them into groups based on patterns of use. The next section includes analysis of these groups and patterns alongside the individual pieces. This is not a musicological thesis, but where relevant there is musical analysis of selected pieces. The final section examines changes in the brass band idiom and compositional styles of test piece to place changes in musicality and technique in their historical and musical contexts.
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This thesis would not have been possible without the support of the staff at The British Bandsman who granted me access to the archive and advice when I visited. During the long days in the archive the information they gave me about the brass band movement proved to be a great aid to my research. My interviewees proved to be one of my greatest assets during my studies. Their willingness to share their memories and opinions on the brass band movement has made my thesis a unique contribution to knowledge on brass banding from the middle of the twentieth century. They all provided more information and advice than I had hoped, and I owe them a great debt of gratitude.

The support provided by my parents and grandparents enabled me to complete this MPhil and I am extremely grateful for this. I would also like to thank my parents and Nancy Wilson for proof reading my work.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The British brass band is an important cultural and musical phenomenon. It has been a primary source of community music - specifically working-class music - providing musical education as well as entertainment for over 150 years. It is also a genre of music in which Britain can truly claim to have been and still be the world leader. This is despite there being established brass band movements in countries as diverse as Norway, Japan, Belgium and Australia.¹ The impact of this movement and its music on British culture and working-class life is well documented. The stereotypes - reinforced by the films Play Up The Band and Brassed Off - of working-class men working in mines, mills or factories and being in a brass band survive to the present day.² This version of an industrial, manufacturing Britain only survives in such cultural representations, but one part of the representation of the brass band that continues to hold true is the significance of competition. As Denise Odello describes, during the formation of the brass band movement in the second half of the nineteenth century ‘Contests become the primary context for brass bands; they are a space where musical practice is not only regulated, but becomes regulating.’³

In both the films Brassed Off and Play Up The Band, large parts of the plots focus on the build up to contests and the competitions themselves. The way in which brass bands compete is completely different from any other artistic movement. The

primary style of competing is a set test piece contest. It is the effects on the culture of the brass band movement of competing in this way which provides the focus of my research. Competing in such a distinctive style has been one of the most defining features of the British brass band movement. It was an important factor in both its height of popularity around the turn of the twentieth century, with over 100,000 attending the National Brass Band Festival in 1913, and the decline dating from the post-World War Two period.\(^4\) The increasingly insular nature of the movement in part caused by the prioritisation of winning competitions over artistic merit for its own sake, resulted in the movement inhabiting a more or less self-contained ‘cultural ghetto’.\(^5\) Insularity is reinforced by bands setting their standards by their competitors rather than musicians outside of brass banding. Competition has shaped the position of the brass band movement in British musical culture. It has also helped to determine its popularity, and relationship with audiences, and has shaped the repertoire and the community of players who make up the brass band movement.

Throughout the history of the brass band movement, the bands with the best reputations for musical quality have been contesting bands. There are very few exceptions to this in the worldwide movement (other than Salvation Army bands) and, according to Bevan, none in Britain: ‘Contesting relates to the status of a band

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as it is perceived by others. There has been no case of a band reaching general esteem without contesting success.\(^6\) In the years since publication of Bevan’s work, there has been very few notable exceptions, chiefly Kings of Brass, who were active for ten years in the late 1990s and early 2000s and were made up of brass band ‘legends’. According to 4barsrest it was ‘A brass band where the minimum qualification had to be forty years in top flight banding’.\(^7\)

Contesting has been recognised by academics as not only the *raison d’etre* for brass bands but also a key driver of both their position within British musical culture and their standards of playing. Herbert suggested that contesting may have contributed to the decline in the numbers of brass bands in the twentieth century and repositioning of the movement away from the cultural mainstream:

> One is bound to ask whether any part of the legacy of the nineteenth century contributed to this decline, and the subsequent residence of the brass band movement in a more or less self-contained cultural ghetto.\(^8\)

As Herbert describes, contesting determines most aspects of brass banding activities: what bands do, why they do it and how they engage with their audiences. My research explores the centrality of the competition to the movement and specifically what can be learnt from an examination of test piece selection and performance.

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\(^8\) Herbert, ‘Making a Movement’, p. 65.
Historians such as Clifford Bevan have identified a link between the raising of standards in the nineteenth-century brass band movement and the development of brass band contests:

While contesting led to a spectacular rise in performing standards by brass bands, at a pace unequalled at any other time in any other type of music-making, it led also to an equally unique obsession with contesting and contest results.  

Bevan argues that contesting was no longer necessary by the mid-twentieth century as the leading brass bands had developed sufficiently to take their place alongside professional classical ensemble:

By the 1960s brass bands had won critical acceptance for their technical standards, if not always for their repertoire. Contesting was no longer necessary as the prime method of developing their overall ability. In 1975 it was accepted that Grimethorpe and Black Dyke could perform in a Henry Wood Promenade Concert, in the same series as the world’s leading orchestras.

My research builds upon the work of Herbert, Bevan and others who have established that contesting greatly enhanced the abilities of brass bands in the nineteenth century but argues for the continued significance of contesting in the twentieth century. My research examines whether the same forces that helped propel the best bands to comparable levels of ability as professional orchestras have had any effect on the brass band movement as a whole, throughout the twentieth century.

**Periodisation, research questions & contribution to knowledge**

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9 Bevan, 'Art or Sport', p. 118.
10 Bevan, 'Art or Sport', p. 116.
This thesis focuses on the twentieth century, beginning in 1913 and concluding a century later. 1913 marks the first time that an original composition for brass band was used as a test piece at the National Finals, Percy Fletcher’s *Labour and Love*.\(^{11}\)

Whilst my stated period of study is the century between 1913-2013, my results database finishes in 2011, the year before my research started and the final year for which there was a complete set of contest data available when I started my research. However, I have made use of primary sources published after this date, where they have had a relevant impact in my research.

The research question at the centre of this thesis is how important competition is to the brass band movement and what effects it has had on its development. There are four dimensions to this question:

1. What can be deduced about the technical or musical difficulty of brass band test pieces mapped against time?
2. How has competition shaped the styles of music that are composed for brass bands?
3. What impact does competition have on the brass band movement as a community?
4. How has the centrality of competition affected the brass band movement’s position within British musical culture?

To answer these research questions, this thesis examines the British brass band movement through the lens of contesting, using a variety of different types of sources from within the brass band movement alongside the existing academic

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literature. My most significant sources include written sources from brass band media archives, contest results and reports, musical recordings and scores from test pieces and interviews with some of the brass band movement’s musical leaders, including seven interviews I conducted between 2014 and 2017. These sources allow me to engage with the views from within the brass band movement on a variety of topics including the selection of test pieces for competition, whether test pieces were of the right standard of difficulty for the sections they were selected for, the artistic value and integrity of test pieces, how the brass band movement has dealt with the decline in both the number of players and audiences in the second half of the twentieth century and how this decline could be reversed. Trevor Herbert, Roy Newsome and others have offered social, political, and indeed musical histories of the British brass band movement, which provide the context for this study of the significance of the competitive aspect and how this shapes the opinions and interactions of the players. This thesis sits between the general histories by Herbert and Newsome on one side and the specialist, music-focussed works such as Dennis Taylor’s *English Brass Bands And Their Music, 1860-1930* on the other.12

The thesis begins by focussing on the most important aspect of brass band competitions: the set test piece. After examining the strictly defined genre of music that is used in most brass band competitions my research moves on to how the use of these pieces and this particular style of competition has affected the brass band movement and its position in British musical culture.

My examination of frequently used test pieces provides a basis for discussion on the
oft-repeated claim among brass banders and the brass band media that the
standards of brass bands have improved throughout the twentieth century.
Alongside reports in the brass band media, this was cited by all my interviewees in
the seven interviews I conducted with musical leaders of the brass band movement.
This discussion frequently centres on the fact that some test pieces which were used
to challenge the very best bands earlier in the twentieth century became accessible
to bands competing in lower sections by the end of the twentieth century. It may
also require evidence that no longer exists. However, I believe it is possible to come
to broader indicative conclusions about the standards of playing among brass band
players in the twentieth century and more importantly what any changes suggest
about the style of music and musical direction favoured by the brass band
movement. It uses the selection of music for competitions and other primary sources
from within the brass band movement to examine the effect of competition on the
brass band movement.
The use of recordings from throughout my period of research and the test piece
scores provides supporting evidence for changes in both the standard and style of
test pieces. Basic analysis of the speed, range and length of notes along with
differences in speed and style of performance in recordings provides supplementary
evidence to the contest results and reports for the examination of claims of changes
in style and standard.
The interviews I have conducted with musical leaders from the brass band
movement provide an updated oral history of the movement that I have used
alongside existing oral histories, including Taylor’s 1983 work *Labour and love: An*
oral history of the brass band movement. My interviewees have a significant amount of influence in the brass band movement and come from a variety of backgrounds and careers including composers, conductors, journalists, producers and contest organisers. These interviews provide a key insight into the views and opinions of some of the people who have shaped the brass band movement from the mid-twentieth century and some of whom joined the movement prior to significant changes in demographics, instrumentation and musical styles that have taken place over the last sixty years. I chose to interview these seven people because they cover every single aspect of brass banding activities. Their careers have covered both brass banding at elite, lower section and community level. They have been involved in every part of contesting from selecting and commissioning test pieces, to composing test pieces and adjudicating to playing and conducting. Alan Fernie has composed some of the most popular concert repertoire for youth and community bands, alongside test pieces. Richard Evans has played and conducted at the highest level, from 1975, when he won the British Open conducting on his first attempt. Philip Harper is another extremely successful conductor, leading the Cory Band to ‘grand slam’ in 2016, winning the National Championships, British Open, Europeans and Brass in Concert contests. He has also composed both test pieces and concert repertoire. Paul Hindmarsh is an eminent producer of brass band and choral music, including working for the BBC, selecting and commissioning tests pieces and producing brass band recordings. Frank Renton is best known as the BBC’s face of brass banding, presenting Listen To The Band for twenty-three years, until its

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cancellation in 2018, as well as conducting brass bands and orchestras. Peter Graham is a member of the triumvirate of composers who have dominated test piece composition from the late 1980s and has been one of the most popular composers of both contest and concert repertoire in the twenty-first century. Finally, Philip McCann has taught in the music department at the University of Huddersfield, alongside his work as a world-renowned cornet player, featured as a soloist on many recordings.

In order to avoid creating an imbalance in my evidence towards the latter part of my research period (as none of my interviewees were alive during the first forty years of my research period), I have sought personal testimony from earlier in the period. This includes drawing on oral testimonies collected by Taylor alongside recordings, interviews and media reports from the first half of the twentieth century, selected according to similar criteria based on role, significant and longevity in the movement.

The logical starting point for this thesis is to define the two vital concepts in my research: the British brass band and the brass band contest. These two terms both have a specific meaning as a British brass band has a set combination of instruments and players, and all of the most important national (and international) brass band contests use the set test piece as their primary form of competition.

**The British brass band: a musical definition**

There are several important factors which mark out the British brass band as a unique entity. The first important factor was the formation of the all brass band. It was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that brass and reed bands became wholly removed from the brass band movement, becoming the forerunners of the wind band or concert band movement. By this time the dominance of the all
brass band was already in place. As Roy Newsome notes in *Brass Roots* the term ‘brass band’ had a defined meaning as early as 1836 but it was some time before these newly defined brass bands became the principal form of amateur band in Britain.\(^{14}\) By the 1850s there were sufficient quality instruments available cheaply enough for this to happen and by the 1880s almost all of the characteristics associated with the brass band were in place, including the instrumentation and combination of players.\(^ {15}\) Initially there was great variation in the types of instrument used and the number of players, but by the late nineteenth century a specific combination of conical bore brass instruments, cornets and saxhorns, supplemented by trombones, became the definitive brass band instrumentation and led to the creation of the brass band idiom. This combination was already well defined by 1902, which allowed a single arrangement of a test piece to be played by all bands at a contest.\(^ {16}\)

The meaning of the term ‘brass band’ when used in a British context has undergone a few changes since it first became a defined term in the 1830s as identified by Newsome.\(^ {17}\) When Newsome described it as having a set definition, he was talking about a wind ensemble made up solely of brass instruments without any woodwind instruments. However rudimentary percussion such as a bass drum for marching has also been present since this period. This definition changed throughout the

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\(^{14}\) Newsome, *Brass Roots*, p. 5.


\(^{16}\) The rules of the September 1902 Crystal Palace Band Contest state that ‘Each band must play the test piece selected which will be sent free to each band competing at least six weeks prior to the day of the contest. No rearrangement of the music will be allowed.’ Trevor Herbert, ed. *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 317.

\(^{17}\) Newsome, *Brass Roots*, p. 5.
nineteenth and early twentieth century to become a much more narrowly focused term. Since the early twentieth century the ‘British brass band’ has referred to a musical ensemble which uses a specific set of instruments.

The current selection of brass instruments used in a brass band, in order of pitch highest to lowest, are Eb Soprano Cornet, Bb Cornet, Bb Flugel Horn, Eb Tenor Horn, Bb Baritone, Bb Euphonium, Slide Trombones in Bb and F (bass), Eb and E Eb Bass, Bb and BBb Bass. \(^\text{18}\) It must be noted that none of the instruments are pitched in ‘C’ and all brass band instruments except bass trombone are scored in treble clef written in the key of the instrument. \(^\text{19}\) This is different from many other ensembles, particularly for euphoniums, trombones and tubas, which are usually written in bass clef in C and in some cases limits brass band players to the genre as they never learn to play in the keys required by orchestras, big bands or wind bands. The standard set of players is defined by the scoring of brass band music. The following brass instruments are used in the standard brass band scoring:

1 Soprano Cornet,
4 solo Cornet,
1 repiano Cornet,
2 second Cornet,
2 third Cornet,
1 Flugel Horn,
1 solo Horn,
1 first Horn,
1 second Horn,
1 first Baritone,
1 second Baritone,
2 Euphonium,
1 solo Trombone,


\(^{19}\) Wallace, The Cambridge Companion to Brass Instruments, Kindle edition, chapter 13, location 3594.
1 second Trombone,
1 bass Trombone.
2 Eb or EEb Bass,
2 Bb or BBb Bass.  

Many bands perform with a range of different combinations for concerts as the scoring is flexible so an extra player or two on a part, or even one or two parts missing usually makes little difference. Many pieces include cues on other parts for any solo sections. This enables bands that do not have the standard combination of instruments to perform most pieces in the brass band repertoire (dependent on the standard of the players).

Some bands will also compete with different numbers of brass instruments. It is not uncommon to see a band with one fewer cornet and an extra horn or trombone. This is either because the band does not have the standard number of players for each instrument or a test piece features a section of the band and the conductor wants to ensure that the feature can be heard in the balance of the band.

It is the combination of brass instruments that makes British-style brass bands unique among brass ensembles. Other brass ensembles are usually based upon orchestral brass sections which use a different combination of instruments, primarily the trumpet, french horn, trombone and tuba. The use of a ‘brass choir’ of primarily conical bore instruments which have evolved from the saxhorn models, provides the distinctive tone and timbre of brass bands compared with other brass ensembles. The instruments used in the brass band with the exception of the trombone, are all conical bore. This means that the diameter of the tubes which make up the

instrument gradually increase as you move away from the mouthpiece and towards
the bell. The bell itself is often flared out but unlike other brass instruments it is not
the only part which increases in diameter. Trumpets are cylindrical bore instruments
with all of the increase in diameter occurring at the bell. This gives a very different
tone.21 Although there are players who can switch between trumpet and cornet and
produce a similar sound, the cornet naturally sounds mellower and warmer. Coupled
with the specific style of vibrato often used by brass band players it produces a warm
sound which is very different from that of orchestral brass sections. The trombone is
the only brass band instrument which is not conical bore. As the pitch of a trombone
is determined by a slide which takes up a significant proportion of the instrument, a
conical bore would not work as the slide would not be able to move.22

Some brass instruments are used almost exclusively in brass bands, primarily the
soprano cornet and tenor horn. Eb trumpets are used in orchestras and occasionally
in wind bands if a brass instrument higher in pitch than a cornet or trumpet (which
are both pitched at the same octave in Bb) is required. French horns are used widely
in many different types of ensemble including wind bands and marching bands to the
almost total exclusion of tenor horns. However, some wind band music sold in Britain
and Europe is supplied with copies of the horn parts in Eb and F. This is owing to the
large number of tenor horn players in areas where brass bands and wind bands co-
exist. With the exception of the trumpet, the french horn is the only brass instrument
commonly used in orchestras and wind bands that is not used in brass bands. As the

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22 The tuning slides on other brass band instruments are short and these sections are cylindrical bore
to enable the slides to move.
cornet can be used to play trumpet parts it is only the french horn parts which cannot be played by a wind band brass section made up of brass band players, hence the inclusion of Eb horn parts in some wind band music.23

The brass instruments, instrumentation and scoring which are the mainstay of the British brass band have changed very little since the beginning of the twentieth century.24 Although there have been developments in technology affecting all brass instruments such as the development of new types of valves, triggers and mouth pieces, the types of instrument used have not changed. This is important for researching brass band contests as this means that pieces of music are still accessible to all bands dependent on ability rather than when and for which instrumentation they were written. Individual performances or recordings are therefore directly comparable. The only major change in the instrumentation of the British brass band that has taken place since the early twentieth century is the vast expansion of the use of percussion.25

Percussion instruments have been used by British brass bands since the first bands were formed from brass and reed bands in the 1830s. These groups were often formed to accompany civil events such as marches or parades. The use of a drum was required to keep the band marching and playing in time. Marching percussion

23 Publishers including Editions Marc Reift (EMR) including Eb horn parts as standard and have other ‘special parts’ including trombones, baritone and tubas in treble clef in Bb or Eb. Some publishers label all of these parts as ‘world parts’ along with additional ones for fanfare band or in different keys. EMR example scores available online: Editions Marc Reift, ‘Example Scores,’ Editions Marc Reift, [04 July, 2016], http://www.reift.ch/givePisteEmr.php?emr=12329.
25 Brass bands did change from high pitch to low pitch and adopt the use of wider bore instruments during the 1960s, but this was a change to the existing instruments used, which some people suggested altered their tone and timbre, not a change to the instrumentation used at contests. See Newsome, The Modern Brass Band, pp. 62-63.
formed the basis of the brass band percussion section until the mid-twentieth century.\textsuperscript{26} The percussion required was usually limited to a bass drum, a side drum or snare drum and clash cymbals. This limited set of percussion was not involved in many early contests from which it was forbidden. Percussion is still prohibited from march contests such as the famous Whit Friday contests in Saddleworth and Tameside. During the performance on ‘the stand’, as the performance area is known, only brass instruments are permitted. This does not affect the range of music that can be performed at these march contests, as percussion is not integral to the performance in the same way that it is to test pieces.

This vast expansion in the use of percussion was also the only significant change in instrumentation that has been driven by composers and the music they have composed for brass bands to use in both concert and contest performances. The 1973 National Finals Championship Section was the first time that percussion instruments were permitted in a top level major contest.\textsuperscript{27} The selection of Gilbert Vinter’s \textit{Spectrum} was the first test piece which could not be performed satisfactorily without percussion.\textsuperscript{28} Most subsequent test pieces required the use of percussion to be satisfactorily performed, with the necessary timbres and sounds required to perform the piece as the composer intended. This change demonstrates that the demands of contests have not proved to be a straitjacket for artistic and musical

\textsuperscript{26} As early as 1828 the Bramley Band had a combination of brass and reed instruments with a drum. See Newsome, \textit{Brass Roots}, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{27} For an examination of the introduction of percussion to contests and the effect on the brass band idiom see Chapter seven.

development and there has been some adaption as musical tastes developed in the second half of the twentieth century.

Having defined the British brass band by its instrumentation and combination of players I will now discuss the concept of brass band competitions and the strict rules that they follow.
The brass band contest
Contesting has been the key influence shaping the instrumentation and definition of the brass band. There are a variety of different types of brass band contest including march contests, march and hymn contests, entertainment contests and set test piece contests. The most important type of competition is the set test piece contest. In this type of competition bands perform a single piece of music selected by the contest organisers, the test piece. Many set test piece contests are split into different sections, the equivalent of leagues in football (working on a promotion/relegation system). Each different section is given a different test piece to perform which allows bands of different levels of ability to compete in the same competition whilst still being able to make a good attempt at playing the test piece set for them. The selection of a test piece of the right standard for each section is vital and an examination of the impact of the creation of sections follows below, alongside the impact of selecting unsuitable test pieces. I will refer to set test piece contests as ‘contests’ for the rest of this thesis, and state the name of any other type of contest that I refer to. One of the reasons I am not focussing on entertainment contests is that there is no national framework or competitive structure for this type of contest, and therefore I cannot use the same methods of analysis to look for patterns or examine their significance.

The requirement to play a set test piece defines the instrumentation of the participating ensembles because they need to be able to play the piece as it is scored by the composer. Contest organisers have control over this by the selection and commissioning of test pieces and therefore have a significant influence on the instrumentation (combination and number of instruments and players) used by brass
bands. The influence of contests on the instrumentation of British brass bands is best
demonstrated by comparing it with the instrumentation of American brass bands, as
Herbert does in *The Cambridge Companion to Brass Instruments*:

> The American experience of brass bands was in some ways similar
to what happened in Britain, but there were differences... contests
were never the *raison d’etre* for American bands as they were for
the British, and subsequently the instrumentation was not
formalised. 29

This identifies the importance of contesting in defining the instrumentation of British
brass bands. There were other contributory factors, including for example, financial
incentives offered by companies selling complete sets of instruments to bands as
early as the 1890s, a practice continued to this day by some manufacturers. 30
Therefore contesting cannot be viewed as the sole reason for the standardisation of
instruments, but it was the primary reason.

Contest rules have included some guidance on permitted instruments since the mid-
nineteenth century. Whilst in 1902 the *Crystal Palace Band Contest Rules* only stated
that the contest was open to brass bands of up to twenty-four players and that no
valve trombones were allowed, the rules evolved over the twentieth century to
include a full list of permitted instruments as shown in the 1989 *National Brass Band
Championships of Great Britain Contest Rules*. 31

> The championships are open to brass bands only which will be
subject to the following:
They will, subject to Rule (10b) below, consist of a maximum of 25
players (plus percussionists) of recognised classification, namely: Eb
soprano cornet, Bb cornet, Bb Flugel horn, Eb tenor horn, Bb

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baritone, Bb euphonium, slide trombones, Eb and EEb bass, Bb and BBb bass (Eb trumpets are not permitted)\textsuperscript{32}

The use of percussion in test piece contests has been accepted since the late 1960s but it was only with the publication of test pieces such as Elgar Howarth’s \textit{Fireworks} in 1975 that test pieces started demanding the use of large percussion sections.\textsuperscript{33}

Owing to the varied nature of percussion requirements in test pieces, there is no set number of percussionists for contests. However, most pieces are scored for three players or, for more complex pieces, four players. The number of brass players in a competing brass band is set in the rules of most contests. The rules for major contests such as the Nationals and British Open stipulate the instruments allowed and the number of players. The National and Regional rules from 1 November 2012 state as follows:

\begin{quote}
The Contest is open to brass bands only, consisting of a maximum of 25 brass players plus percussionists, as required by the band.

A brass player may only play ONE brass instrument, unless required by the score.

9. a) All players taking part in the Contest must be registered with only ONE accredited Registry at least 7 days before the Friday of the contest weekend and may only compete with the band that holds their Registration.

b) A player may play with only ONE (1) band in any ONE (1) series of Regional Championships, and with only ONE (1) band in any ONE (1) series of Finals’ Championships\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

One of the impacts of contesting on brass bands is that it has defined the number of players in the top bands, as they usually perform with the same instrumentation in

\textsuperscript{32} Herbert, ‘Contest Rules’, p. 321.
\textsuperscript{33} For a comparison of percussion requirements for notable test pieces from 1975 including \textit{Fireworks}, \textit{Blitz}, and \textit{Dances and Arias} see Newsome, \textit{The Modern Brass Band}, p. 65.
concerts as they do for contests (even if it is not the same players). By only allowing a player to play with a single band and regulating their ability to change bands, the rules help create an identity for each band. It also prevents a few top players playing with multiple bands giving those better results and potentially earning a significant amount of money in fees for doing so. The limit of only playing a single brass instrument also stops virtuoso players dominating a contest as they cannot change instruments to play solos on multiple instruments. The registry is the method of enforcing these rules; hence the requirement to be registered with only one registry to stop players using different registration cards for different contests. Although lower section bands will often have more players than allowed at contests and simply choose their best players for contests, top bands will only have as many players as they are allowed in the contest.

The standard set of seats in a brass band creates a market among the top bands for swapping players. Players are allowed to transfer between bands much like football players transfer between clubs. When a seat becomes available at a band the position may temporarily be filled by a deputy or stand-in player, known as ‘deps’. These are players borrowed from another band or are players who do not currently have a regular band and are therefore available to play for whoever they like. ‘Depping’ for contests has been regulated since the first registry was founded alongside the rebirth of the National Finals after the Second World War. Although this system initially solved the problem of unregulated use of borrowed players for
the National Finals series it was a major step forwards in the organisation and formalisation of contesting rules.35

By the late twentieth century university students away from home for much of the year, including the main contest season, became a rich source of ‘deps’ for many bands in university towns and cities. ‘Depping’ is very common for concerts among top bands as there is no registration process to go through and any player can ‘dep’. However, for contests players must transfer between bands through the registration system. Each player has a registration card and can only play in contests with the band to which they are registered. Some contests do allow day transfers, but this is not permitted at the Regionals or Nationals.

The current registry for the Nationals in England is Brass Players Ltd. Their rules on transfers between bands contain three main elements. The first is that the transfer takes place twenty-eight days from the receipt of the documentation by the registry, until which point the player is still a contesting member of the releasing band. Secondly a player who has transferred from a band cannot re-join any previous band until a period of six months has elapsed from the date on which the player transferred from that previous band. The final main regulation of transfers is that ‘a maximum of two transfers/moves shall be permitted within a twelve-month period.’36

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As the process for transferring from one band to another takes over a month and a player cannot transfer more than twice in a year, transfers are only designed for long term moves such as moving to a vacant seat at another band or when the player leaves the geographical area and is forced to switch bands. This process was not always maintained by a registry of players. At the beginning of the twentieth century the contest rules required special dispensation for players living more than four miles from the band’s locality and forbid players from playing in more than one band, threatening disqualification for both bands. This left it up to the players and contest organisers to spot any players who broke the rules.  

There are no similar transfer limits on conductors. Until the mid-twentieth century, it was common to see conductors conduct more than one band in the same contest, even multiple bands in the same section competing against each other. This widespread practice disappeared in the second half of the twentieth century, it had been common practice as the best bands wanted to employ the best conductor for important contests such as the British Open and National Finals. This led to the domination of a few very successful conductors such as William Halliwell who conducted the top three placed bands at the British Open between 1910 and 1913. He also continued his success in 1912 in the National Finals, completing a feat that would never be matched of conducting the top three placed bands in both competitions in the same year. He matched his National Finals success in 1921 and 1923. William Rimmer also secured the top three places in 1906. The last time any

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38 As late as 1961 George Hespe conducted the 2nd and 3rd placed bands at the British Open, Ransome & Marles Works Band and Yorkshire Imperial Metals Band respectively. See *Appendix 1: Brass Band Contest Results Database*.  

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conductor achieved this feat at either competition was in 1926 when Halliwell once again completed a hat trick at the British Open. The prevalence of the few top conductors at the beginning of the twentieth century was such that between 1905 and 1912, only five conductors gained a top three place at the British Open or Nationals.  

It is now uncommon to see conductors conducting more than one band at the same contest, especially bands in the same section. There are players who also conduct and will do both in the same contest or series. One of the best known current examples is Glyn Williams who played euphonium for Foden’s in the North West region and conducted Marsden Silver in the Yorkshire region. Part of this decline in conducting multiple bands stems from questions of allegiance to the bands by the conductors. If a conductor is performing with two bands on a single day, their performance with one may be affected by the other, for example if there is not much time between the performances. With lower sections and community bands in particular, there are also issues of community identity and rivalry. The nearest band may be the local rivals in which case a conductor playing with them would not be welcomed by the band. Another cause is the time required and the geographical distance between the top bands. It is not feasible to conduct several top bands in a single section when their locations are far apart. Due to the decline in the number of bands since the inter-war years, there were no longer great concentrations of bands.

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in many areas and travelling between them for rehearsals several times a week became unfeasible in many cases by the later twentieth century. The role of the conductor is interesting because prior to 1991 this was the only role which a professional musician could take in a contest performance. There were however, plenty of amateur conductors.

One other defining feature of the brass band contest is that the adjudicator(s) does not know the identity of the bands performing. The adjudicator(s) are housed in a ‘box’ (usually a tent or wooden frame which prevents them from seeing the stage) for the duration of the contest. Only after they have taken their seats in the box does the draw for the running order of the contest take place. Subsequently all bands are referred to by their draw number so that the adjudicator remains unaware of which band is performing. This practice was established by the late nineteenth century and was part of the brass band stereotypes described in mainstream media in the 1930s.41 The role of the adjudicator is important for my research because the outcome of their decisions provide importance evidence in the form of contest results, and their often reported post contest remarks also provide the best evidence about whether a test piece was suitable for the contest section for which it was chosen.

I have now defined, for the purpose of my research, the concepts of the brass band contest and the test piece. I have also outlined how contests have affected the music and players of the brass band movement. Next, I will explore one of the most

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41 Herbert, 'Making a Movement', p. 52. And Russell, 'Cultural Change and the Band Movement', p. 115.
important aspects of brass band contests for my research: the use of different sections in the same contest and the selection of test pieces for these sections.

**Brass band contest sections & test piece selection**

The structure of brass band competitions, including the use of different sections for bands of differing levels of ability, is vital to understanding the influence of competition on the brass band movement. The selection of test pieces, and the factors which influence these decisions is also important. An in-depth discussion of these processes and considerations follows in the next chapter, but a brief introduction is given here.

The concept of sections in a brass band contest is a well-established one. The Belle Vue contest first held separate sections in 1886.\(^42\) Sections added to the National Championship in 1900.\(^43\) Clifford Bevan states that the introduction of sections provided two main benefits:

> It was a great step forward when, towards the end of the nineteenth century, divisions or classes of different standards were established. These provided opportunities for bands of broadly similar attainments to compete against each other and also the stimulus of a possible move to a higher class.\(^44\)

The increased opportunities provided by sections was vital in enabling the growing brass band movement fully to embrace contesting at a national level. Without sections it would have been impossible to organise a national contest series all bands could enter. In addition, the stimulus of promotion (and the ability for bands in

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\(^{42}\) Newsome, *Brass Roots*.

\(^{43}\) Herbert, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

\(^{44}\) Bevan, ‘Art or Sport’, p. 114.
different sections to place 1st or win prizes) is an important psychological factor in the prevalence of brass band contesting.

There were two further reasons behind the introduction of sections: first the limit on the number of bands entering a contest, as it is only possible to have a certain number of bands compete in a single day (and there is only so long an adjudicator can sit in the adjudication box). Secondly, the varying quality of bands necessitates the creation of sections because the concept that bands only compete against bands of a similar standard was required by the development of test piece contests. As all the bands within a section play the same piece, it must be of a standard which is low enough for all the bands to make a good attempt but not so low that the top bands give a near perfect performance and are impossible to separate.

If the standard of the test piece is too high, then the weaker bands struggle to play the piece. Practising a piece that is too difficult is disheartening for the players as they will struggle to play it well and will not gain anything from the experience. It is also a waste of time turning up to a contest knowing the band are going to come last and potentially get relegated. In addition, it makes the job of the adjudicator much harder if several bands make equally bad attempts at a piece and cannot be separated at the bottom of the contest. Due to the system of relegation and promotion of bands based on three-year averages adopted by the Nationals series, the rankings at the bottom of each section (other than the lowest section, currently 4th section) are as important as the ones at the top. 45 It is also not very pleasant for

the audience to sit through several poor performances of the test piece! The consequences of a test piece being too difficult for a section were described by Iwan Fox in his account of the Welsh Regional Second Section in 2006, which shows that the delicate task of selecting an appropriate test piece has continued to challenge contest organisers throughout the twentieth century and beyond:

It was perhaps the best performance of Howard Snell's 'Images of the Millennium' of the entire Regional Championships, and perhaps one of only a very small handful that actually managed to possibly conquer it. The real contest in fact was to find which of the other bands was to join them at Harrogate.

The stature of Newbridge's performance also gave the contest a rather lopsided feel. With it you could argue the test piece justified its selection at this level as it was given such a fine account, but without it, it was in reality another Second Section contest that saw competing bands in various states of distress. There were performances that through no fault of the bands here that verged on the catastrophic.46

This example also shows the problems caused by a single band being much better than the rest of the section. The adjudicator can easily separate out one band in this case but found the rest of the section much harder to rank. If the standard of the test piece is too easy, the audience will have a much more pleasurable time being able to hear many good performances, but it will still cause problems for the bands and adjudicators. The bands will gain equally little from playing a piece that is easily within their capability as they would from attempting one that is far too hard. The adjudicator may have an easy time placing the lower end of the results but if there are several bands who cannot be separated at the top, it will cause even more controversy in the results.

46Iwan Fox, '2006 Welsh Regional Championships - Second Section Retrospective,' 4barsrest, [18 November, 2016], http://www.4barsrest.com/articles/2006/art562b.asp#.V0xKZ2ERkUK.
This is especially true of the British Open and National series of contests. Currently the bands in the top three places in the Regional Qualifiers will stand a very good chance of moving up to the next section for the following year and are also invited to compete at the National Finals. Despite the huge expense of taking a band sometimes halfway across the country, there is enormous prestige in being invited to the Nationals as bands do not get the chance very often. The system of promotion and demotion means that bands can only be invited to the Nationals (except the Championship Section) up to two consecutive years, as they will get promoted to a higher section in which they are unlikely to finish in the top three when first promoted. 47 In the Championship Section this is not the case as there is no higher section to get promoted to so bands can get to the finals year after year. The only other exception is for a band which is of a high standard but has to work its way up through the sections. This happens either because a band did not compete for several years and was removed from the ranking system or a new band is formed of good players from other bands. Wire Brass, based in the Warrington area in the North West Region, are a good contemporary example of this as they competed in the National finals in the Third Section in 2002, Second Section in 2004 and 2005 and First Section in 2006 as they worked their way up to the Championship Section Regionals by 2007. 48 Wire Brass was formed by Championship Section players who

47 If a band finishes in the top three places two years in a row, their average points will be enough for them to be promoted to a higher section. Therefore, unless they have dramatically improved their ability over the two years they will not be able to perform well enough to place in the top three of the higher section the following year.

48 ‘Brass Band Results: Bactiguard Wire Brass,’ [18 November, 2016], https://brassbandresults.co.uk/bands/bactiguard-wire-brass/.
had played with other bands; these experienced players were the key to their meteoric rise through the sections.

The British Open series works on a similar system to the Regionals for promotion and relegation but there is no equivalent of the National Finals for bands to be invited to. The promoted bands are invited back the next year to a higher section. However, bands qualifying for the Open get to compete twice in one year as the lower sections in this contest series, the Senior Cup, Senior Trophy and Grand Shield are all held on the same day in May, the Spring Festival, whereas the Open is held in September. The structure of having sections at different times of the year for the British Open has been in place for almost the entire history of the contest, although the timing was initially July and September. Therefore a band getting promoted from the Grand Shield can compete in the Open later the same year.

The sections structure is vital for both the test piece contest to function and for my research. Without it, test piece contests would not work because there would be too many bands to hear in a single session and many of them would find the test piece either too difficult or too easy (consider the difference in attempts by a fourth section band and a National Championship winning band).

The timing of contests has a significant effect on competing bands and for many the calendar revolves around contest dates. Players not only have to ensure they are available on the contest weekends, but also for extra rehearsals in the weeks leading up to the contests. The number and types of contest that each band competes in

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49 Herbert, 'Contest Rules', p. 319.
varies, with some solely competing in local contests, some competing in the Regional contests so that they maintain their ranking, and others competing in a selection of contests. Philip Harper described how contesting defined the year for The Cory Band which he conducts:

Cory, we do five contests every year and every single one of them is a very intense affair and every band that does a contest will have the same kind of experience, maybe to a greater or lesser extent than we have at Cory. We spend probably three weeks of great intensity working on whatever test piece has been selected for us, and I as the conductor will spend longer than that because I’ll need to do my analysis and study of the piece way before then. So, some bands maybe at the lower section may spend much longer than that on a piece, they might spend six months on a piece of music for example. But we do it in short bursts of very high intensity.\(^{50}\)

Harper’s description of the preparation process demonstrates the commitment that players have to contesting. They must be willing to sacrifice significant amounts of time in the weeks leading up to a contest for rehearsals. As none of the players in the band (even in one of the world’s best bands such as Cory) are professional brass band players, they must do this around earning a living, alongside family and other commitments.\(^{51}\) Harper went on to explain why the band did not take part in other prestigious competitions which they were invited to:

We do the British Open, the National Finals, Brass In Concert, the Regional Contests and we have done the European Contests if qualified, I mean yeah we have qualified for the last few years and we’ve qualified again next year so those are the five. In the past the

\(^{50}\) Philip Harper, interview by Chris Osborn, 13 September, 2017.

band has been invited to do the World Music Competition in Kerkrade, but we did that once and I just felt a sixth contest was one too many, we were just asking too many demands of the players so we definitely do five contests a year.\textsuperscript{52}

Balancing the commitment required from amateur players has always been one of the challenges of the brass band movement. This sets it apart from the best ensembles in most other musical genres, because at the top level most other genres have professional ensembles. It is one of the reasons that brass banding can still be called an amateur movement, and may also be one of the reasons why to the outside world it has retained a working class, community music making image.

\textbf{Brass band contests, competitive arts and sports: a comparison}

To explore the significance of contesting, it is helpful to consider the comparison between the brass band movement and sports, rather than other artistic movements. The focus on competition and the use of competitive success as the key barometer of ability, have ensured that the brass band movement has been considered by some as much a sporting activity as an artistic one since the development of the brass band contest. Therefore, this view must be examined in order to determine the influence of contesting on the brass band movement.

One aspect of brass band competitions that sets them apart from almost every other type of artistic competition is that the structure of the contest is designed to challenge bands so that some bands will not perform the piece as well as others.\textsuperscript{53}

The very nature of twenty bands performing the same piece demands this. If the test

\textsuperscript{52} Harper, interview by Osborn, 13 September, 2017.

\textsuperscript{53} Some singing competitions and festivals do set a song for each class/category but there is no national system as there is for brass bands.
piece is too easy and every band performs it well, then the adjudicator will struggle to separate out the best performances. Therefore, it is an artistic event in which some groups will artistically fail. This type of pre-determined failure is not part of most other types of artistic competition. Wind band competitions set some of the pieces to be performed, but each band or conductor selects pieces from a list set by the contest organisers, giving them the freedom to choose pieces that are at the right level of difficulty.\textsuperscript{54} Ballroom dancing competitions do use the same music for all couples competing on the floor at the same time. However, the couples do not know in advance what the music will be (just the tempo and length), and each couple choreographs their routines to a level which they can perform to show off the best of their ability. Despite the differences between ballroom dancing competitions and brass band contests, it must be noted that they may be, from an audience perspective, the competitive arts movements that share the most similarities. Both disciplines share a well organised competitive structure, both of which developed within about forty years of each other, although ballroom dancing has had a more prominent international competition circuit since the first World Dance Competition was held in Paris in 1909.\textsuperscript{55} They are also both highly codified art forms, with ballroom dancing if anything more prescribed than brass band playing, particularly after 1928 when Victor Silvester's \textit{Modern Ballroom Dancing} was published, which became the handbook of dancing until it was succeeded by Alex Moore's \textit{Ballroom}

\textsuperscript{54} The National Concert Band Festival is the largest wind band competition in the UK and has been running for over 30 years. More information on the repertoire required for the competitions can be found on their website. NCBF, 'Ncbf Classes - Definitions,' NCBF, [18 November, 2016], http://www.ncbf.info/documents/ClassesDefinitions.pdf.

Both competition formats are reliant on a significant number of people to make them run smoothly. Brass band contests requiring people to usher the bands between registration desks, practice rooms, storage areas and the contest stage, along with people to register the bands and players, look after the adjudicators and compere the event. Ballroom competitions also require people to register the competitors, along with someone to organise and play the music, scrutineers, judges and announcers. However, it must be noted that most ballroom competitions rely on multiple judges who are visible along the edge of the dance floor and they make their own marking decisions which are combined by a scrutineer, rather than the one or two adjudicators who are kept hidden and make a joint decision at brass band contests. Therefore, there are still significant differences in the competition formats between these two competitive art forms.

Sports offer the best parallels with brass band contests and some brass band contests have been described as ‘little more than sporting assemblies’ as early as 1893. This is particularly true of sports such as athletics, in which those taking part are competing not only against each other but against world records. In addition, their performance is not affected by the performance of their competitors, as are a football team’s or tennis player’s. Football and tennis are not good comparisons because the participants are competing solely against each other. If one team or player is playing particularly well, they can have a direct impact on the performance of their opponent, resulting in a significant score difference and the appearance of a good performance by the stronger team. In athletics competitions a competitor can

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57 Bevan, ‘Art or Sport’, p. 117.
still win an event despite their sporting performance being far below the world or regional records (or even their personal best) as long as the other competitors are inferior. For example, in recent athletics history, the World Championships of 1997, 2001, 2003, 2007 and 2013 all passed off without a single world record being broken.\textsuperscript{58} This is similar to a brass band contest because a poor musical performance of a test piece can still win a contest as long as the other performances are worse. This is usually a symptom of the set test piece being too difficult for the section for which it was selected.

Although football and ballroom dancing are both leisure activities that came of age at a similar time to the brass band movement, their formats are completely different. The comparison with athletics offers a much more appropriate comparison of competitive styles. In both circumstances the competitors are competing against two different measures. First, the other competitors, whose performance has no physical or musical impact on their performance. Secondly a defined challenge, world records or the music written by the test piece composer. However, the one major difference between athletics and brass band competitions must not be forgotten: musical performances are artistic endeavours which can be enjoyed and consumed on an artistic level entirely separate from the competitive aspect of their nature.

This comparison goes further than just the competition format to include the ethos of both activities. Some members of the brass band movement, including prominent media reporters and musical leaders, believe that the Olympic motto, ‘Faster –

\footnote{58 James Gheerbrant, ‘Why Are We Waiting for a World Record?’, \textit{The Times}, 10 August 2017. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/why-are-we-waiting-for-a-world-record-nwffgtj70.}
Higher – Stronger’ has been adopted by the brass band movement. Philip Harper believes that the borrowing of this ideology by the brass band movement has been detrimental to the brass band repertoire:

We always want to... you know, The Olympic ideal springs to mind: ‘Higher, Faster, Stronger’. You know, you can look at, let’s look at the Olympics for example. All of the world records will not stand forever will they. There will always be someone faster and faster or jumping higher or, you know, what have you. And I think it is that spirit of human endeavour that has enabled this situation we currently have where a lot of the new music we have is technical first and foremost and unfortunately musicality plays second fiddle to it really.

The effects of the sporting ethos on the brass band movement, particularly on standards of playing has important ramifications for my research. These include insight into origins of the preference for technique over musicality, the marginalisation of the brass band movement in the twentieth century and the momentum that sustains and binds together the brass band movement. However, it is a particularly under-researched area. There is very little reference to brass band as a sport or comparisons with competitive artistic or sporting activities. Even Bevan’s Contests: art or sport? does not address this. Bevan’s work provides an informative history of brass band contests and some interesting predictions of the effect of contesting on the future of the brass band movement but only addresses the question in its title in reference to brass band as an audience spectacle. The focus on

61 Bevan, ‘Art or Sport’.
the audience and the ways in which the audience behave at the event is at the exclusion of any investigation of contesting itself as a sport.

From the point of view of the audience, brass band contests could indeed be called a sport. They have the necessary components: an audience made up of supporters, winners and losers, defined criteria and rules, and more than its fair share of controversies as a result. However contesting as an activity in itself falls into the grey area between art and sport that few artistic movements inhabit. The artistic nature of brass band contests (the fact that their endeavours can be enjoyed outside the realm of competition) separates them from sport and the importance of the desire to win separates them from other artistic movements. More research is required into this area to determine any similarities in the development of these activities (some forms of dance, cheerleading, brass bands, some wind bands and choirs). This would greatly increase the understanding of the importance of competition in the development and popularisation of leisure activities but is sadly well outside the remit of this thesis.

The definitions of the British brass band and the brass band contest, and the brass band movement’s position as a competitive art form set an important framework for the focus of my study. One further definition is required: the differences between musical technique and musicality, as inflected by the Olympic ideals inflected above.

**Musicality and musical technique**

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62 For reports of drunken behaviour from spectators, abuse of adjudicators and rumours of fixed results or cheating see Bevan, ‘Art or Sport’. And Denise Odello, ‘British Brass Band Periodicals and the Construction of a Movement,’ *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 47:3 (2014).
This thesis considers musical skill in two different dimensions: technicality and musicality. These are two very different skill sets and can be learnt in very different ways. Technicality is the ability of the player to play the notes as they are written on the score. This involves the fine muscle control of both the lips and fingers required to play each note, along with the ability to play them in sequence. The difficulties with technique on brass instruments are having the lip muscle control and strength to play high notes for a long period of time, being able to play the notes as written in quick succession, particularly with some difficult valve combinations, and the movement of the tongue required to correctly articulate the notes. Individually these are relatively simple aspects of playing to practise, and repetitive practicing of playing the notes builds up the players skill and stamina. Guides such as the J. N. Arban Cornet Method contain exercises which greatly help players improve.63

For the context of this study ‘musicality’ is the musical sensibility of the player, and their ability to interpret the written music in a way that is faithful to how the composer intended. This encompasses the skills of interpreting music, performing music in the style which was intended by the composer, adding the ethereal quality of music to a performance that is not strictly defined in western notation and requires a knowledge of the context and history of the piece, the timbre required and musical images which the piece should generate in the minds of the audience. Musicality cannot be perfected by the repeated practicing of exercises, as technicality can. Many of these skills demand of the players as much background knowledge of the music being performed as they do the ability to read music and

63 Jean Baptiste Arban, J. B. Arban Cornet Method (Boosey & Hawkes, 2000).
play their instrument. Whilst there are some clues to be found in the printed sheet music for the selected piece, there is as much to be learned from the programme notes, and researching the history of any melodies featured in the piece. These melodies or inspirations can include folk songs, excerpts from a particular composer, if they are the focus of a work such as Philip Wilby’s *Paganini Variations*, or performances from a certain time or place if they are the focus of the work. An example of this type of inspiration is *On The Shoulders Of Giants* by Peter Graham which is based on the musical giants of the past including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Miles Davis & the Sousa band. There may also be other evidence provided by the composer of their intentions of how the piece should sound, perhaps influenced by their personal or religious beliefs such as Eric Ball’s *Resurgam*. Because conductors oversee shaping the sound that bands produce, most of the musical skill required falls on their shoulders and their ability to communicate their interpretation to the band. However, the importance of solos and cadenzas in many brass band test pieces means that principal players must also have good musicality to perform their solos. Philip Harper perhaps summed up the easiest way for a player to enhance their musicality, albeit described in rather simplistic terms: ‘anyone can develop musicality at any time just go into a music shop and buy a CD, or get yourself a Spotify account and just listen to a lot of different music.’

Another way of looking at the differences between these two skill sets is that ‘technicality’ is the ability to play each individual note in the score (or play any succession of notes at the right speed), whereas ‘musicality’ is the ability to perform

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them all together in the most appropriate manner for the piece. If a band is judged to have played a piece well technically but the performance was lacking musicality, this suggests that the conductor was primarily at fault rather than the players. If a piece was played musically but the performance was technically deficient, it suggests that the piece was beyond the technical ability of the players to play their instruments, but that in the view of the adjudicators (or reporters) the conductor interpreted the piece correctly. These situations are not mutually exclusive as a poor performance or result is never just the fault of the players or just the fault of the conductor. Conductors advise the players on technique during rehearsals (suggesting the use of double or triple tonguing for example) and, as already stated, solo sections often rely on the musicality of the soloist. The balance of these skills has often been noted in contest reports, including Rodney Newton’s report for *The British Bandsman* of the National Championship Finals in 2002 at which *Masquerade* composed by Philip Wilby was the set test piece:

> Masquerade is a brilliant, affectionate and highly entertaining tribute to both Verdi and to the arrangers of all those operatic transcriptions with which our brass band ancestors did battle at the Belle Vue and Crystal Palace a century ago. As a test-piece for the Championship Section, it requires considerable technical ability from all players and conductors with keen ears for balance and clarity - qualities paramount in the cavernous acoustic of the Royal Albert Hall.65

Newton directly states that technical ability is required from the players but for musicality picks on two particular aspects that require the conductors’ focus in this piece: balance and clarity. Newton also comments on another aspect of musicality: the ability to adapt a performance to a particular venue with a known acoustic. This

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is very important when performing in a venue such as the Royal Albert Hall which throws up difficult acoustic challenges for bands. Many brass band contests take place in the same venue for many consecutive years (including the Royal Albert Hall, Belle Vue, Symphony Hall, Blackpool Winter Gardens). Eric Ball noted different aspects of ‘musicality’ that presented a challenge in his test piece *Call of the Sea*.

Right at the outset the players are set some problems of balance and control, for the music is to be played very quietly and with the utmost delicacy. It should have a distant dream-like atmosphere - think perhaps of the haze over a calm sea on a hot summer's day... Music about the sea ought perhaps to describe not only its call to "far-away places with strange sounding names," but also its dangers, storms and tempests. This overture does no more than hint at such dark matters, and if the conductor needs a further picture to help in its interpretation he might do worse than look once more at the popular painting of a boy called 'Sea Dreams', or one of its companions (there are copies in the shops of most picture dealers.) This overture is addressed to the young in heart of all ages and is one of my favourite children!\(^{66}\)

The preparation which Eric Ball instructs conductors to do shows that many aspects of musicality are not strictly musical in the sense that they require the study of the score or music theory. ‘Musicality’ includes the ability to create the right picture in the minds of the audience members and therefore some aspects focus almost as much on the human experience of listening to music as to the production or performance of the music itself. The differences between ‘technicality’ and ‘musicality’ which have been outlined here should always be kept in mind whilst reading this thesis and I explore the development of the technical and musical challenges of test pieces and the brass band idiom in Chapter Seven.

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The definitions of musicality and musical technique and the potential for development in both areas raises several questions. The most important is that if technique and musicality can continually develop, the assumption cannot be made that that is always to the better. The musicians who first performed the works of Purcell during his lifetime were not necessarily inferior to those of Mozart, and Mozart’s musicians were not inferior to Beethoven’s or Wagner’s. Therefore, we need to consider how the nature of brass band players has developed over time.
The nature of brass band players

As Herbert notes in *The Cambridge Companion to Brass Instruments*, the nineteenth century saw a seismic shift in the nature of brass players:

> the idea that the brass players who populated Europe from the Middle Ages – Alta band players, waits, stadpfeifer, court or church musicians, state trumpeters or whatever else they were called – were connected to or had a causal relationship with, the amateurs who bought valve instruments in the nineteenth century is spurious.67

This separation from previous generations of brass players must be acknowledged in order to understand the relationship between the brass band movement and classical music in Britain. They have never been part of the same musical establishment and are products of separate musical origins. Herbert continues:

> To deny the compelling reality that widespread amateur brass playing was new in the nineteenth century, a feature of modernity, is to misunderstand one of the most remarkable sociological shifts to have occurred in the history of music. Almost anyone who, say in 1820, possessed a sophisticated skill on an art-music instrument and did not make a living at it was, virtually by definition, an aristocrat or a member of the wealthy bourgeoisie. Yet, within a single generation such skills were commonplace among amateur brass band players across Europe and America.68

The importance of this change and the origins of the brass band movement that Herbert describes in regards to examining standards of playing is that we are examining a young movement (less than 70 years old by the start of my core research period in 1913) of amateur musicians. Therefore any comparison with professional musicians is problematic. Stating that the finest players of Beethoven’s music were any better or worse than those performing Mozart’s simply because of

the twenty to forty years difference in time cannot be compared to stating that there was a noticeable change in standards of playing in British brass band contests of amateurs between 1945 and 1975. The former example would take into account the finest professional musicians performing in the concert halls and opera houses of Vienna and Paris, whereas the brass band players are almost as exclusively amateur, working class people.

However, there is one connection between the uptake of brass instruments by working-class players from the 1830s and the existing brass musicians that must not be overlooked: bandmasters and conductors. There have been both professional and amateur bandmasters as long as there have been British brass bands. Rose notes in *Talks With Bandsmen* that:

> At the early stages in the formation of a band, there ought to be three practice nights a week, besides a monthly parade. Few bands can find money to pay a professional to attend more than once a week, if as often as that. The band’s existence, therefore, depends much upon the skill and patience of the amateur bandmaster.  

The acknowledgement of the role of professional bandmasters, even as Rose goes on to sing the praises of the many amateurs who started with scarcely little more musical knowledge than their fellow bandsmen, shows the importance of the link between professional musicians and the brass band movement. Many of these professional bandmasters had a military background including Charles Godfrey, bandmaster of the Royal Horse Guards 1868-1904 and member of the Godfrey family.

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which had connections with the Coldstream Guards band dating back to the late eighteenth century, and John Gladney (son of a military bandmaster and second clarinet player in the Halle Orchestra). There was also a military influence on some of the prominent bandmasters and conductors who were products of the brass band movement rather than a military career. These include Alexander Owen who was taught the cornet by a military bandmaster.

Once the brass band has been identified as being separate from the musical establishment the next logical step is to place it within the expansion of leisure activities in late Victorian Britain. The competitive nature of brass bands fits better into this family of activities rather than the musical establishment, as Bythell described:

Contesting could not, in itself, be unacceptable in a society which valued competition as a means of encouraging ambition and achievement and of raising standards. The popularity of music festivals and "tournaments of song" in late Victorian Britain - a subject still largely unexplored by historians - suggests that properly conducted contests were seen as having a beneficial role to play in amateur music-making. But when, as with brass bands, contesting came to be associated with gambling, drinking, cheating and an unsporting refusal to accept the judge's ruling, it was another matter. Apart from the sheer pointlessness of having a number of rival bands, most of whom relied on the services of the same trainer, playing the same well-prepared test-piece against each other week after week at a succession of separate local contests, the carnival atmosphere of the contest field could have little appeal to those who approached music with an almost religious reverence.

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71 Herbert, 'Making a Movement', p. 61.
Bythell states that one of the themes of late Victorian leisure activities was advancement through competition. Although he admonishes the conduct of participants at some brass band contests, an issue that has been at times frequently reported, his use of the language describing the Victorian attitude reflects the question at the heart of this thesis: is competition a means of raising standards within the brass band movement? He also notes that competitive music making in Victorian times is an area largely unexplored by historians. This is also true of brass band contesting in the twentieth century and it is in this area which I aim to make a significant contribution to knowledge. The way in which I intend to do this relies on the study of music used for brass band contests. The use of test pieces for particular contest sections allows the tracking of standards of playing for the bands in those sections if the music is deemed to have been suitable. Herbert describes a similar process of changing standards of playing tracked through the difficulty of music in the mid-nineteenth century as the brass band movement was forming:

> The fact that working-class brass players often played music from handwritten parts is helpful to those of us who, a century and a half later, are interested in what they did. This bespoke music tells us how well players could play, because it would make little sense for those of who codified the music to have made demands on their players that those players were incapable of meeting. Much of the earliest music is very straightforward, but as playing techniques became more advanced and sophisticated, so did the music that was written and arranged for bands.\(^\text{73}\)

The key difference between my study of contest pieces and Herbert’s conclusion based on bespoke music books is that the test pieces for contests are not written specifically for an individual band or player and therefore cannot be taken at face

value as suitable for the bands entering the contest section for which the piece is selected. Therefore, I need to qualify the suitability of test pieces in a way that was not required by Herbert for his nineteenth-century music. The way I have done this is by looking at the adjudication remarks, as reported in brass band media, and contest reports from various media organisations and publications. It must be said that the process of selecting test pieces for the major contest series that I am studying is undertaken by some of the leading figures of the brass band movement. However, they do on occasion get it wrong and select a test piece that is unsuitable for the competing bands. I will ensure that these pieces do not affect my conclusions by using the adjudication remarks and contest reports to rule any such pieces out of my analysis. This allows me to track the changes in standards of playing in my period of study in a similar, but more detailed way, due to the increased amount of data available, as Herbert has described in the formative years of the brass band movement.

I have now defined the key terms and concepts at the centre of my research and outlined my key sources. In the next chapter I will describe my methodology before discussing the primary sources and secondary literature relevant to my research.
Chapter 2: Sources and methods

Methodology
As my research is not focussed on a single key source or set of sources, there are several distinct methods for the different strands of my research. There are three main strands to my research: oral testimony, media archive research and musical analysis of test pieces. Although there is some overlap, each of these strands requires a different methodology and set of sources. These sources will be examined in my primary source review that follows the methodology and secondary literature review.

Test pieces
The first strand of my research is examining the selection of test pieces for contests to see if the selection of these pieces can be used as a measure of change over my research period. The possible changes that may be able to be measured are:

1. standards of playing: do bands within the same section get better or worse?
2. styles of playing: does the relationship between musicality and technique change?
3. styles of composition: what compositional styles and techniques are favoured by brass band composers?

Finding out which test pieces are used, when and how frequently they are used and which section they are used in was my first aim, as this allowed me to examine the use of test piece selection as a measure of change within the brass band movement.
In order to do this, I compiled a database of test pieces used in the most important contests. The sources I used for this were the *British Bandsman* archive, cross-referenced with Appendix 5 of Herbert’s *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History*.¹ This contains a list of all the test pieces and bands who had come in the top three at the British Open since 1853 and the National Championship section finals from 1900 until 1997. This work was the inspiration for my database as it first enabled me to explore test piece selection over time.

The most important contests for this database are the two longest established national contesting series. The first is the British Open and its qualifying rounds the Grand Shield, Senior Cup and Senior Trophy.² This is the longest-running Brass Band competition in the world. The second series is the National Finals and Regionals qualifying rounds. These are the most important contests for two reasons: their significance or profile, and their longevity.

They are the highest profile brass band contests held in Britain. The Regionals and Nationals are the contest series upon which the national and international rankings are primarily based. The British Open series does not allow all bands to enter as there are only twenty bands in each section. The top section, the British Open, is widely believed to be the toughest competition in Britain and with the exception of the European Championships probably the toughest in the world. Winning both the British Open and the Championship section Nationals is known as ‘doing the double’. Foden’s achieved this rare success in 2012, 102 years after they last achieved it in

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¹ Herbert, ‘Appendix 5’.
² ‘British Open History,’ [18 November, 2016], http://www.thebritishopen.net/history.html.
The only other contest with the prestige to match these two contests is the European Championships. I am not including these in my database primarily because they have two rounds, only one of which is a set test piece, so the results are not solely based upon this. In addition, this contest has only existed since 1978 so the amount of information they could add to my database is limited.

As these contests are the oldest in the world, they can provide the most data for my research. The British Open and the Nationals have been going since 1853 and 1900 respectively. Both of these have qualifying rounds and therefore use multiple test pieces each year whereas the Europeans only have two sections.⁴

There are several examples of well-known test pieces that have fallen in section use. This means they are accessible to bands of a lower ability from where they were originally used. These include Eric Ball’s *Resurgam* which has fallen from use in the British Open (the top twenty bands in the UK) in 1950 to the Second Section in 2011 and Percy Fletcher’s *Labour and Love* which was used for the National Finals in 1913 and the 3rd Section in 2010.⁵ My research aims to explore whether these pieces are part of a wider trend or anomalies, if and what this could tell us about standards and styles of playing.

The test pieces which are of the greatest value to my research are the ones which are repeated multiple times over a period of several decades. These pieces are the ones most likely to be used in sections other than the one they were initially used for.

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⁴ They also include own choice test piece and an own choice programme
⁵ See Appendix 1: Brass Band Contest Results Database for full details of test piece use.
Looking at reports from *The British Bandsman* about the reception of the piece each time it was used enabled me to identify whether the piece was judged to be at the right level for the bands and therefore whether the use of the piece fits the rate of change in musical ability of the brass band movement. This allowed me to rule out any pieces which were chosen for the wrong section and provide a more accurate picture of rate of change in ability. Test pieces which have only been used once or twice provide more of a challenge to fit into the rate of change in musical ability because I could not make any direct comparisons. Therefore, my research is focused on pieces which have been used four or more times.

My research is not a musicological research project. The primary focus is on the music selected for use in brass band contests, and what can be learned from the performance of this music, rather than the examination of the scores for brass band test pieces. However, where relevant I have used test piece music and scores to examine compositional styles, and the particular intricacies of individual pieces. Parts of my research in this area are supported by the work of Hindmarsh and others who have published on the development of the brass band repertoire.\(^6\)

Recordings of performances of test pieces at contests provide additional information about the test piece selection process. Tempos, timings and stylistic changes help identify changes in the way conductors and bands interpret the music. Live contest recordings also help identify any technical aspects of the music that bands struggled with. The growth of brass band recordings at the end of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century to include published CDs of contest recordings of every

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\(^6\) Hindmarsh, 'Building a Repertoire'.

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competing band provides a valuable resource for the latter part of my research period. However, this scale of resource is not available for the majority of my period of research. Frank Andrews’ book *Brass Band Cylinder and Non-Microgroove Disc Recordings 1903-1960* provides a comprehensive and valuable record of all brass band recordings made during the non-microgroove era (pre-1960), which corresponds to the first half of my research period. Andrews’ work systematically catalogues all available recordings from this period. However, this work also helped me to identify a gap in the historical sources for my research: there are simply not enough existing recordings of the pieces which form the focus of my research to undertake a comparative study of test piece recordings from the early and late twentieth century. With the help of Andrews’ work I was able to identify forty-three recordings of the test pieces I am studying from the period of 1913 to 1950. Fourteen of these recordings are of *Pageantry*, eight are recordings of *Resurgam* and the remaining twenty-one recordings cover a further ten pieces. Crucially, there are only live contest recordings of three contests. These are the 1950 British Open for which the test piece was *Resurgam*, the National Finals Championship Section for which the test piece was *Pageantry* and a recording of a single performance from the 1926 National Championships, for which *An Epic Symphony* was the test piece. As my thesis focusses on the effects of contesting on the brass band movement, a study based on comparisons and musical analysis of recordings should use live contest recordings, rather than studio recordings. It is the ephemeral musical performance on the contest stage that the adjudicator listens to and uses to judge the bands, and

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a studio recording is completely unrelated to this. It may well include a different
group of players and be completed at a time when the test piece has not been
selected for contest use in a number of years. Therefore, the research for this thesis
does not make extensive use of historical recordings, and instead relies upon other
sources which have captured the essence of the ephemeral contest performances, to
explore standards and styles of playing.

To supplement my database I will also look in more detail at a selection of seminal
test pieces composed throughout the twentieth century. Analysis of note length and
frequency, tempo and range will enable me to examine some of the stylistic trends in
test piece composition. The test pieces selected will not be from the list of frequently
used test pieces as their composition dates do not cover the whole of my research
period, but are instead an indicative sample of test pieces that are regarded by
musical leaders of the brass band movement as seminal works that demonstrate the
most significant musical influences on test piece composition. A comprehensive
analysis of this nature is beyond the scope of my research, but this small sample will
provide an insight into some of the changes in compositional styles. This analysis is at
the end of Chapter Seven.

**Brass band media archival research**

To aid in the analysis of the quantitative data in my database and from the musical
analysis of the test pieces I will utilise brass band media archival sources to provide
qualitative data. These sources will provide the contextual information required to
understand the patterns and trends shown in the database. Reports from brass band
contests have been a regular feature of the brass band media since the publication of
brass band periodicals started alongside the first brass band contests in the second half of the nineteenth century. Bevan described the subject matter:

The contents of the band press, much of which even today reflects the interests of its readers by assuming more of the character of the sporting paper than that of the music journal, indicate that attitudes are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.8

This sporting nature of the brass band press is useful for my research as many articles are focussed on the selection of test pieces and their difficulties, the transfer of players and conductors between bands, advertisements for players for bands, and contest results.

Whilst some members of the brass band movement may bemoan the intense focus on contesting as a sport that Bevan describes, it ensures there is a very substantial collection of source material available to me in brass band media archives. The reports often contain several different features that are useful to my research. The most important information is the test piece(s) selected, number of bands entering and results. This basic contest information contributes directly to my database.

Secondly some reports contain direct quotes from the adjudicators at the contest. These quotes, often taken from the remarks the adjudicators said at the end of the contest when delivering the results, include information such as whether they thought the test piece was too easy or too difficult for the bands, information on any stylistic or technical elements that the majority of bands struggled with and other overviews of the performances given. Additionally, some reports also include quotes

8 Bevan, 'Art or Sport', p. 118.
from conductors or players who have competed in the contest, including what they
thought of the test piece (difficulty and whether it was enjoyable to rehearse and
perform), how they thought their performance went and their views on the result.
This provides a significant amount of contextual information and ensure that any test
pieces that were not suitable for a contest can be flagged as such. The most
significant media archive for my research is the The British Bandsman. This periodical
has been continually published since 1887, varying between monthly and weekly
publishing schedules. Further media resources include 4barsrest which has a web
archive for the last two decades of my research period covering a wide variety of
brass band related topics, including both primary and secondary resources.

The media resources listed above also provide information on how contesting has
shaped the development of the brass band movement. Articles cover topics including
the brass band community, the position of the brass band movement in British
musical culture and the influence of other musical styles on the brass band
repertoire. These sources will support a wider examination of the influence of
contesting on the brass band movement.

Oral testimony
I have conducted interviews with musical leaders of the brass band movement to
provide further evidence of the way key members of the brass band movement view
the changes that have taken place since the second half of the twentieth century.
These interviews build upon Taylor’s work Labour & Love An Oral History Of The
Brass Band Movement. My aim is not to provide a new, updated oral history of the

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9 Taylor, Labour & Love.
brass band movement but to understand how the brass band movement has viewed the changes that have taken place in the second half of my research period. In order to meet this aim my seven interviewees include a wide range of musical leaders including players, composers, conductors, producers and journalists. The brass band movement is dominated by people in these positions. The power wielded by individuals and small groups such as composers, music selection panels, contest promoters and adjudicators makes the opinions of these people valuable evidence of the changes that have taken place in the brass band movement. Whilst they are only the opinions of seven people, the positions of power and influence which they have occupied enable me to use their views as evidence for perceptions of the significance of contesting within the brass band movement. My interviewees, and their positions within the brass band movement are detailed later in this chapter, alongside my other primary sources.

There is a gap in the oral testimony evidence available for the early part of my research period. Rose’s 1895 work *Talks With Bandsmen* contains some oral testimony from the late nineteenth century, but the first fully fledged oral history of the brass band movement is Taylor’s *Labour & Love* published in 1983 and covering the period of c.1900 until the 1980s. My work builds upon Taylor’s work to cover both memories and opinions of the events prior to Taylor’s publication and events that have happened since. My media archive research provides sources to fill in some of the gaps in the early twentieth-century sources with reports including quotes from players and conductors at contests.
The three distinct methodologies outlined above combine to provide both
quantitative and qualitative data for the arguments outlined in this thesis. This
multidisciplinary approach combining musical analysis, archival sources and oral
testimony enabled discussion of the attitudes within the brass band movement to
changes and influences throughout the period of research. As a result I have been
able to examine whether these views from within the movement correlate with
representations of the changes as viewed from outside the movement and from the
musical sources.

**Primary Sources**
My research is based upon four main sets of primary sources, as I have outlined in
my methodology. These are split into musical, archival and media sources, oral
testimony and biographical sources.

**Musical sources**
For the study of a musical movement such as the brass band movement, musical
sources must be understood to gain insight into brass banding activities. However,
my research is not a musicology project, as I have already stated. Therefore, the
study of musical scores and some recordings takes a secondary role, supporting the
sources which capture the ephemeral contest performances on which my research is
based.

Test piece scores and individual parts are of value for my research where I have
examined the style and particular difficulties of a test piece, particularly when
discussing changes to the brass band idiom and test piece compositional styles.
Although my academic background as a historian does not lend itself to interpreting
scores, my background as tuba player and conductor of brass bands and wind bands has given me the skills to interpret them.

The second type of musical source available to me is recordings. As I have already discussed in my methodology, there are not enough live contest recordings of relevant test pieces to conduct a comparative study of contest recordings. However, as my study focuses on a number of frequently used test pieces, recordings have been invaluable in familiarising myself with these pieces. Along with using these sources to familiarise myself with the brass band repertoire, the existence of recordings also provided evidence for the state of the brass band movement, and its relationship with media and other aspects of British musical culture.

No work on British musical culture in the twentieth century can be complete without reference to the effect of the growing popularity of recordings on LP, cassette, CD and available online in various formats. Newsome writes about this in detail in two chapters with reference to brass bands in the general media and to recording activity by specific bands throughout the remaining chapters.¹⁰ One contradictory finding by Newsome which I will build upon is the decline in media presence of brass bands towards the end of the century at the same time as the number of brass band recordings increased greatly:

In the media, band broadcasts and appearances on television have almost dried up. From the late 1990s there has been only one dedicated weekly brass band broadcast, the late Friday evening programme *Listen to the Band*, and that lasting a mere half-hour. Bands on television are almost completely limited to spasmodic appearances in programmes such as *Songs of Praise*.

¹⁰ Newsome, *The Modern Brass Band*. Chapters three and eight.
On the other hand, brass band recordings have again escalated...The recently launched 'World of Brass' is a subsidiary of SP7S and a recent catalogue shows the current availability of well over 300 brass band CDs - most of which have been produced within the last five years.\(^{11}\)

Both of these trends have continued since Newsome published his work, with brass bands currently as rare as ever on television but brass band recordings available to purchase on CD or download at both specialist sites like World of Brass and general music sellers such as Amazon and iTunes.

This finding will form one of the cornerstones of my research into the position of the brass band in British culture. As recordings are a largely commercial enterprise, there must be a large enough market to enable producers to recoup the cost but there is seemingly not a large enough audience to warrant further appearances in mainstream media. I will build upon Newsome’s work investigating whether this suggests the BBC and other media organisations were still out of touch with the scale of the banding movement by the end of the twentieth century or whether the purchase of CDs was done by a small but committed audience, too small to warrant increased programming. Paul Hindmarsh’s work and experience within both the BBC as a music producer and the brass band movement provides insight on the reasons behind the changing and declining audience for brass band music.

**Archival and media sources**

The archive of *The British Bandsman* magazine is one of the most valuable records of the brass band movement, with a complete archive of weekly or monthly editions

\(^{11}\) Newsome, *The Modern Brass Band*, p. 324.
reaching back to its first publication in 1887. Sam Cope founded the magazine as *The British Bandsman: A monthly magazine for Bandmasters and members of Military and Brass Bands* and became the second editor when he replaced James Waterson in 1888. Cope served as editor until 1895, and again from 1899-1906 and 1930-42. The eleven other editors include James Browne (1895-98), Herbert Whiteley (1906-30), John Henry Iles (1942-51), Eric Ball (1951-63 & 1964-67), Alfred Mackler (1963-64), Geoffrey Brand (1967-75), Robert D. Alexander (1975-77), Peter Wilson (1977-2000), Nicola Bland (2000-2004) and current editor and owner of the publication, Kenneth Crookston (editor 2004- present). It is notable that the editors have included leading figures from the brass band movement who are better remembered for other roles, as composer (Eric Ball), contest organiser or promoter (John Henry Iles) and conductor or adjudicator (Geoffrey Brand) as well as those such as the current editor whose primary contribution to the brass band movement is through journalism and publishing. Ownership too has varied between organisations in different sectors of the brass band movement, with the most significant difference being the change in its recent history from Kapitol Media and Events Ltd (owners of the National Championship contest series) between 2000-2004 and The Salvation Army (whose bands do not contest at all) in 2004-15. For most of my period of research *The British Bandsman* was owned by Bandsman’s Press Ltd. (prior to 1977) or Austin Catelinet Ltd. (1977-2000). As the name and publisher of this publication changed several times throughout my period of research, for the purpose of this

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thesis I have standardised it to *The British Bandsman* for the title and publisher for the entire period.

This archive covers the whole of my period of research and provides both qualitative and quantitative information. The most accessible information in this archive, and with other brass band media sources, are pieces of information about the contests. These include the test piece selected for each section, the results and any other procedural information included such as the draw, the names of the adjudicators and the number of bands that entered. This information can be taken at face value without the need to consider the nature of the publication and any media bias as it is in the best interest of the publication to publish these basic facts correctly. They can also be cross referenced with other sources including Herbert’s list of test pieces and contest results in *The British Brass Band A Musical and Social History* (Appendix 5), which provided the initial impetus for this research, other brass band media sources and other contest results archives. The following quotes are typical of articles reporting on contests that include quotes from either participants or adjudicators. A report on the 1964 National Finals Championship Section preparations stated:

> Reporting from South Shields, Harton & Westoe Colliery Band say Gilbert Vinter’s new piece they are to play in the Royal Albert Hall is a ‘Very good test for all sections of the band’. Harton add that their rehearsals are going well, and that all the members find the piece interesting. From Bristol, Fishponds British Legion Band comment that in the *Variations On a Ninth* there are ‘Very pleasing, tuneful melodies. A good test’.¹⁴

This example demonstrates that the brass band media was connected to the individual bands within the brass band movement and not disconnected from

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current activities. It also provides an insight into the reactions to one of the seminal test pieces of the mid-twentieth century at its first use. I will discuss the relevance of this quote and the role of Vinter in the evolution of the brass band idiom in Chapter seven.

Another example of useful information from contest reports comes from a much less positive account from performances in the Championship Section of the North West Regionals contest in 1963. The reporter quoted adjudicator Frank Wright as saying:

> Of the top class: 'Rienzi has a number of technical and other problems which still have to be solved. On the whole basses were excellent, but trombones were inclined to be wild. Volume was too heavy'. He was critical of the 'wavering' cornet player.¹⁵

This type of report, directly quoting the adjudicator’s remarks and views of the contest provides a very important source of information on the contest performance standards. However they are not the only type of article published by The British Bandsman that contain useful information for my research. The magazine prints detailed discussions on each of the test pieces chosen for contests which explain the background to the piece and any particular difficulties with it. The musical challenges of the piece are explained in detail, often including comments by the composer if they are still alive. The explanations of the background and story to the piece also include explanations of any reason for the piece being chosen for that particular contest, for example an important anniversary of the composer. This was one of the

reasons for choosing Philip Wilby’s *Masquerade* in 1993 as it was the centenary of Verdi’s opera *Falstaff* which premiered on 9 February 1893:

Predictions that some bands would never cope with the technical demands of the test-piece, Philip Wilby’s *Masquerade*, were unfounded, though much of the fast music had to be taken on trust in most parts of the auditorium... *Masquerade*, dedicated to Mrs Margaret Mortimer and intended as a centenary tribute to Verdi’s *Falstaff*, is difficult, don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. It is difficult but not impossible, and the wonder of last weekend is that it brought the best out of bands who were thought to have no hope. Composer Philip Wilby was in no doubt. “Last week it was unplayable; today everybody played it really well. The results show what sort of depth there is in the brass band movement when some of the 'star' bands don’t come in the frame but some of the Cinderellas have done fantastically well. Today was a triumph for the audience as well as for the brass band movement. For me it was a great day.”  

This aides my further investigation into changes in musical ability of brass bands by allowing me to identify any particular musical challenges which bands have not managed to overcome. The reports and comments on each contest informed me if a particular test piece was judged to be too difficult or too easy on the day of the contest, allowing me to single out and qualify any occasions on which an unsuitable test piece was chosen for a contest.

When *The British Bandsman* was first published it was one of several brass band periodicals including *Brass Band News* (1881-1958), *Cornet* (1893-1940) and *Brass Band Annual* (1894-1910). These periodicals were distinct from mainstream music publishing at the time, with their greatest circulation, and in some cases their publishing base, being the industrial North of England - the brass band heartlands.

17 Odello, ‘British Brass Band Periodicals and the Construction of a Movement.’
Denise Odello’s work reveals their importance in forming the brass band movement and identity:

The history of the brass band movement as recounted in the pages of brass band periodicals reinforced the strength and vitality of a working-class aesthetic. Rather than propel brass bands into the musical mainstream, brass band periodicals had the effect of justifying the preservation of their unique practices.

As Odello notes, the insular nature of brass band periodicals helped promote the idea of a brass band movement and community. However, in creating this feeling of community they increased the distance between the brass band movement and mainstream musical culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is one of the reasons that these periodicals failed to achieve one of the publishers’ other aims: to help raise the brass band movement to part of the artistic middle-class musical culture of which many band organisers and patrons were a part:

Historical articles focusing on art music composers were originally presented as an extension of the social mission of working-class periodicals. Eventually these features expanded to include composers, conductors, and prominent performers in the brass band movement. This shift represented a larger effort to position brass bands not as a distinct working-class form of music but rather as part of bourgeois British music culture. To legitimize brass bands in the eyes of the British musical establishment and middle-class audiences, middle-class band organizers and enthusiasts attempted to elevate working-class brass bands to high-art status. However, this effort ultimately did not succeed.

Throughout the twentieth century, the place of the brass band in British musical culture was pulled in two different directions: working-class and popular music influences versus the middle-class enlightening agenda of artistic endeavour. As

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18 Odello, 'British Brass Band Periodicals and the Construction of a Movement,' p. 447.
19 Odello, 'British Brass Band Periodicals and the Construction of a Movement,' p. 432.
Odello states, the middle-class agenda did not manage to elevate the brass band to art music status within the musical establishment. The argument continued in the test piece selection committees with commissioners such as Paul Hindmarsh striving for an artistic agenda to overtake commercial composers. *The British Bandsman* articles and reports reveal the artistic position of the brass band movement to be a contentious debate throughout its existence.

Odello’s work provides good insight into the role of periodicals in forming the brass band movement however there is overstatement of the role of contesting in the mid-nineteenth century. Odello states ‘most brass band performances took place as part of public competitions’ but Herbert counters this argument, quoting J Ord Hume. Hume was a military band player and professional brass band conductor, now most famous for the composition of marches including *BB & CF*.

J. Ord Hume wrote in 1900 of ‘the remote village band which is generally composed of an unlimited number, from ten upwards.’ Such bands probably outnumbered the contesting bands which used the ‘standard instrumentation’. ‘Contesting’, said Ord Hume, ‘is in my opinion, the only way in which to raise the standard of moderate bands.’ But many, even most, of these bands may never have competed.

Despite brass band contests developing throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century and the benefits that influential figures believed they provided, it is clear that the majority of performances were not part of contests.

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As *The British Bandsman* provided my primary archival source the attitudes towards brass band contests held by the owners and editors must be taken into account.

There was a period in the 1890s when *The British Bandsman* was critical of contests, publishing an article in 1897 stating:

> We owe a great deal to contests, inasmuch as they have been the cause of existence of so many good bands, and have spread a knowledge of good music among the people, but there are signs, even in the north and midlands, that the public are tiring of them, and prefer to listen to good steady programmes.\(^{22}\)

However, when John Henry Iles took over the periodical, support for contests returned by 1899. It became a major promotional tool alongside music publisher R. Smith & Co.\(^{23}\) As I am primarily using contest results and reports from contests that quote the adjudicators, any changes in the editorial support for contests will have a limited effect on my research. However, it is important to note the broad continued support for contests from the editorial team.

There are two other significant databases of contest results available. The first is [brassbandresults.co.uk].\(^{24}\) This website contains information about contests, bands and test pieces. There are hundreds of different contests and thousands of sets of results available. However most of these are irrelevant to my research as I am only focussing on two contest series. There is a significant amount of data that is useful to me, for example there is information for the National Finals for every year since it

\(^{22}\) No Stated Author, *Contests*, in *The British Bandsman* 1897. Quote in Odello, 'British Brass Band Periodicals and the Construction of a Movement,' p. 444.

\(^{23}\) Hindmarsh, 'Building a Repertoire', p. 246.

\(^{24}\) Tim Sawyer and Sharon Sawyer, 'Brass Band Results,' [16 October, 2017], https://brassbandresults.co.uk.
has been contested since 1900. This provides a useful record to cross reference reports in *The British Bandsman* with to ensure accuracy. However it is maintained by users, without any references or identification of changes which is the reason I am not basing my own database of contest results and test piece uses on this source.

Another archive of contest results is the National Brass Band Archive. This Wigan based archive also has a website with databases of contest results, sheet music and recordings (CDs and LPs). This is a more limited database of contest results, only covering the National Finals Championship Section from 1900 to 2010.

I had to create my own database of contest results for two reasons. Firstly, none of the existing sources contain all the quantitative information that I require in a single database (test piece selected and results) for all the contests that I am studying (British Open and National Finals Series from 1913-2013). Secondly, none of the available sources contain the qualitative data to enable my examination of the effects of test piece selection alongside the quantitative data, adjudication remarks or comments, reports from listeners or interviews with participants. Therefore, my own database is more substantial, and contains different datasets from the existing ones.

*The British Bandsman* is not the only brass band media source with a significant amount of information readily available about the contests I am studying. Online brass band media developed at the end of the twentieth century and has continued

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25 As different sections were formed in different years there are a different number of results for each section available as follows: Championship 110, First 27, Second 74, Third 74, Fourth 72.


to expand ever since. The most important brass band media website is 4barsrest. This website gave me access to another set of contest results and information against which I can check my database. 4barsrest reporters live blog contests and write up the results. This can supplement the information I have about the suitability of test pieces for the most recent contests. Content from the website is available from 2001 onwards, so is useful for examining the changes which took place in contest repertoire from the beginning of the twenty-first century. Some of the articles are of little use, such as contest predictions (which are notoriously inaccurate), but others especially those written by composers about test pieces, provide insight into both the composition process, and therefore the intended performance outcomes and attitudes of the musical leaders who have shaped the repertoire of the brass band movement.

Biographical sources
From the earliest days of brass band contests the best and most successful brass band players and conductors became very well-known within the brass band movement, and occasionally within the wider musical community in Britain.²⁸ Some of the most well-known members of the brass band movement have taken commercial advantage of their position and written autobiographies. The top players and conductors who have regularly achieved success at the highest level of contesting could choose which band to perform with. From the early twentieth century this has added a commercial element with the increasing monetisation of the upper echelons of the brass band movement. This has increased the power of

²⁸ For example Alexander Owen (1851-1920) was widely regarded as the as the greatest all-round cornet player of his day by 1871. Newsome, Brass Roots, p. 54.
the most successful players and conductors however the heyday of the conductor is arguably the early twentieth century. In this period it was not uncommon for successful conductors to conduct three, four or five bands in a single contest, all in the Championship Section competing against each other. Harry Mortimer was one of these conductors. The Mortimer family is one of the most famous dynasties in the brass banding movement and has been involved in brass banding for well over 150 years, Harry Mortimer was the most famous and successful of the family. His autobiography *Harry Mortimer On Brass* portrays the brass band movement through nearly seventy-five years. Harry Mortimer was born in 1902 and his father started teaching him the cornet when he was just five years old.

*On Brass*, published in 1981, covers almost the entire history of the brass band movement until that time. With the early part of the book covering his father Fred Mortimer's involvement in brass bands before Harry's birth, including conducting Foden’s band through the most successful period for any competing brass band, this represents nearly a century of brass band history.

Harry Mortimer's importance in the brass band movement comes not only as a world class player (as part of the Foden’s Band which did a double hat-trick at the National Finals between 1932-1938) and conductor (conducting the winning band at the National Finals every year between 1945 and 1955 except 1946 and 1951) but also as

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29 For example, Harry Mortimer conducted the bands placed 1st, 2nd and 7th in the British Open in 1952. See Appendix 1: Results Database.
31 Bands which completed a hat-trick had to sit out the contest the following year. Foden’s were therefore not invited back in 1935.
a champion of brass bands and their music within the British music establishment through his job at the BBC. This book explores the opportunities that became available to Mortimer, initially as a result of his reputation as a trumpet and cornet soloist and principal trumpet with the Hallé Orchestra. His role as Brass and Military Band Supervisor, which he held between 1942 and 1964, provided the opportunity to determine the shape and prominence of brass band broadcasts for some of the most important eras of brass band radio broadcasting. Although the arrival and growth of television meant that by the early 1960s there was much less focus on radio broadcasts than between 1920 and 1950, the period of 1942 until 1964 was the time of the most prominent brass band broadcasts. This was in part due to the technical challenge of recording brass bands with early microphones and because of Harry's role in pushing for more time for brass bands on air.

A studio was usually little more than a room which seemed to be decorated with miles of cable, and into this room a band was squeezed, where it would gather round the one microphone suspended in front of it. For this reason, the BBC preferred a soloist. The microphone was better able to cope with the sound of one than with twenty-five, and soon proved that bands, like orchestras, were better recorded in a concert hall.

By examining the role which Harry Mortimer played in BBC brass band broadcasts On Brass places the brass band movement in the context of British musical culture. The role of the brass bands in British culture has changed significantly throughout the twentieth century and this work helps track those changes. The comparison with the current state of the brass band movement and its position in British culture is shown

33 'National Brass Band Championships of Great Britain Archive,' http://www.kapitol.co.uk/index.php?id=18. In 1946 Eric Ball was the winning conductor and in 1951 Harry's brother Alex was the winner.
34 Mortimer, On Brass, p. 65
by the fact that many people had to be turned away from the 1980 British Open as
the venue was full.

It is fifteen minutes before the contest is due to start and all the
programmes have been sold. Worse still, about five hundred
people have had to be turned away from the unbooked seating as
the hall is sold out. Whilst most contest organisers would be
delighted at a sell-out, H.M. seems positively upset by it ‘Five
Hundred. That’s an awful lot of disappointed people.’

It is now almost unheard of for a contest to sell out. Since the beginning of the
twenty-first century, Brass in Concert has sometimes sold out but that is an
entertainment contest, not a test piece contest like the British Open or National
Finals. The only test piece contest which sells out on occasion is the Championship
Section National Finals at the Royal Albert Hall, depending on the test piece selected.
For example, the 2014 British Open had 130 tickets to sell on the door (out of 2262
available) and this was viewed as an exceptional audience for a very popular test
piece.

The final aspect of this book which is of great value to me is the section dealing with
Mortimer’s involvement in the organisation of both the National Finals and the
British Open. Although his involvement in the National Finals was much shorter lived
than his involvement in the British Open, which is still run by Martin Mortimer, Harry
Mortimer was part of the committee which drew up the contest structure in 1945. It
is this contest structure, with the addition of the First Section, which has remained in
use ever since.

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35 Mortimer, On Brass, p. 199
36 No stated author, ‘Huge Audience Expected at Open,’ 4barsrest, [18 November, 2016],
The Mortimer association with running the British Open was established after Harry’s retirement from the BBC. As he explained: ‘Since 1964 my idle hours between concerts have been spent with such trifles as running the British Open Championship-at Belle Vue, and the Spring Festival Contest for lower section bands.’ This ironic understatement disguises many of the other brass band related activities which Mortimer was engaged in after his BBC career but does demonstrate the amount of time and importance he placed on running the contest series. Alan Lynton, Harry’s collaborator for *On Brass* gives a detailed report of the running of the contest which provides a useful view of behind the scenes of contest organisation. As contests are the central focus of my research this is invaluable information.

As this work is an autobiography and is therefore subject to the character of the human memory, there are some sections which lack some detail. However, the book provides useful information about all the major changes in the brass band movement, from the establishment of original test pieces, the separation and integration of the Salvation Army bands and the impact of the First and Second World Wars. Therefore, this source provides a third angle on the general history of the brass band movement in the twentieth century.

Other autobiographies by renowned adjudicators David Read, David Horsfield and composer Denzil Stephens also provide information on two different types of brass band personality, the adjudicator and the composer. The relationship between

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37 Mortimer, *On Brass*, p. 197
composers and adjudicators in the brass band movement and the influence they have is extremely important to the contesting nature of the brass band movement and these works provide sources for both sides. David Horsfield’s *A Boy From Brighouse* includes a list of all of his contest conducting engagements from 1984 to 2011 and adjudicating engagements from 1989 to 2013. This provides some insight into the life of an adjudicator/conductor making a living in the brass band movement. For example, in 1996 Horsfield undertook four contest conducting engagements including the Regional and National contests and three adjudicating engagements including all four sections at the Yorkshire & Humberside contest. However, by 2011 he only lists a single conducting engagement at Kippax Entertainment contest but lists seven adjudicating engagements totalling eighteen sections. This is an example of the career path of many adjudicators, who start off as conductors and move into more and more adjudicating work as their experience grows.

Denzil Stephens’ *Banding Is My Life* details his career with the RAF Central Band along with his time playing with Black Dyke band and in the brass band movement. This provides a useful insight into the relationship between military bands and the brass band movement. Richard Evans has also written a biography, released in 2005, titled *Dick the Stick*.³⁹ This book describes his long and illustrious brass band conducting career. Evans is the only person to feature in all three of the types of first person sources from musical leaders of the brass band movement that I am using. He published his own biography, was interviewed for Taylor’s *Labour & Love An Oral*

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³⁹ Richard Evans, *Dick the Stick*, Dick the Stick (Stockport: Jagrins Music Publications, 2005)
History Of The Brass Band Movement and I have also interviewed him as part of the oral testimony collection I undertook for this thesis.

Oral history and interview sources
I carried out seven interviews with musical leaders of the brass band movement as part of my research. I chose the interviewees to include expertise in as wide a range of brass banding activities as possible. Therefore my interviewees include people whose primary roles within the brass band movement are as composers, players, conductors, journalists and producers. They have experience at the very highest levels of brass band performance, including winning the contest series that I am studying, choosing or commissioning test pieces for contests, national broadcasting and working with community and grass roots level bands and players. Although I only conducted seven interviews, I deliberately chose the interviewees to cover the widest range of topics, and breadth of experience relevant to narrow focus of my research. This thesis is not an oral history of the brass band movement, but sought to use voices from within the movement to gain an understanding of how changes in the brass band movement during the second half of the twentieth century were viewed from within.

My first interviewee was Peter Graham. Graham is a renowned brass band and wind band composer. He has lived and worked extensively in both the UK and United States of America and has held roles with Black Dyke Band as Music Associate/Conductor (1997-2004) and as the first civilian composer in residence with
Her Majesty’s Coldstream Guards Band. His test piece compositions include *Dimensions, Prisms, The Essence Of Time* and *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*.

My second interviewee was Richard Evans. Evans is one of the most successful brass band conductors in the world. His illustrious conducting career took off in 1975 when he became the conductor of Wingates Temperance Band and within three months won the British Open on his first attempt. He is also the most successful conductor ever at the Brass In Concert entertainment contest, having won it nine times conducting several different bands. Aside from his contesting success he is also of particular interest for my research as he has served on the Music Panel, the group who select the music for the National Finals contest series.

Alan Fernie was my third interviewee. Fernie’s role within the brass band movement is primarily as an educator and a composer of both concert music (both original compositions and arrangements) and test pieces. His test pieces include *Anglian Dances* which was selected for the Regional Fourth Section contests in 2006. Alongside his composing and arranging activities Fernie is heavily involved with lower section bands, conducting Harwick Saxhorn band and regularly working with other lower section bands across the UK. This enables him to provide an insight into the effects of contesting on lower section bands and on community banding.

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41 Richard Evans, ‘History,’ [20 October, 2017], http://www.evanso.co.uk/history/.
42 No stated author, 'Brass in Concert Past Results,' brass band results, [20 October, 2017], https://brassbandresults.co.uk/contests/brass-in-concert/.
44 For more of Fernie’s views on contesting and lower section bands see No stated author, 'Interview with Alan Fernie, Composer of the 2006 Regional 4th Section Test Piece,' the Mouth Piece, [22 October, 2017], http://www.themouthpiece.com/forum/threads/interview-with-alan-fernie-composer-of-the-2006-regional-4th-section-test-piece.19848/.
experience with community and youth bands provides a very different view from many of my other interviewees who have spent most of their professional careers working with the very best bands around the world, which has made some of them feel disconnected with the grass roots activities of the British brass band movement.

Paul Hindmarsh was my fourth interviewee, and the first of two interviewees who have worked extensively with brass bands and the national media. Hindmarsh was brought up in the Salvation Army and played trombone. He worked in academia and as a professional singer before getting a job as a producer for BBC Radio 3 in 1985. His main focus was chamber music but by the time he left the BBC in 2006 he was producing all the brass and wind music programmes and a lot of the choral music programming.45 He has also worked for Brass Band World and The British Bandsman magazines, produced CDs and recordings, and commissioned test pieces for a variety of contests and organisations. Hindmarsh provides useful information on the role of brass bands in British musical culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In his role as a BBC producer he was directly in contact with the commissioners who decided what brass band programmes would be broadcast and therefore how prominent brass bands would be in the output of the British national broadcaster. He also provides insight into the process of commissioning new test pieces for contests and other events, the role of the contest organisers, media organisations and composers in this process.

My fifth interviewee, Frank Renton, was the second who has been involved in brass band broadcasting. Renton started his career as a professional trumpet player before

45 Paul Hindmarsh, interview by Chris Osborn, 18 February, 2014.
becoming a conductor. As a military musician and conductor Renton conducted several regimental bands and the Royal Artillery Orchestra. In 1988 he was appointed Principal Conductor of the British Concert Orchestra and in 1992 he made the decision to concentrate entirely on conducting and broadcasting. He also conducted Grimethorpe Colliery Band, including their winning performance at the 1992 National Finals that became the inspiration for the film *Brassed Off*.46 As presenter of BBC Radio 2’s *Listen To The Band* he is one of the most recognisable figures in the British brass band movement and the only remaining presenter of a regular brass band programme on a major nationally broadcast channel or station. His experience in professional civilian and military music and in broadcasting gives him an almost unique viewpoint on the position of the brass band movement in British musical culture. His evidence supplements Hindmarsh’s as the main source of views from within the brass band movement on the relationship between brass bands, broadcasters and the musical establishment.

Philip Harper, my sixth interviewee, is one of the most successful conductors in the British brass band movement, having conducted the Cory Band since 2012 and leading the band to a ‘grand slam’, winning the European, British Open and National Finals contests, a feat that had only been achieved twice before. He also led the band to victory at the 2016 Brass in Concert, completing a four contest set that had never before been achieved.47 Harper’s success as conductor of one of the leading brass bands in the world marks a generational change from conductors like Richard Evans

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and Frank Renton. Harper is also a composer and arranger, he has arranged many of
the pieces included in Cory’s winning performances at Brass in Concert in 2012, 2013,
2015 and 2016.\footnote{No stated author, ‘Brass in Concert Past Results’, https://brassbandresults.co.uk/contests/brass-in-concert/.} Harper studied an academic music degree (as opposed to studying
a degree primarily focused on performance skills, at a conservatoire) and
postgraduate degree in composition and this musical education has shaped his view
of the brass band. He is the music editor of Wright and Round music publishers and
previous editor of \textit{Brass Band World} magazine.

My final interviewee is Phillip McCann. McCann is a lecturer in music at the
University of Huddersfield and cornet soloist. He is one of the few cornet players to
feature as a soloist with both brass bands and orchestras. He recorded \textit{The World’s
Most Beautiful Melodies} series of CDs with a variety of brass bands and choirs on the
Chandos record label. He recorded several television and film soundtracks as a
soloist with orchestras including \textit{Anna of the Five Towns, Woman of Substance} and
\textit{Hetty Wainthropp Investigates}, which received an Ivor Novello Award for Best Music
commissioned for a Broadcast Production.\footnote{Phillip McCann, ‘Phillip Mccann Biography,’ University of Huddersfield, [12 October, 2017], https://research.hud.ac.uk/ourstaff/profile/index.php?staffid=19.} He also works as a conductor, currently
for Carlton Main Frickley Colliery Band, and has been awarded both the Mortimer
Medal and Iles Medal by The Worshipful Company of Musicians. His position as a
music lecturer at one of the most prominent higher educational establishments to
offer music degrees on brass band instruments, with some brass band focussed
courses, provides an understanding of the developments in brass band education
and the effects of the formalisation of brass band education within higher education.
When the experience and viewpoints of all my interviewees are combined I have a wide range of sources covering all aspects of brass band activities. The individual specialities in conducting, composing, contest music selection, broadcasting and education ensures that there are several relevant and interesting viewpoints on all aspects of my research covering the period from the immediate post war years to the present day.

In addition to the interviews which I have carried out for my research there exists a small body of works which contain oral testimony or interview transcriptions from members of the brass band movement. The most significant work for my research is *Arthur Taylor’s Labour & Love An Oral History of the Brass Band Movement*.\(^{50}\) This work contains excerpts from interviews with nearly one hundred people, conducted in the early 1980s.\(^{51}\) Some of the interviewees recall playing at the Crystal Palace contest in 1913 whereas others became interested in brass bands in the 1970s. These interviews extend the range of voices from within the brass band movement past the limits of my own interviews right back to the beginning of my research period. Not all of Taylor’s interviewees are musical leaders from the brass band movement as are my interviewees, some are grass roots members which gives the book a balanced view of different aspects of brass banding activities. However, the musical leaders are the focus of another book which provides insight into their musical backgrounds and education as well as their careers and successes.

\(^{50}\) Taylor, *Labour & Love*.

Chris Helme’s 2009 book *What Brass Bands did for me* provides a series of profiles of some of the musical leaders of the brass band movement.\(^{52}\) It does not include interviews with them but provides a detailed profile of each including views and reports of their successes from other musical leaders or media organisations. The people featured were active throughout the whole of my research period and include players, conductors and composers. One chapter focuses on prominent female players to demonstrate that the brass band in the twentieth century was never a totally male world despite the male domination and media stereotypes.

Taylor and Helme’s works greatly aid my research into brass bands in the twentieth century but do not contain any information on the development of the brass band movement in the nineteenth century. For this I must turn to Algernon S. Rose’s *Talks with Bandsmen*.\(^{53}\) The book is not an oral history but a series of lectures originally given by Rose to the members of the Broadwood Band in 1893 when they converted from strings to brass.\(^{54}\) The book contains a number of quotes from a very wide variety of individuals involved with brass bands on topics including brass band instruments, music and setting up bands, alongside Rose’s own analysis.

This combination of these sources alongside my own interviews provides a substantial body of voices from the brass band movement from across my whole research period. Although there is a bias towards the latter part of my period, created by the number of my own interviews relative to the existing oral history sources available for the early twentieth century, this is not an insurmountable

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problem for my research. Most of the changes that I am investigating took place after the National Finals were reinstated in 1945 and there is sufficient evidence available to me to discuss the state of the brass band movement in the interwar years.

Secondary literature review
The brass band movement has been a part of British cultural life for two hundred years and is the subject of a number of academic and non-academic works. Much of this literature has been published in the last twenty-five years. The earliest of this recent group of publications is Bands: The Brass Band Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries edited by Trevor Herbert and published in 1991. 55 This book was reworked in 2000 and became the edited collection The British Brass Band A Musical And Social History. 56 This is the most complete history of the brass band movement to date in a single work. It also covers the widest range of different aspects of the brass band movement, from the entire chronology, the development of the repertoire, Salvation Army bands and brass bands outside of Britain. These provide insights into several aspects not covered by other works, such as the influence of brass bands on other styles of brass playing and brass bands outside of the United Kingdom. Although these areas are not a central part of my research they provide useful insight on influences upon the brass band movement outside of contesting in Britain. This includes the use of alternative instruments from wind bands or orchestras and the influence of foreign bands on British contests as

55 Herbert, Bands: The Brass Band Movement.
56 Herbert, The British Brass Band.
demonstrated by the Newcastle Steelworks Band from New South Wales which won the British Open on a visit in 1924. Some of the contributors are well known within the brass band movement such as Paul Hindmarsh and other contributions are by cultural historians such as Dave Russell.

In particular Paul Hindmarsh’s chapter *Building a Repertoire: Original Compositions for the British Brass Band (1913-98)* gives detailed analysis of some important test pieces such as Percy Fletcher’s *Labour and Love*, Eric Ball's *Resurgam* and Wilfred Heaton's *Contest Music*. This provides a starting point for me to build upon Herbert and Hindmarsh’s research into individual pieces, but does not analyse the frequency of use of these pieces or any differences in reception from players each time they are used.

Also examined in this work are the differences and links between the contesting band movement and the Salvation Army bands. Simon Cobb’s work also builds upon Herbert’s earlier work on the Salvation Army. Cobb examines the musical similarities and origins of both contesting and Army music. This is particularly relevant for my research owing to the crossover of composers such as Ball, who was initially a Salvation Army composer and subsequently became a prolific writer of test pieces. Ball crossed over to contesting band music more than thirty years before the breakdown of barriers between the Salvation Army bands and other brass bands. His

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58 Hindmarsh, 'Building a Repertoire', pp. 245-77.
59 Simon Cobb, ‘Dma Portfolio’ (D.M.A., University of Salford, 2006).
music was extremely popular, both for contests and concerts. Therefore his influence is extremely important to both sides of the brass band movement.

Roy Newsome's two-part history of the brass band movement, *Brass Roots* (1998)\(^{60}\) and *The Modern Brass Band From The 1930s To The New Millennium* (2006)\(^{61}\) complements Herbert's work and together they form the basis of the academic history of the brass band movement. *The Modern Brass Band* includes sections on media coverage of the brass band movement and contest development which are particularly relevant to my research.

Roy Newsome's work builds upon Herbert's history providing more detailed insight into both chronological extremes. Much of Newsome's work, including his thesis, focuses upon the formation of the brass band movement, but the second part of his history also comes more up-to-date including the last decade of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first.\(^{62}\) Some themes are picked out by both authors such as shortages of players. As noted by Herbert, this became a problem just before the First World War, but Newsome shows it continued to be a problem throughout the twentieth century and beyond:

> The hierarchy of bands remains much the same, but a worrying - and growing - shortage of players means that the very top bands are tending to pull even further away from those lower in status. The best players gravitate upwards, as they always have done, but vacancies lower down become increasingly difficult to fill.\(^{63}\)

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\(^{60}\)Newsome, *Brass Roots*.

\(^{61}\)Newsome, *The Modern Brass Band*.


\(^{63}\) Newsome, *The Modern Brass Band*, p. 323.
This shows two of the key themes of my research: the decline in the number of players and the increase in the standard of playing are linked and can create unforeseen consequences, such as the drain of players, not from the very bottom bands but from those beneath the very top bands. This is an interesting area of research as the difference in standard between the top bands and the rest of the movement has long been recognised as a problem within the brass band movement. This problem led to the creation of the First Section in 1991-1992. By investigating the rate of increase in musical ability in the brass band movement I will build upon Newsome's work to find out at what level this problem is most acute. I will then be able to find any links between this problem and the demographic composition of the bands most affected.

*The Modern Brass Band* provides detailed information on every aspect of twentieth-century brass banding: successful bands and players, changes to contests, the developing demographic composition of bands and repertoire. The thrust of this work focuses on the brass band movement as a whole rather than just the competing activities. Although Newsome explores test pieces, he also looks at many other different types of competition including concert items and concertos. My work differs from this as I am looking at brass bands through the lens of the contesting movement and using this angle to explore changes in the wider movement.

Supplementary works include Helen Wallace's *Boosey & Hawkes The Publishing Story*, Roy Newsome's thesis ‘The 19th century brass band in Northern England: musical and social factors in the development of a major amateur musical medium’ (1999), Simon Cobb's DMA portfolio work on Salvation Army recordings (2006) and

Helen Wallace’s history of the major music publishing company Boosey & Hawkes provides a detailed insight into the world of music publishing throughout the twentieth century. However much of *Boosey & Hawkes The Publishing Story* is devoted to the publishing of serious music. The relationships between the company staff and composers such as Britten, Copland, Bartók, and Stravinsky is looked at in detail, but very little time is spent on the publication of light music. As all band series music is classed as light music, whether it be original light music, transcriptions of serious music for band or serious compositions written specifically for brass band, there is very little information on the publication of brass band music. There is also very little mention of the instrument production side of the company, apart from instances when it directly affects the publishing side. As the author notes in the introduction, both of these were deliberate decisions:

In order to keep the project from sprawling out of control, I was compelled to focus on the ‘serious music’ side of the business as it

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was run from the London headquarters. I am all too aware that there is more to be written about the light music department, and the work of the New York office, and the hubs in Germany and France, not to mention the original offices in Australia and South Africa. Moreover, the history of Boosey & Hawkes as an instrument manufacturer is a fascinating story in its own right and deserves to be told.66

This work was researched in 2005 as Boosey & Hawkes were preparing to move out of 295 Regent Street, the London headquarters of the company for the previous seventy-five years. This created time constraints as the archive was being removed from the building and in part led to the decision for the limited focus of the work.67

Therefore the main interest in this work for my research is that it provides a detailed background of the publication of serious music, with occasional notes on the publication of band music in Britain, throughout my period of study. This information is vital in understanding the changing place of the brass band movement in British musical culture. It is notable that this is the closest any existing work gets to the publishing of brass band music. The publishing of brass band music is an industry shared between large international publishers such as Boosey & Hawkes and much smaller specialised brass band publishers. Smaller publishing companies and individual composers often sell their own music via adverts, stands at contests and more recently websites. Because of this, prominent arrangers, composers and conductors have significant influence over the music in the brass band repertoire. It is a great shame that there is little research done on this industry and how it reflects changes in brass band repertoire.

Jack Scott's thesis 'The Evolution of the Brass Band and its Repertoire in Northern England' is another important and relevant work for my research. This is because it deals not only with the development of the brass band movement but specifically with its repertoire which is a central theme of my research. This work also includes other major aspects such as the position of the brass band movement in British musical culture. Scott concludes:

By the end of the [19th] century, brass bands were an important entertainment, if not cultural media for the working-class bandsmen and their peer audience. In the twentieth century the role of the bands reverted from one of entertainment for listeners, to its original role of providing an activity for the participants. 68

This conclusion is examined more closely along with the different audiences which have developed for brass bands. Once again Paul Hindmarsh’s work in this area, along with that of Frank Renton, provided an inside view from the BBC on the decline of broadcast listeners and I examined whether Scott’s conclusion on this matter is true across broadcast media and concert and contest audiences.

Scott’s work focuses on the development of brass bands and brass band music from the very start of the movement. Therefore, there is considerable overlap with Newsome’s work on nineteenth-century brass bands. One major difference between this work and my own research is that the brass band movement was still developing in terms of instrumentation during the nineteenth century but by the time my research begins in 1913 the instrumentation was set. Although there has been substantial expansion of the percussion required in brass bands, the number and

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type of brass instruments used has not changed significantly since 1913. Minor changes like the preference for a bass trombone in F rather than G and occasional preference for the Eb trumpet over the soprano cornet are the only changes to have taken place during the twentieth century.\(^{69}\) Therefore in my period of research, music notation does not have to change to cater for developments in the instruments used. Scott's research also includes the very beginning of band music publishing and the limitations imposed by not having a back catalogue of music already available for bands.

Some aspects of music choice after 1913 can be traced back to the earliest days of the brass band movement. Scott demonstrates this with the preference for opera selections. By 1840 operatic selections were included in addition to the airs, glees, quadrilles and other light music that made up the brass band repertoire.\(^{70}\) These opera selections remained the main contest music until the 1920s.\(^{71}\) Although nineteenth-century opera selections are now rarely played, more modern arrangements are still used as test pieces and concert music today. Scott argues that the performance of opera selections had a large effect on the position of brass bands in British culture. People became quite familiar with the names of the famous operatic and orchestral composers and could instantly recognise melodies and entire passages of their music. Yet performer and audience alike rarely heard any of the pieces in their entirety nor in their original orchestral or operatic form nor did they have any desire to do so. In a sense, these Victorian brass bands were the musical

\(^{69}\) Myers, 'Instruments of British Brass Bands', p. 156.


\(^{71}\) Taylor, *English Brass Bands and Their Music*, p. 46.
Readers Digest of the day. Scott’s work by examining the legacy of the use of operatic selections by brass bands.

By the end of the twentieth century there was a growing group of test pieces based on the works of classical and operatic composers. These pieces use the familiar melodies of Paganini, Mozart and Purcell among others as the starting point for their musical journey. Originally the melodies were introduced to the brass band movement in the form of the opera and classical selections and the familiarity which they offer is only possible because of the audience’s and performers’ knowledge of them. I will examine how these pieces from composers such as Philip Wilby and Philip Sparke have developed from these earlier works discussed by Scott.

Scott finishes his work with an outline of the music played by brass bands in the twentieth century until his date of publication (1970). This is much more limited in focus, partly due to the rapid expansion of music that was published for brass bands from the interwar years onwards. As this is the main focus of my research, my work will follow on in greater detail. There is also very limited discussion of test pieces being used for different sections. This is most likely due to the current section structure being in place since 1945. Although bands had been sectioned in contests since 1893, there was not a full section system like the current system in place until 1945. This means that by 1970 there were only a limited number of test pieces which had been used multiple times in different sections.

Adding to the body of work on the early years of the brass band movement is Dennis Taylor's *English Brass Bands and their Music, 1860-1930*. Taylor details many aspects of brass band activities in his period of research including those of church and village bands and of the Salvation Army bands. Although none of these bands compete and are not therefore part of the main focus of my research, allocating their place in the brass band movement relative to the contesting bands will be necessary. The rise in playing standard has been attributed to the whole brass band movement by authors including Taylor: ‘Despite [the] later decline in numbers, the standard of musicianship was not affected and has happily continued to make progress up to the present day’. These non-contesting bands may also have benefitted from some of the factors which improved the playing ability of contesting bands.

The ‘music first’ approach of Scott and Dennis Taylor is shared by the parts of my research focusing on the selection and use of test pieces. These are not the only works to share methodological similarities with aspects of my own work. Arthur Taylor’s *Labour & Love An Oral History of the Brass Band Movement* has been insightful as a guide and template for my own oral history research. Taylor interviewed over one hundred members of the brass band movement for his research, ranging in age from people who remembered performing in the 1913 National Finals to people who joined the brass band movement in the 1970s after seeing brass bands on television. This work provides Taylor’s insightful analysis of the situation of the brass band movement in the early 1980s and the journey of the

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75 Taylor, *Labour & Love*.
movement up to that point, and provides a wealth of primary source accounts that complement my own oral history research, taking the record back to the start of my research period. However, the amount of material from early in my research period is more limited.

Alongside the work of historians there are some academic sources from other disciplines that provide a useful insight into aspects of the brass band movement. Anthropologist Ruth Finnegan’s *The hidden musicians: Music-making in an English town* has a chapter devoted to the brass bands active in the Milton Keynes area in the 1970s and 1980s. This work provides a significant contribution to the role of the brass band in the local community. It also places brass bands within the local musical culture and examines the relationships between different groups and genres of music making at a local level. Several of Finnegan’s findings are supported by evidence from my interviewees. For example, Finnegan identifies one of the most important changes in the relationship between brass bands and their local community: by the early 1980s many players did not live in the immediate neighbourhood. However, despite this change, there was a still a strong feeling that bands represented their local community, particularly on civic, religious and public occasions.77 This is supported by evidence from my interview with Alan Fernie, in which he described his own band’s place in their local community.78 Finnegan also suggests that competition was at the heart of the brass playing identity, and ‘competitions had much to do with the enthusiasm of brass band players for both

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the “brass band movement” as a whole and for their strong identification with their own bands.’79 Philip Harper agreed with this when I interviewed him, as he believed there would not be a brass band movement without brass band contests.80 As Finnegans suggests in her book, the local community is organic and brass bands, and other music groups, grow out of it. This contrasts with the national community of the brass band movement which, as Harper argues, can only exist because of the way competition brings bands together. Competition itself creates community by creating an ’other’ to identify against, but it also brings people together repeatedly at rehearsals and competitions, as social occasions, which in itself creates community. Therefore Finnegans work is useful for contrasting the brass band movement with other local music genres and organisations, to contrast with those that do not rely on competition as a raison d’etre.

Finnegan’s work also provides insight into the changes in education affecting the brass band in the second half of the twentieth century, noting that ‘bands also contained players who had learnt their craft in several different modes’, including the traditional methods of learning within a band and through formal education, in the classical music method.81 Finnegans conclusions about the role of brass banding in the community are significant and provide insight into the role of brass banding in the 1980s outside of the core traditional areas. However, it must be acknowledged that her work is a localised study and does not contain any championship section bands. The relationship that these bands have with their local communities was very

79 Finnegans, The Hidden Musicians, p. 51.
81 Finnegans, The Hidden Musicians, p. 50.
Journal articles provide a limited set of sources on British brass bands in the twentieth century. The majority of journal articles focus on either different periods (the formations of the brass band movement in the mid-nineteenth century is the subject of more articles), geographical locations or brass playing styles. However, two articles by Odello are particularly relevant to my research. The first is British Brass Band Periodicals and the Construction of a Movement.\textsuperscript{82} This publication examines the role of brass band periodicals, including one of my most important primary sources \textit{The British Bandsman}, in the creation of the brass band movement. The second article is “Musical Athleticism: Victorian Brass Band Contests and the Shaping of Working-Class Men”.\textsuperscript{83} This article discusses the impact of contesting on the brass band movement. Between these two articles Odello focuses on one of my primary source archives and one of the main themes of my research. However, both articles concentrate on the brass band movement as it was being founded in the mid-nineteenth century through its rapid development into the early part of the twentieth century. My work will extend this time period and discuss whether the forces that shaped the brass band movement in its early years are still the ones that dominated its development in the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{82} Odello, ‘British Brass Band Periodicals and the Construction of a Movement.’
\textsuperscript{83} Odello, ‘Musical Athleticism: Victorian Brass Band Contests and the Shaping of Working-Class Men.’
Some journal articles focus on brass banding as a regional activity. These include Etheridge’s “Southern Pennine Brass Bands and the Creation of Northern Identity, c. 1840–1914: Musical Constructions of Space, Place And Region” and Nettel’s “The Influence of the Industrial Revolution on English Music”, which describes brass banding as an activity found in Yorkshire and other ‘industrial districts’. However Bythell’s “Provinces Versus Metropolis in the British Brass Band Movement in the Early Twentieth Century: The Case of William Rimmer and His Music” examines the brass band movement as a national movement. Bythell argues that whilst brass banding was ‘overwhelmingly proletarian and provincial’ it was inextricably linked to the metropolitan musical establishment by the nature of its links with London-based music publishers and formally trained music professionals who became some (but by no means the majority) of the musical leaders of the movement.

The brass band movement itself has been the source of several histories of brass bands and other useful publications that sit alongside the works from the academic community. Many of these are biographical sources but others are secondary publications for either the academic or general reader. Nigel Horne’s *The past and future of brass bands* is one such work. This essay provides a brief history of the brass band movement. There are further detailed sections on the brass band

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85 Bythell, 'Provinces Versus Metropolis in the British Brass Band Movement in the Early Twentieth Century: The Case of William Rimmer and His Music.'


instrumentation and the relationship between contesting and market forces as a conservative force within the brass band movement.88 Composer Gavin Higgins also produced a series of two articles for the brass band media website 4barsrest titled *What Might Have Been? The first 50 years of lost compositional opportunities* and *The second 50 years of lost compositional opportunities*.89 These articles provide a useful comparison between compositional styles in the brass band movement and those in classical music throughout the twentieth century, as well as identifying test pieces that sections of the brass band movement view as seminal in the development of the brass band repertoire. The publication of these articles by 4barsrest and their author being a composer who has written numerous pieces for brass bands demonstrates that these articles are a product of self-reflection by the brass band movement. However, they also include viewpoints from outside the brass band movement as the author is also an established orchestral composer, having composed the piece chosen to open the Last Night of the Proms 2014 among other works.90

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Chapter 3: Test pieces: the music of the brass band contest

Having defined the concept of the test piece, and its central role in brass band contests, I will explore the process of choosing test pieces for contest use and the musical, political, and organisational decisions this involves. It will become apparent that the selection of test pieces for a contest is one of the most influential decisions in the history of the brass band movement, and in some cases the selection of an individual piece has the power to change the future direction of the brass band movement.

The test pieces used in brass band contests such as the British Open series and National Finals series have become some of the most well-known pieces of music in the brass band repertoire. These pieces are rehearsed by many bands for a long period of time, up to three months, and performed at the most high-profile brass banding events. Test pieces therefore have a profound effect on the brass band movement not just musically but also socially. There are several patterns that can be seen in the test pieces selected for use in these contests over the last century and these patterns shed light upon the position of brass banding within British musical culture.

How and why are test pieces chosen?
The starting place for examining the test pieces used in major brass band contests is looking at the people who select these pieces of music, the process they go through and their considerations when choosing a piece. For the National Finals series this is the Music Panel. The Music Panel is made up of renowned members of the brass
band community who have been involved in organising and competing at contests for many years. Their current members include Chairman Philip Morris, Administrator Tim Jones, Brian Buckley, John Maines, Richard Evans, Mike Fowles, Paul Holland and Samantha Harrison.¹ These eight people choose ten pieces each year that will be played by almost every contesting brass band in Britain. The Music Panel has been in existence in some form since the National Finals were reinstated after the Second World War when Harry Mortimer was an early member.² In contrast, the British Open series does not rely on a Music Panel, as the test pieces are chosen by the promoter and contest management.

Several key factors must be considered when the Music Panel or the promoter selects the pieces. The pieces must be suitable for the bands’ performance to be adjudicated, be interesting and practical for the bands to rehearse, and be appealing to the audiences who will hear them up to twenty times. These three factors relate to the three groups of people involved in the contest: the adjudicators, the participating bands and the audience. Although the format of all set test piece contests is the same, the importance of these factors varies at different levels. According to influential members of the brass band movement I interviewed for my research these three factors lead to two key influences on test piece selection: commercial or financial influences, and musical influences. Therefore, the question must be addressed of the balance in test piece selection between financial and musical considerations.

² Mortimer, On Brass, p. 140
A commercial or financial choice

The cost of running a brass band contest means that attracting a paying audience is necessary for the survival of the contest. The importance of this factor in test piece selection varies, linked to the varying costs of putting on each contest. Audience appeal is an important factor for the Championship Section National Finals because this contest has been held at the Royal Albert Hall in most years since 1945.³ This venue is very expensive to hire, see below, and the contest needs to attract a paying audience of several thousand to make it financially viable. Music Panel member Richard Evans believes that the financial cost of the Royal Albert Hall means that selecting the test piece for the National Finals Championship Section to be primarily a commercial decision:

RE: Well I’m on the panel, you know, to choose music. I’ve got to admit that within this panel that is promoted by Capital Promotions, Philip Morris comes in the meetings, number one, take the Albert Hall, number one I think it costs him over £40,000. Whatever you say but there is a commercial venture there . . . [S]o therefore commercially you’ve got to think about that because if he had had a poor attendance we might have been playing in Fulham Town Hall next year. So that’s number one in my opinion.⁴

Although there are venue costs for all contests, the Royal Albert Hall is by far the largest and most prestigious venue that has been regularly used for brass band contests in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, with a capacity of around 5500. The British Open must deal with similar financial concerns, but on a smaller scale, with Symphony Hall in Birmingham (which has been home to the

⁴ Richard Evans, interview by Chris Osborn, 12 November, 2014.
contest since 1997) seating up to two thousand people. The financial risks involved in hosting these two contests are potentially greater than those involved in other contests. Former Music Panel member Paul Hindmarsh confirms the significance of the commercial impact:

PH: I think at the minute we are hitting a downslope in that sense, musicians aren’t selecting pieces at the moment in this country. It’s not being selected necessarily, the [British] Open is not being selected by musicians its being selected by a promoter, the Nationals is being conditioned by what is going to fill seats and that therefore affects not necessarily the quality of what’s written but the sound of what’s written.
CO: So the commercial nature of these contests, the fact that it costs x thousand pounds
PH: Yes
CO: to hire out the Royal Albert Hall
PH: That is absolutely key I think at the moment to how these contests are sounding.

It is no surprise that there are major financial influences on brass band contests.

Enderby Jackson’s nineteenth-century contests, which pre-date the widespread use of set test pieces as the sole repertoire for contests, involved commercial deals with railway companies and venues. In Herbert’s biography of Jackson, he states:

Jackson’s autobiographical writings reveal him as a man of considerable self-confidence and self-opinion, and he was one of the most effective impresarios of his time. His retrospective claim that his mission had been ‘The Propagation of Music amongst the Working Classes’ (Jackson) probably disguised more mundane,

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5 The 1997 British Open contest actually took place on 17th January 1998 after it was postponed due to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. ‘British Open History’, http://www.thebritishopen.net/history.html.
6 Hindmarsh, interview by Osborn, 18 February, 2014.
financial motives, but his impact on the musical life of ordinary Victorians cannot be denied.7

The view that even the most prominent contest organisers - and the man who is commonly credited with creating the brass band contest as a leisure activity - had major financial motives, demonstrates the relationship between contests and business. Alongside Jackson, John Henry Iles can be viewed as the most influential organiser and promoter of brass band contests owing to his work in the first half of the twentieth century re-establishing the Nationals at the Crystal Palace (later moving to Alexandra Palace and the Royal Albert Hall) and promoting the British Open from 1925.8 Russell also suggests that Iles shared Jackson’s financial motives, stating that:

For commercial interest-groups, contests offered sizeable rewards. Certainly, only a very limited number were organized with major commercial intent... The two major national contests controlled by J. H. Iles, the National and the Open (under Iles’s control from 1925) were the clearest examples of commercial motivation. Although it would be churlish to deny Iles’s commitment to bands as forces of musical education and entertainment, it would also be foolish to overlook the extent to which the two big festivals were used as vehicles to publicize Richard Smith and Company, and the British Bandsman.9

This evidence of the significant financial motives held by the two most influential contest promoters of the 19th and early 20th centuries demonstrates that brass band

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8 Herbert, 'Introduction', p. 7.
9 Russell, 'Cultural Change and the Band Movement', p. 91.
contests have never existed in an artistic world cut off from financial concerns by means of patronage, through which some art forms have flourished. This is despite major sponsorship from newspapers and magazines, including the sponsorship of nearly every single section at the National Finals in the 1920s. The amount of money involved in holding contests in large and prestigious venues and the financial motives of organisers, demonstrates the importance of selling significant amounts of tickets. Therefore, a contest must be appealing to potential audience members. As most contests involve every band in each section playing the same piece of music, they are extremely reliant on the appeal of the test pieces to draw in an audience. An audience for the National Finals Championship Section or the British Open will only hear one test piece all day, so these are the contests that are most reliant on the appeal of the test piece. The Regional contests, lower section finals and Spring Festival are all multi section contests with different sections held in the same venue on the same day, so the audience members can hear more than one piece of music. The fact that multiple pieces are performed in the same venue, combined with the fact that the venues are smaller and cheaper than the National Finals and British Open venues means that these contests are less dependent on the appeal of a single test piece, although it must be noted that the highest sections at each contest are usually the main attraction audience. It must be noted that the financial considerations of test piece selection have taken place during the steady decline in numbers of brass bands during the twentieth century. By the turn of the millennium even the most optimistic contest attendances were a far cry from the reported

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10 For a list of publications that sponsored sections at the National in the 1920s see Russell, 'Cultural Change and the Band Movement', p. 91.
audience of 25,000 at the 1864 British Open at Belle Vue. Bythell argues that the choice of test pieces has been at least partly to blame for the decline in contest audiences:

In retrospect, the main result of the emergence of a 'modern' repertoire of contest pieces has been to emphasise the marked difference between this relatively small body of works and the majority of items still to be found in a popular brass band concert programme. Much of the new music which originated as contest pieces has at best proved unattractive, and at worst simply incomprehensible, to traditional brass band audiences. As a result, there are now two distinct strata in the repertoire - one specialist, the other popular.

This suggests that commercially test piece selection has been a failure throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. However, the fact that contests still survive and are still held at some of the largest and most prestigious classical music venues in the United Kingdom suggests a more complex, and more positive narrative. It also demonstrates the links between the musical and the commercial influences on test piece selection and how closely they are intertwined.

A musical choice

Having considered the financial aspects of test piece selection I will now examine the musical challenges that test piece selectors face. The musical challenges in selecting a test piece are split into two categories: difficulty and style. They are separate categories because difficulty is related to the standard of playing of the competing bands (regardless of the style of music selected) and style is related to what the people selecting the test piece decide is ‘good’ or ‘worthy’ music for the brass bands.

11 Herbert, ‘Making a Movement’, p. 64.
to be performing (regardless of the difficulty of the piece). They both link to the commercial or financial aspects of choosing a test piece in their own way. I will examine the difficulty and standard of a test piece first before examining the arguments surrounding the style of test pieces selected for contests.

The challenge of selecting a piece of the right standard for the competing bands is most significant for the Music Panel selecting the test pieces for the Regional Championships because of the number of bands and wide variety in levels of ability between bands within the same section across different regions. Richard Evans notes the differences between regions and that, perhaps surprisingly, the lowest section is not the most difficult to choose for:

The other difficulty I think in choosing, it’s good to pick the top section and the fourth section. It gets more difficult when you close in because we’ve such a varied standard of ability in our bands throughout the country. Some bands, I was going to say Scotland, but take one of the weakest areas, I would say, well I thought it was the South East but it’s not. The weakest area is in the North, that’s in Darlington.13

The differences in standards between regions that Evans notes, along with the weakness of the North of England region that he mentions, are highlighted further if we look at the number of times a band from each region has won each of the National Finals sections. This is shown in the following two tables

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13 Evans, interview by Osborn, 12 November, 2014.
Table 1: Number of times a band from each region has won a section at the National Finals\textsuperscript{14}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/Section</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North of England</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West of England</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London &amp; Southern Counties</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Ranking of regions by the number of winners at the National Finals\textsuperscript{15}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Championship Section</th>
<th>1 Section</th>
<th>2 Section</th>
<th>3 Section</th>
<th>4 Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>North West (=1)</td>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Wales (=1)</td>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>North of England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>Wales (=4)</td>
<td>Wales</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables above show the inconsistency between the different regions at different levels. While these tables only show the strength of the best band in each region (for example the only Welsh band to ever win the Championship Section is Cory) they are indicative of the comparative strength of each section in each region. One or two very good bands in a section may be able to skew the results for that section in

\textsuperscript{14}Data from No stated author, 'Brass Band Results: National Championship of Great Britain (Finals),' Brass Band Results, [07 December, 2017], https://brassbandresults.co.uk/contests/GREAT-BRITAIN-NATIONAL-FINALS/.

\textsuperscript{15}No stated author, 'Brass Band Results: National Championship of Great Britain (Finals)', https://brassbandresults.co.uk/contests/GREAT-BRITAIN-NATIONAL-FINALS/.
favour of a particular region, however due to the promotion system this should not be possible for any section other than the Championship Section. These tables support the statement by Evans that the North of England is one of the weakest regions, as it is the only region in the bottom three places for every single section.

Alan Fernie also noted the wide variety of standards between different regions:

> There was a piece a couple of years ago for the Second Section called *Images of the Millennium* which is horrific to play. It has hardly ever been played since as far as I can make out. As well as conducting band for it I judged one area, and again it was the same thing only five bands showed up. This was in North East England. Only five bands showed up, one band could play it and the rest just couldn’t, simply just couldn’t play it. At least two of them, if it had been a boxing match it would have been “right ok, you’ve had a great day, just stop now.”

A test piece which is so difficult that four out of five bands cannot play it cannot be described as suitable for the section for which it was chosen. This demonstrates a failure on a musical level for two reasons: first, most of the bands cannot perform the piece to a good standard that is pleasant for the audience to listen to, and second if performances are so bad that an adjudicator thinks two of them should be stopped, it makes ranking the lower placed bands difficult. It also demonstrates a failure at a commercial level because the situation described by Fernie is not one that would be appealing to an audience. Fernie goes on to argue that some influential members of the Music Panel may be out of touch with the realities of lower section bands because they are wanting to challenge bands too much by selecting test pieces that are deliberately very difficult for the bands to play:

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AF: I think we’ve got to be very, very careful when we’re choosing the test pieces and I know that Richard [Evans], he’s on the panel that chooses the pieces and he always tells me “it needs to be a test”, It needs to be a test... I’ve got twelve-year olds, eleven-year olds in the band, the baritone player is eighty-four and has played with the band for seventy years and all that kind of stuff. It’s full of lovely, lovely people who just want to come along to the band room twice a week and enjoy themselves and have fun and they are very particular in the music they play, you know, they’ll tell me quite honestly, especially with my own writing as well which I find refreshing “we like that, we don’t like that, no we don’t like playing that one” so they’ve got to be very careful when they are choosing test pieces at that level.17

Fernie demonstrates the way in which the difficulty of a test piece affects the competitors on an individual level. The attitudes and behaviour he describes is only a single example of a Fourth Section band, and is far removed from the situation of bands in higher sections. However, Fernie hints at another impact of test piece selection aside from the immediate musical and financial impacts. This is the fact that at a community band level the impact of choosing a test piece which is unpopular among competitors and not enjoyable to rehearse could have consequences for brass bands across the country if players decide they either do not want to compete or stop playing.

These comments are a good example of the arguments that have taken place in the brass band movement since the establishment of contesting, some of which have been reported in the brass band press, regarding how difficult a test piece should be.18 Despite these arguments, however, the selection of most test pieces has either

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18 For examples of reports and discussion in the brass band media on test pieces being too difficult for competing bands see Alfred Ashpole, _The British Bandsman_, 2 June 1951, p. 3. Derek Bourgeois, _The
generated favourable reviews of the difficulty of the piece or not warranted any specific mention in the brass band press. This is important for my research as it supports the view that test piece selection is at least partly based on a musical judgement that the composition is of the right standard of difficulty (musically and technically) for the competing bands. This is an important foundation of the analysis of standards that follows.

The second part of the musical decision in selecting a test piece is what style the test piece should be, and whether it is ‘good’ or ‘suitable’ music for brass bands to be performing at a national competition. The quotation from Bythell’s *Provinces Versus Metropolis in the British Brass Band Movement in the Early Twentieth Century*, suggests that this has come down to an argument of the artistic versus the popular. Whilst this is an over-simplified view, this is indeed the core of a battle that has been taking place since the early twentieth century for the future direction of the brass band repertoire. Bythell identifies the two core arguments that existed at the start of the twentieth century over the place of brass band music in British musical culture:

Arguments about the shortcomings of the brass band repertoire were of two kinds. In the first place, whilst bands could rightly claim that they 'presented the classics' to a popular audience, they were condemned for doing so only in unauthentic arrangements or ruthlessly butchered selections... at the other extreme, bands were criticised for playing 'trash' - marches, dances, show-pieces solos and inane descriptive numbers - written specially for them by largely self-taught composers who were the product of the movement itself and were unrecognised outside it, increasingly, the key to the problem of repertoire was seen to lie with the failure of

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'serious' composers to write 'art music' specifically for the brass band.20

Although these arguments changed in the interwar years with the commissioning of compositions from mainstream composers including Holst, Elgar, Bliss and Ireland, they came back in the second half of the twentieth century once these links to mainstream composers disappeared. Although compositions from classical composers in the inter war years allowed the brass band movement to show integration with the classical music world and gain some artistic integrity in the eyes of the establishment, in truth the view that brass bands were artistically deficient never disappeared. Musicologist Reginald Nettel’s remarks in 1946 that ‘the failure of brass bands to become musically great in spite of their fine technique is historically interesting’ show that even as the National Championships was finding its feet again after restarting in 1945, the view that brass bands were an artistic movement held little influence.21 Furthermore Edward Gregson’s comments to Arthur Taylor in the early 1980s show the viciousness which has characterised the argument over the stylistic direction and artistic merit of test pieces and brass band music in general.

If the brass band movement could improve its repertoire by, say, twenty per cent, they would come out of the shadows of cultural life in England and break through into general acceptance. To me, those who are real traitors to the brass band movement are not the people who come in from outside, but those people in the movement who insist on playing crap all the time, because what they are doing is selling something which is really good at an

21 Bevan, ‘Art or Sport’, p. 112.
The outside influence that Gregson identified as a potential saviour for the artistic soul and cultural reputation of the brass band movement never materialised to any significant level in the latter twentieth century. Despite brass band composers such as Philip Wilby and Philip Sparke introducing new compositional styles and techniques, along with the use of some of Gregson’s own compositions, the clear majority of test pieces to this day continue to be written by composers from within the brass band movement, and in the style of the brass band idiom. This has had positive effects, aiding the development of a distinctive idiom and style of composition unique to the brass band movement, but has left the movement open to the criticism above. Further attempts to change the direction of the brass band music repertoire and encourage the influence of a wider variety of composers have at times brought the argument to a head, and demonstrated that even in the early twenty-first century test piece commissioning and selection remains one of the most controversial issues in the brass band movement. One example of this was the selection of the 2005 National Finals test piece, Eden, which was commissioned from Jon Pickard. The piece received a glowing review from 4barsrest editor Iwan Fox, describing it as ‘a piece that is as significant as Contest Music and Cloudcatcher Fells and a new dimension in the art of writing a test piece for brass.’

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RE: After, you know there was a bit of controversy in the group. We met in the BBC, Paul Hindmarsh was on the group there and all day we chatted about the pieces and it came to thinking about the London piece and rather amazingly he didn’t say anything, we were saying “right what about this piece? What about that piece? I don’t know”. We hadn’t really come to any sort of decision and when I got home Alan Hope who was the secretary there because he is very close to Philip Morris, he said then “right what we’ve decided”… I said “what?”, he said “Paul Hindmarsh has just rung me to say he’d forgotten” now all day we were there and forgotten to tell me, “I’ve given John Pickard the commission for the piece for London” and we went “what?”… So I said well “I’m totally against that so we don’t want it.” And John Maines said the same and I think Brian [Buckley] said the same. So then he whinges back, he said “I told him and I’ve signed a contract and he’s going to sue me.” We all said “well let him sue you.”...“We’ve not said anything.” And in the end because nobody would benefit we said “ok we’ll go along with it but you must fall on your sword.” And that’s why he left the group.

Although Evans believed the composition, *Eden*, was a ‘fair old test’, he went on to say that the next year:

RE: we got distinct instruction to make sure you choose a piece the audience will like so we went straight to an oldy, *Judges Of The Secret Court*. Oh the outcry, a lot of it came from Paul Hindmarsh, he said “outdated, a very poor arrangement, awful, one of his poorest pieces”...and we found out that when it was performed Philip Morris said “you know we had 4000 people in nearly all day long”.

The intensity of the argument that Evans describes demonstrates that if anything the arguments over what type of music is a suitable test piece have become more entrenched throughout the twentieth century. The fall in numbers of competitors and the marginalisation of brass bands in British musical culture has increased the infighting, as witnessed by Evans and Gregson. By the beginning of the twenty-first century the stylistic selection of test pieces had become as much a political choice as

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24 Evans, interview by Osborn, 12 November, 2014.
a musical one. This has relatively little effect on my research into the difficulty of test pieces because regardless of style, test pieces are selected to have a balance of suitable technical and musical challenges. However, it does influence the styles of music that brass bands are familiar with playing and therefore affects how proficient the players and conductors are at interpreting and performing some of the musical challenges. This may be one of the reasons that some test pieces become more or less accessible to bands of lower ability, because changing musical styles and tastes helps to familiarise players with the different musical and technical skills required to perform different genres of music. This will be the subject of examination once I have introduced the most frequently used test pieces in the National Finals and British Open contest series.

The different financial and musical influences on test piece selection make the study of test pieces a difficult but highly informative way of examining the brass band movement. The selection of test pieces can neither be described as solely, or even primarily, a musical or financial choice at all levels. It is a more nuanced combination of the two sets of factors, with each individual contest being more influenced by one or the other. However, they must both be present to ensure the long-term musical and financial health of a contest, guaranteeing that sufficient paying audience attend and sufficient bands enter to ensure the viability of the contest. Now that I have examined the choice of test pieces and identified some of the consequences that selecting an unsuitable test piece can have, it is time to scrutinise these consequences in more detail to find the potential impact they could have on my research findings.
The consequences of choosing an unsuitable test piece

The repercussions of choosing an unsuitable test piece are felt by everybody involved in the contest section for which it was selected. Bands from around Britain can suffer by having to play a piece that is too difficult or too boring to rehearse, audiences can be put off from attending future contests if they have listened to a piece that bands could not perform well, and adjudicators can struggle to place bands if the piece is not of the right difficulty. These effects are not just felt at the grass roots level of banding but right to the top, as noted by Richard Evans when he was conducting BNFL band in 1995 and Elgar Howarth’s *Songs for BL* was selected as the test piece for the National Final Championship Section.

And we got the piece out [Elgar Howarth’s *Songs for BL*] and it really was, oh this is rude to say, but almost like a Mickey Mouse piece. The trombones at one time were just giggling away and he said “it’s Tom and Jerry music this, Mr Evans.” Anyway we all were giggling and laughing and then at the end of it Alan Wycherley stood up, he said “just to let you know gentlemen”, cos we hadn’t got girls in the band at that time, “gentlemen, we have to play this at the Royal Albert Hall.” and it sobered everybody up. So I said “right off we go, thank you, have a good holiday and come back soon” and there was a small queue of three players. One was a trombone player, one of the trombone players and he said “I’ll play at London Mr Evans but I’m not coming to any rehearsals. There was a Bb bass player said “I’m leaving after London. I’m not playing this S H one T” he said. And my second cornet player said “yeah I’m finishing after that, this is not, I’ve not joined banding to play this.” So I fully understand, understood what they were saying. So I didn’t, I never ever criticised Elgar Howarth or the piece that way. I didn’t criticise it how it was, how he’d written, but I criticised the person or the people who chose it.25

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At the time BNFL band was one of the best in Britain, and in the event they placed 5th and subsequently 19th in the British Open (off the dreaded number one draw). The players of top bands must be amongst the most dedicated in the brass band movement because of the amount of practice time individuals have to put in to get to the required standard of ability. Although the players in some top bands are rewarded financially and this will increase their dedication, it has never been enough to make a living for bandsmen, unlike for soloists, conductors and composers. Therefore, if the bandsmen at the top end of the movement dislike a test piece so much they are willing to give up, it demonstrates the power that individual test pieces chosen for important contests can have.

These effects are magnified at the lower end of the brass band spectrum with community bands. Community bands are particularly difficult to pick test pieces for because they often contain one or two good players who have chosen to play with their local band rather than a better band with which they have no connection. Many community bands also must balance their contesting with local commitments as they are part of a local community in a way which the best bands often are not. This is partly down to funding, as the best bands have always found it easier to get sponsorship or become works bands due to the publicity that contest success can bring to a sponsor and the quality of music they are able to provide for functions and

26 Appendix 1, Contest results database, information from The British Bandsman archive. 4barsrest conducted analysis on the commonly held view that a band drawn to play first would do worse in the contest than predicted: 'The Luck of the Draw: 1968 - 2002,' 4barsrest, [18 November, 2016], www.4barsrest.com/articles/2003/art342d.asp.
events. If the music being played is not interesting to the players, they may decide to give up playing and do something else with their leisure time. However, the nature of community banding means that there will always be people who find a piece too easy or too difficult, this is especially true of tuba or baritone players who do not have the chance to move up to principal positions. Alan Fernie noted:

*Dark Side Of The Moon* is an interesting one. I had to conduct it in a third section contest, it was the area piece actually and I have to admit I didn’t like it at all and I should actually have turned my stick over to somebody else in the band and said “listen I can’t do this” because at the time I remember I had a fabulous young tuba player in the band who’s now moved on with the SNO [Scottish National Orchestra] and all kinds of stuff but she had to play bottom C for ten minutes.\(^\text{27}\)

The amateur nature of the brass band movement creates these problems as the music is not being played by professionals who are paid to perform but by people doing it for fun.

Unlike other competitive amateur movements such as sports teams, competition is in theory not the raison d’être of the brass band movement. The biggest difference is that half of the brass band movement’s activities, performing concerts, has no element of competition. A football team plays against teams of a similar standard and all the training and other activities of the team prepare them for that competition, whereas a brass band performs music which appeals to its members and audiences for a large part of its activities. This means that the test pieces must fit in with the standard of music which the bands are playing outside of competition. Test pieces will usually be harder than concert music as they are designed to test a

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\(^\text{27}\) Fernie, interview by Osborn, 21 November, 2014.
band in eight to fifteen minutes, rather than being part of an hour and a half concert, but a band cannot be expected to change radically the standard of music it is playing for competitions because their other activities will not support that. The selection of a very difficult and unsuitable test piece for a single contest section has not usually had a major impact at a band or national level. However, it has sparked debate and in a few cases, such as the ones mentioned by Evans and Fernie, had serious detrimental consequences.

I have now explored the process of choosing test pieces, the people involved and the main arguments that have shaped the contesting repertoire since the composition of the first original test piece in 1913. Next I will examine the process of brass band contest adjudication and the role that adjudicators play in the brass band movement. This is a vital area for my research because contest results and adjudication notes are one of the most important source bases for my thesis.

**Brass band contest adjudication**

My research is heavily reliant on examination of the outcome of brass band contests. This includes the contest results, along with reports and comments made by contest adjudicators and journalists. The decisions made by adjudicators have a very significant impact on my research and therefore the adjudicators themselves and the adjudication process need to be examined before I start exploring the main part of my research.

As early as 1902 the absolute supremacy of the results as decided by the adjudicator was defined in contest rules, with the September 1902 Crystal Palace Band Contest rules stating that “The decision of the various Adjudicators to be final, and from such
decisions there will be no appeal, except where a band is disqualified for an infringement of the rules.’\textsuperscript{28} Despite the absolute nature of the adjudicator’s decision, members and supporters of bands that did not get the result that they believed they deserved have often been heard to say that it is only the opinion of ‘one man in a box’. Competitors and audience members have not always been deferential to the adjudicators, which has sometimes led to abuse or violence against adjudicators. This was particularly prevalent in the 1880s and 1890s and as Odello notes, led to the loss of several prominent military musicians as adjudicators.\textsuperscript{29} This included Charles Godfrey, one of the most prolific arrangers and adjudicators of the time. Whilst occasional abuse was directed at adjudicators throughout the twentieth century, and occasionally into the twenty-first century, by the mid-twentieth century frequent reports of violence or bad conduct at contests was thankfully a thing of the past. Close run contests still frequently occurred and I have experienced this myself when Alan Fernie, judging at the Manx Music Festival, stated in his adjudication notes that the element of the performance that won the contest for Ramsey Town Band was the way in which the euphoniums played a passage of quavers. This was all that separated two bands in the performance of an eight-minute piece of music. Nonetheless the usual response from competitors and audiences by the late twentieth century was one of ‘there’s always next year’ or ‘it’s only one man’s opinion’, maybe some lively debate in the pub after the contest, but very rarely anything resembling the nineteenth-century accounts that Odello described.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28} Herbert, ‘Contest Rules’, p. 318.
\textsuperscript{29} Odello, ‘Musical Athleticism: Victorian Brass Band Contests and the Shaping of Working-Class Men,’ p. 150.
\textsuperscript{30} No stated author, ‘The Ten Most Controversial Brass Band Contest Results since 1990.,’ 4barsrest, [12 February, 2018], http://www.4barsrest.com/articles/2001/art038.asp.
Thankfully the violence did not stop all of the well-respected professional adjudicators from adjudicating contests, despite the significant loss of people such as Godfrey.

Without the participation of well-trained musicians as adjudicators, the brass band contest and by association the wider movement, risked losing its musical standing as a method of musical edification. The organisation of contests without the services of professional adjudicators was tried by some contest organisers in the late nineteenth century, but this was viewed with disdain by some in the movement, with the editors of *Brass Band News* stating that ‘We say fearlessly, that there cannot be a band contest, in no wise whatsoever, unless an experienced musician of integrity and ability adjudicates upon the respective performances of each band.’ However, in the twentieth century, with the expansion of brass band education and the growth of professional conductors who learned their craft in the brass band movement, the use of external adjudicators became less of a necessity. Although many twentieth-century adjudicators came from within the brass band movement, they did not come from the amateur ranks of players who made up the clear majority of the brass band movement. Many of them left the ranks of amateur players when they gained a formal musical education at a university or conservatoire. Many were also distinguished players with top ranked bands before they became conductors or adjudicators. They formed a small group of professionals, who earned a living as conductors, teachers, and adjudicators, with some undertaking roles as soloists,

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arrangers or composers. In the second half of the twentieth century many of these adjudicators were a product of the joining of brass bands and higher education, as several of my interviewees stated about their own musical training.  

Therefore, adjudication is the one part of the brass band movement that is completely professional, with all adjudicators earning a significant amount of their income, if not all, from music related activities. It must also be noted that throughout my period of research this has been an almost exclusively male group. In 2010 4barsrest noted that the Association of Brass Band Adjudicators (ABBA or AoBBA) only had one female member - Simone Rubello, a world-renowned percussionist. In 2015 ABBA Public Relations Officer Sarah Groarke-Booth noted in her article *No job for a woman?* that although two of the ABBA executive committee were female, there were only three female members out of 89.  

One of the peculiarities of brass band contests is that the adjudicator is not necessarily best placed to hear the performance. This is because at most contests the adjudicator(s) is seated in a ‘box’ or ‘tent’, so that they cannot see the performers. This arrangement has been in place since the first recorded contest in 1845, to ensure that adjudicators could not be bribed into awarding the prize to a certain band, and has remained ever since. This is despite the effects that a structure, usually either wooden or made from poles and drapes, has on the acoustic for the

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32 Alan Fernie, Philip Harper and Richard Evans are examples of brass band adjudicators who were brought up in the brass band movement but educated in music at universities or schools of music.
35 Bevan, ‘Art or Sport’, p. 104.
The location of the ‘box’ in the auditorium has been problematic at some contests, due to seating layouts and other considerations. Both the National Finals in the Royal Albert Hall and the British Open (when it was housed in the King’s Hall at the Belle Vue) tried moving the ‘box’ to different locations in the auditorium. These attempts to move the box to give adjudicators a better acoustic environment acknowledge the problems created by using such a structure in a music competition. However, the almost sacred, ritualised use of the box continued as the perceived benefits in terms of fairness were thought to outweigh any musical or acoustic disadvantages.

The decisions made by adjudicators in brass band contests have at times been contentious and have had a huge influence on the brass band movement because of the centrality of contesting to many bands’ activities. Their decisions and results have been used to calculate national and international rankings and some bands have defined themselves by their position and success in these rankings. However, the adjudication reports have also been vital for my research, providing evidence on whether a test piece was suitable for the section for which it was chosen. This evidence allowed me to validate the musical decisions of the people who selected the test pieces for contest use.

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36 Herbert, ‘Making a Movement’, p. 52.
37 Newsome, The Modern Brass Band, pp. 95 & 108.
Chapter 4: Patterns of test piece use in brass band contests

I have established the definitions of the British brass band, brass band contest and test piece, and the extent of the existing academic literature on the subject. I will now turn to the data I have collected on test piece selection and use. This data reveals changes in the style of music used in contests and changes in the levels of technical and musical ability amongst competitors. It provides insight into the influence that contesting has had on the brass band repertoire (both test pieces and concert music).

As previously stated, the unique competitive nature of the brass band movement, and the rigid competitive structure, allows me to track changes in the standards and styles of playing using the test pieces selected for contests. This is possible because some test pieces are repeatedly selected but used for different sections. I have selected the test pieces which have been used four or more times as they allow me to see patterns in the use of test pieces over time. This chapter will focus on these frequently-used test pieces, their patterns of use, what these patterns suggest about the ability of bands to play these particular pieces in the twentieth century and then identify the contributing factors for these patterns.

The contests

My research focuses on the test pieces selected for two contest series: The National Finals series and the British Open series. By examining the use of test pieces in these two series, I was able to judge how standards of playing changed in the twentieth century. These are the two longest running and most high-profile contest series in
the United Kingdom. The British Open, also known as the Belle Vue September, is the longest running brass band contest in the world: it started in 1853, although the lower sections of this series are younger and have not been run continuously.¹ The National Finals series is the most important contest in Britain as it is in this series that bands earn their national rankings. These rankings (based on sections) are used to make them eligible for other contests and are renewed each year based on the band’s performance in the Regionals.² The National Finals series is also a well-established series, having been started by John Henry Iles in 1900.³ The Championship Section Final has its origins in the Crystal Palace contests which reached their zenith in the 1920s and 1930s, whereas the series in its current form, with multiple sections in both the Regional and National Finals events, was formed in 1945 after the end of the Second World War. Since then there have been few changes to the rules and structure of the contests, the most significant of which was the introduction of the First Section in 1991. Other than this there have been a few changes to the regional boundaries, most of which have not lasted long, for example the North Wales region which existed from 1991 to 1994.⁴ Regional (or Area) contests also act as a showcase on the strength of the brass band movement in the different areas as Geoffrey Brand noted in 1986:

 Different characteristics will be present as each Area Contest is run by a local committee... All of the Area Contests reveal to the experienced band observer the health of the band community in

¹Herbert, 'Introduction', p. 7.
² If a band reaches the National Finals for their section, then this may also affect their ranking, but the rules have changed throughout my period of study.
³ Herbert, ‘Introduction’, p. 7. This contest is not related to Enderby Jackson’s 1860-1863 ‘Great National Contest’ also held at the Crystal Palace.
that part of the country. This may not only be evidenced by the quality of the top bands but also the young bands in the Youth Section or the number of bands in the Fourth Section.\textsuperscript{5}

The stability of these contests, with minimal changes since 1945, is what makes them useful to historians and other people studying the brass band movement. If there were significant changes, the data found in test piece selection and use would not be comparable over time. The lower sections of the British Open series varied significantly in the 1930s and early 1940s. There were between one and four different classes in the Belle Vue May contest, in addition to the Belle Vue July contest.\textsuperscript{6} The short-lived nature of these contests and the fact that they did not fit into a national structure makes them very difficult to classify for my research. Therefore, I have omitted the lower sections of the British Open series prior to 1945. By this time the structure varied less than during the 1930s and crucially for my research, after 1945 both the contest results and the test pieces can be compared against the rigid structure of the Regional contests.\textsuperscript{7}

It must be noted that for my research I have only included contests for which I have been able to find verifiable sources stating the test pieces that were used. These sources are primary accounts of the contest published in the brass band cross-referenced with academic secondary literature. There are several unverifiable, publicly edited, website archives which do list test pieces for contests. However, I have chosen to not include these as the online databases are unreferenced and I

\textsuperscript{6} In some years there were two ‘groups’ for each contest class.
\textsuperscript{7} After 1951 some of the lower sections were removed completely.
have only used these sources to supplement other, verifiable sources in a few cases.\textsuperscript{8}

There are therefore some gaps in my database which further research would be necessary to fill. There are 91 contest sections out of 962 between 1945 and 1993 for which I do not have details of the test piece selected. This is less than ten percent of the total number of contest sections. Whilst any additional information could change individual pieces patterns of use, it is very unlikely to challenge my conclusions. Such work would need the complete cooperation and support of the contest organisers, which I have not received.

The National Finals series consists of the National Finals and Regional qualifiers.

There are five sections in this contest series: Championship, First, Second, Third and Fourth. The First Section was created in 1991 and first contested in 1992. Aside from this change, the contest series has retained the same structure since 1945. Any band can enter this series by competing in the Regional Fourth Section competition for their Region or Area. Bands are promoted based on two criteria as stated in the contest rules:

\begin{itemize}
  \item d) The winning bands of sections 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the ‘Finals’ will receive automatic promotion.
  \item e) In the sections 1, 2, 3, 4, the bands with the two best aggregate placings over the previous three years will be promoted.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{8} Among the most useful online databases is \texttt{brassbandsresults.co.uk}. It accepts public contributions and is unreferenced but contains possibly the largest easily accessible amount of information on brass band contest results and test pieces. Sawyer and Sawyer, ‘Brass Band Results’, \url{https://brassbandresults.co.uk}.

Entry to the National Finals is granted to the top two or three bands placing in the Regionals each year. The National Finals have frequently used a test piece that is either at the very top of the range of test pieces suitable for that section at the Regionals, or one of the easiest test pieces suitable for the section above. This has led to some test pieces being selected for the Regionals and then their next use, perhaps ten to twenty years later, being in the Nationals for the section below.\textsuperscript{10} This practice makes it harder to judge whether the bands have changed in ability as it could be that the piece is considered to be suitable for a higher section and set as a challenge for those bands who have reached the National Finals. The National and Regional sections are graded in the following order by difficulty from top to bottom as shown in Table 3 below.

\begin{table}[h]
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\begin{tabular}{|l|}
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National Finals Complete Series \\
National Championship Section \\
Regional Championship Section \\
National First Section \\
Regional First Section \\
National Second Section \\
Regional Second Section \\
National Third Section \\
Regional Third Section \\
National Fourth Section \\
Regional Fourth Section \\
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\end{tabular}
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The British Open contest series consists of the British Open and its qualifying rounds. They are currently called the Grand Shield, Senior Cup, Senior Trophy, Junior Shield, Junior Cup and Junior Trophy. All of these contests have had alternative names as

\textsuperscript{10} The use of \textit{Pageantry} for the Regional Championship section in 1977 followed by the National Finals First Section in 2005 is an example of this.
they used to be held at the Belle Vue in Manchester. As a result they were known as the following contests shown in Table 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>British Open Series Names</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Open</td>
<td>Belle Vue September</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Shield</td>
<td>Belle Vue July Section A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Cup</td>
<td>Belle Vue July Section B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Trophy</td>
<td>Belle Vue May Section A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior Shield</td>
<td>Belle Vue May Section B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior Cup</td>
<td>Belle Vue May Section C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior Trophy</td>
<td>Belle Vue May Section D</td>
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Promotion and relegation in the British Open series is a more complicated affair than for the National Finals series. Scores for the last two years are added together to form an aggregate score. The four bands with the lowest aggregate are demoted from each section and the four bands with the highest aggregate are promoted in each section. There are two exceptions to this. First, only two bands are promoted to and demoted from the British Open and secondly six bands are demoted from the Senior Trophy section, out of the series. Entry into this series is by invitation only: bands can apply based on recent contest results but unlike the National Finals series, entry is at the discretion of the organisers.

Using the test pieces from two contest series had advantages and disadvantages for my research. The main advantage was the number of test pieces used each year. Using both contest series means I had up to seventeen test pieces per year, rather

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than the up to seven (used in the British Open series) or ten (used in the National Finals series) that I would have been able to use had I only been using a single contest series. However, this created the difficult task of combining the contests into a single ranking. Sections in the British Open series often contain bands from more than one section in the National Finals Series. I therefore have chosen the following order for ranking the contests based on two sets of evidence, as shown in Table 5 below. The first is an examination of the bands competing in each contest series. By matching up the competing bands in each series I have been able to compare the standards of ability in the different sections. Secondly, if there is little or no information about the majority of the competing bands then I have based the ranking on test piece selection. This second set of evidence is only useful if the test pieces have been used within a few years for the other contest series as otherwise it could be made invalid by the changes in standard which I am examining. I have highlighted the contests from the British Open series in green and the contests from the National Finals series in blue. In this list the contests decrease in level of difficulty, therefore the contests at the bottom of the list are the qualifying sections for the contests at the top of the list.
Table 5: Combined contest series sections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combined Series</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Open (September)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Championship Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Shield (July A)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Championship Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Cup (July B)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National First Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Trophy (May A)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional First Section</td>
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<td>Junior Shield (May B)</td>
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<td>National Second Section</td>
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<td>Regional Second Section</td>
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<td>Junior Cup (May C)</td>
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<td>National Third Section</td>
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<td>Regional Third Section</td>
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<td>Junior Trophy (May D)</td>
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<td>National Fourth Section</td>
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<td>Regional Fourth Section</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

There will always be some anomalous results and patterns created by combining these two contest series, however I have mitigated against this by placing more value on those pieces which have moved up or down by three or more sections. This meant that even if I had one of the sections above slightly incorrectly ranked it would not affect the outcome greatly. Any problematic effects of combining two contest series were outweighed by the increased number of test pieces that I could use for the study. Furthermore, the goal was to identify broad movement, not to claim precise accuracy of ranking down to individual sections.

**The test pieces**

I have chosen to focus on test pieces that have been used four or more times between the two contest series. I am focusing on these test pieces because their repeated use is the key to my research. By looking at the sections for which the test
pieces have been chosen I can track changes. If a piece has been used two or three times the amount of information it can offer is limited owing to the small number of data points. There are very few pieces which have been used more than four times.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore focusing on pieces which have been used four or more times is the best compromise to get a large enough number of pieces and the highest number of data points per piece. If I only focused on pieces used five or six times then I would have so few pieces that any peculiarities of the individual pieces (e.g. difficult time signatures, instrumentation and scoring, solo passages or style) could have a very large effect on the results.

My selection contains twenty-nine test pieces which give me one hundred and thirty-five data points (individual contest uses). All the pieces have been used between four times (the minimum required) and eight times (\textit{Pageantry}, by Herbert Howells which was the most frequently used). The following table shows how many times each piece has been used and the dates for the first and most recent uses. It is ordered by number of uses.

\textsuperscript{13} Twenty-nine pieces have been used four or more times whereas only thirteen have been used five or more times.
### Table 6: Frequently used test pieces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Piece</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Number Of Uses</th>
<th>First Use</th>
<th>Last Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pageantry</td>
<td>Herbert Howells</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Comedy Overture</td>
<td>John Ireland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festival Music</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Roi d'Ys</td>
<td>Lalo, arr F Wright</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Epic Symphony</td>
<td>Percy Fletcher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet for Band</td>
<td>Joseph Horovitz</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call of the Sea</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contest Music</td>
<td>Wilfred Heaton</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Carnaval Romain(^{14})</td>
<td>Berlioz, arr F Wright</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Street</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petite Suite de Ballet</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectrum</td>
<td>Gilbert Vinter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tournament for Brass</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Holiday Suite</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Festival Overture</td>
<td>Brahms, arr Dennis Wright</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnival</td>
<td>Helen Perkin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divertimento</td>
<td>Bryan Kelly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Hubert Bath</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey Into Freedom</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorenzo</td>
<td>Thomas Keighley</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride of Race</td>
<td>Kenneth Wright</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurgam</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salute to Youth</td>
<td>Gilbert Vinter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salzburg Suite</td>
<td>Denis Wright</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suite in B Flat</td>
<td>Gordon Jacob</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Force of Destiny</td>
<td>Verdi, arr F Wright</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Songs Without Words</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un Vie De Matelot (A Sailor's Life)</td>
<td>Robert Farnon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variations on a Ninth</td>
<td>Gilbert Vinter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{14}\) There are several different spellings of this piece used by different publishers. I have standardised to the one used by W. Paxton & Co. LTD on the Frank Wright arrangement copyright 1966.
This table also shows that only two composers have more than one original test piece in this selection. Eric Ball is by far the most popular with nine test pieces collectively used forty-two times. Gilbert Vinter is the only other composer who has more than one composition on the list, with his three test pieces used thirteen times. However, Frank Wright has had three of his arrangements of classical works, *Le Carnival Romain*, *Le Roi d'Ys* and *The Force of Destiny* used. Dennis Wright is also repeated, with one of his test pieces being an arrangement, *Academic Festival Overture* composed by Johannes Brahms, and one an original composition, *Salzburg Suite*. The following table shows how many times each composer’s pieces have been used.

### Table 7: Number of test piece uses for each composer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of pieces used</th>
<th>Total number of uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert Vinter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Howells</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lalo, arr. F Wright</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlioz, arr. Frank Wright</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi, arr. Frank Wright</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Horovitz</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percy Fletcher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilfred Heaton</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahms, arr. Dennis Wright</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan Kelly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon Jacob</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Perkin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubert Bath</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth Wright</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Farnon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Keighley</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis Wright</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alongside the two composers who have had multiple original test pieces chosen, there are twelve composers who had a single piece selected. Only three of these pieces are arrangements of earlier works composed for other ensembles. This shows the extent to which original test pieces have taken over the contest repertoire since the first was published in 1913.

It is also notable that there is only a single female composer on the list, Helen Perkin. She is also the only female composer whose music has featured in either the British Open or National Finals series during my period of research.15 This demonstrates that even into the twenty-first century the position of composer is one of the last bastions of almost total male domination within the brass band movement.

Having identified the frequently used test pieces which became the focus of my research, the next step was to examine their patterns of use. These patterns form the basis of my research by enabling me to see trends and changes in the use of test pieces. The next challenge was finding a way to present and view this data that allowed me to identify patterns and compare them without them being obscured by all the other information.

**Data presentation**

I have plotted the use of each of the test pieces in a graph. The graph is created by giving each contest section a number, with 17 being the highest number allocated to the highest section (British Open), and 1 being the lowest number allocated to the

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15 No stated author, 'A Woman’s Role in Banding Is...’ 4barsrest. None of the test pieces used for the National Finals Championship Section have been written by a female composer. This article is factually correct except an erroneous mention of one of Perkin’s compositions being selected for use in the National Finals in 1975.
lowest section (Regional Fourth Section). Having so many test pieces to interpret makes it impossible to view all the data on a single coherent graph. When plotting the section in which the piece is used (1-17) against time, if all the patterns are plotted together you end up with an illegible graph. To make the data easier to analyse I have looked at each test piece individually to see whether the data points indicate a pattern. The year in which the piece is first used and last used during my period of research is noted in table 6 on p135.
Figure 8: Individual Test Piece Use Graphs
Test piece groups

Revealing the patterns of use for individual test pieces using the graphs enabled me to group them based on similar patterns. I was then able to compare the similarities and differences between the use of each test piece whilst also revealing the overall picture shown by the use of all these pieces. As there are relatively few data points on each graph there are only four possible groups that each piece must fall into. Three of these are simple patterns which are useful for suggesting a relationship between time and section use and the fourth group contains the test pieces for which I can discern no pattern:

A. A significant fall in section use over time.
B. A significant rise in section use over time.
C. No significant change in section use over time.
D. No meaningful pattern in section use due to seemingly random uses.

I have split the test pieces up into these groups and have the following number of test pieces in each group:

A. 16
B. 0
C. 5
D. 8

Group B is empty because none of the test pieces have risen significantly in section use or become less accessible to bands of a lower ability. Freedom by Hubert Bath has risen a single section between first and last uses, but a rise of a single section is
not significant. This is because there are two contests for each section in the National Finals contest series (Regional and National contests). As I have discussed, these are set at a similar standard. The fact that I have combined two contest series may also have introduced some slight error to the rankings, particularly with the introduction of different sections at different times. Therefore, this piece is categorised as having no significant change in section use over time. *Salute To Youth* by Gilbert Vinter has remained in the same section and is also in this group. Every other test piece has fallen at least one section. These pieces are split between the remaining two groups: those that have fallen significantly in section use and those for which there is no discernible pattern. This means that there are twenty-nine commonly used test pieces split between the following groups:

1. Test pieces which have been used in gradually lower sections throughout their period of use.
2. Test pieces which have been used in the same section throughout their period of use.
3. Test pieces for which there is no meaningful pattern of section use throughout their period of use.

There are no significant amounts of evidence suggesting any of these pieces have repeatedly been used in sections for which they were not suitable. If a test piece is not suitable the contest reports usually note this by quoting adjudicators’ remarks, comments from conductors or players or the journalists’ own views on hearing the pieces performed. For example, *4barsrest* reported several times in 2002 and 2003 that Eric Ball’s *Kensington Concerto* (not one of the test pieces used in my research)
was beyond even elite bands who misjudged the musical difficulty of the piece, so much so that in their 2003 end-of-year test piece review 4barsrest commented:

If bands and conductors thought the choice of Eric Ball’s most personal and introspective test piece was perhaps too easy a test for both the Elite Section of the Norwegian National Championships and the First Section National Finals in Dundee, then after playing it, they were certainly made to think again. It made our list last year after mainland Europe found it too difficult to overcome and this year it still destroyed too many unsuspecting bands.¹

The willingness of brass band media to highlight the occasions when an unsuitable test piece is selected greatly aids my research by identifying unsuitable test pieces. Such articles frequently quote either competitors or adjudicators to add weight to their argument. The report also demonstrates that conductors are as guilty as contest organisers of misjudging or underestimating a test piece. Media reports which discuss the test pieces that I am examining are looked at in detail in the subsequent sections which analyse the test pieces individually and as part of their respective groups.

The lack of any test pieces that have risen in section use is evidence that the average standard of playing among contesting bands did not fall during the twentieth century. If standards had fallen, then the likely outcome would be that either some of the test pieces would show a pattern of rising in section use throughout their period of use or test pieces were chosen for sections for which they were too difficult. If test pieces were chosen for sections that they were not suitable for there should be some evidence of this in contest reports from journalists, competitors or

adjudicators. The brass band media does not contain widespread evidence from any of my research period that a significant number of test pieces were chosen for the wrong section. Therefore, it is unlikely that this was the case and suggests that on the whole test pieces were chosen for sections for which they were suitable and therefore standards of playing cannot have fallen significantly.

To reinforce the evidence that standards of playing have not fallen I discussed this topic in all of my interviews. I saw no evidence of a decline in standards of playing in the patterns of test piece use or the interviews which I conducted. For example, composer Peter Graham stated that he has noticed standards changing from the 1980s.

I think, certainly I’ve been aware that at Championship level the standard of pieces has become increasingly more difficult testing all levels of the band. Back in those days [1984], I don’t know what the championship piece would be at that time. I remember going to contests prior to that and things like Gilbert Vinter’s Spectrum which is a great piece but now I don’t think would be considered difficult enough to really challenge the top bands.2

There is evidence that some contemporary musical leaders of the brass band movement believe that the musicality displayed by competitors at contests has decreased but the same people believe that technically players have got much better. Standards of playing may thus have changed stylistically, and some aspects of performance may have declined generally in the brass band movement whilst others have improved, but this is clearly not a straight forward decline. For instance, there are some examples of test pieces maintaining their position as a top-level test piece

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which challenged bands throughout the twentieth century and some of my interviewees stated that in their opinion the best brass band recordings of certain pieces were made in the middle of the twentieth century not at the end. However, the performances created for recordings outside of contests are also different from those given on the contest stage. I will discuss the difference between commercial recordings and contest performances in chapter seven when examining the brass band idiom. There is also no significant evidence of a fall in standards suggested in the existing secondary literature.³

This leaves three possible scenarios for the standard of playing among contesting brass bands as demonstrated by the selection of test pieces: that playing ability stayed the same, that playing ability went up or that changes in standards of playing did not fit a discernible pattern. I will now examine what patterns of test piece use would suggest each of these outcomes. However, it must be noted that these simplistic patterns will not tell the whole story alone. The style of each individual piece, and its technical and musical challenges, must be considered when examining the pieces. Therefore, the presence of slightly different patterns for different test pieces which were composed in different styles can provide information about stylistic changes in the brass band repertoire and how players were able to interpret and perform music in these styles. I will examine the simplest possible outcomes and patterns first before looking at the more complex, real world data and potential

³ There are no suggestions of falling standards in the secondary literature but there are suggestions of rising standards in some works, including: Bevan, ‘Art or Sport’, p. 112. Herbert, ‘Making a Movement’, p. 65. And Odello, ‘Musical Athleticism: Victorian Brass Band Contests and the Shaping of Working-Class Men,’ p. 145.
outcomes which show the more complex nuances in the development of playing and repertoire in the brass band movement.

First, if levels of playing ability had stayed the same then most of the graphs would be flat. There might be some curved graphs showing rises or falls due to changes in teaching of different styles of playing, with bands focusing on a particular style or sound, making some pieces easier or harder but not affecting the overall trend.

If playing ability had risen, most of the graphs would show a fall in section use. Again, there may be some pieces that show flat or rising section use due to particular difficulties with pieces or styles of playing. This could suggest that either technicality or musicality has increased at different rates (or one has decreased). Thirdly if there was no discernible pattern then there would be a mix of graphs that rise, fall, stay flat or have a mix of rises and falls. As my period of study is relatively limited at only one hundred years, a pattern such as this would indicate either a problem with my data, or that it is not possible to show trends in playing ability using test pieces. Thankfully this is not the case. As shown above, most of the graphs show a fall in section use or are flat. The test pieces in each group are shown in the table below.
Table 9: Test piece groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More accessible to lower ability bands (falls in section use)</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>No Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Comedy Overture</td>
<td>Contest Music</td>
<td>A Holiday Suite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Ireland</td>
<td>Wilfred Heaton</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Epic Symphony</td>
<td>Festival Music</td>
<td>Academic Festival Overture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percy Fletcher</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>Brahms, arr Dennis Wright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet For Band</td>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Main Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Horovitz</td>
<td>Hubert Bath</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call Of The Sea</td>
<td>Lorenzo</td>
<td>Pageantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>Thomas Keighley</td>
<td>Herbert Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnival</td>
<td>Variations On A Ninth</td>
<td>Petite Suite de Ballet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Perkin</td>
<td>Gilbert Vinter</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divertimento</td>
<td>Salute To Youth</td>
<td>Gilbert Vinter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan Kelly</td>
<td>Journey Into Freedom</td>
<td>Three Songs Without Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Carnaval Romain</td>
<td>Tournament For Brass</td>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlioz, arr F Wright</td>
<td>Le ROI d'Ys</td>
<td>Lalo, arr F Wright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride Of Race</td>
<td>Le ROI d'Ys</td>
<td>Lalo, arr F Wright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth Wright</td>
<td>Pride Of Race</td>
<td>Kenneth Wright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurgam</td>
<td>Salzburg Suite</td>
<td>Dennis Wright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Ball</td>
<td>Spectrum</td>
<td>Gilbert Vinter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salzburg Suite</td>
<td>Gallows</td>
<td>Spectrum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis Wright</td>
<td>Suite in B Flat</td>
<td>Gordon Jacob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Force Of Destiny</td>
<td>The Force Of Destiny</td>
<td>Verdi, arr F Wright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi, arr F Wright</td>
<td>Un Vie De Matelot (A Sailor's Life)</td>
<td>Un Vie De Matelot (A Sailor's Life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Farnon</td>
<td>Robert Farnon</td>
<td>Robert Farnon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of pieces showing a downward pattern of section use in this table suggests that the standard of playing has got better so bands are able to play harder test pieces. Therefore, test pieces which were only accessible to the top bands have become accessible to lower section bands causing the test pieces to be selected for
lower sections. This group contains over half the test pieces, but that leaves thirteen out of twenty-nine test pieces in the other two groups. This therefore suggests a more complex pattern than is suggested by the numbers in each of the three test piece groups.

By splitting the test pieces into groups, I have been able to identify the themes and general patterns shown by the use of these test pieces. Having looked at the overall picture the next chapter examines the test pieces individually and within the context of the other pieces in their groups. By focussing on the individual test pieces, I have explored the complexities of test piece performance and standards of playing that are hidden when looking at the categories. It also highlighted the strength of correlation between patterns of use for pieces within the groups, and identified any pieces for which the patterns are misleading, or the contest reports suggest should be in another group, or should be counted as anomalous.
Chapter 5: Test pieces which have fallen in section use in the British Open and National Finals contest series

The test pieces that have been used most frequently for sections of the National Finals and British Open contest series are at the core of my research. In the previous chapter I sorted these pieces into three groups. This chapter looks at the first group of pieces individually and as a whole, to identify trends in test piece use. The order in which I will examine the test pieces is based on their classification according to the patterns identified in the previous chapter. First let us review the groups into which the test pieces were split:

1. Test pieces which have been used in gradually lower sections throughout their period of use. There are sixteen test pieces in this group.

2. Test pieces which have been used in the same section throughout their period of use. There are five test pieces in this group.

3. Test pieces for which there is no discernible pattern of section use throughout their period of use. There are eight test pieces in this group.

The first group of test pieces is those which have fallen in section use throughout their period of use. This is the largest group of test pieces with sixteen pieces, just over half the total number of pieces, and the size of this group alone might suggest that there has been a significant rise in standards of playing in brass bands throughout the twentieth century. This group contains three of the four test pieces which are arrangements of classical music, not originally composed for brass band. All three pieces, *Le Carnaval Romain*, *Le Roi d’Ys* and *The Force of Destiny* were arranged by Frank Wright.
Le Carnaval Romain was composed by Berlioz.¹ This arrangement has been used five times in the contests which I am studying, between 1966 and 2011. For the first two performances in 1966 and 1979, the piece was used for the National Championship Section and British Open. However, since then it has fallen in section use, with its most recent use being in 2011 in the Regional First Section. Despite complaints from the original (orchestral) performers regarding the complexity of the overture, there is no widespread or significant evidence that such complaints have been made about the suitability of this test piece for the sections chosen. It has however been acknowledged as a difficult piece, as The British Bandsman reported:

At the first performance of the overture, Berlioz's wind players were up in arms about its complexities. They said it was unplayable. Berlioz replied: "The parts are correct and you are all excellent players. Watch my stick as often as you can, count your rests carefully, and everything will be all right." 1st Section bands please take note!²

This single quote does not represent the complexity of Berlioz's views of wind and brass instruments and it is the opinions of the players that are more relevant to this test piece.

When the piece was premiered at the Salle Herz in Paris in 1844, Berlioz had already performed many of his most famous works and had access to high level professional musicians.³ Therefore the complaining musicians in the quote from British Bandsman are some of the finest professionals available in the Paris musical establishment. This is very different from First Section bands in 2011. First Section bands in the early twenty-first century were good musical ensembles but did not rely on professional musicians for most of their players and many of those who were professionally involved in music did not earn a

² Paul Hindmarsh, The British Bandsman, 19 February 2011, p. 11.
living from playing, unlike the orchestral players conducted by Berlioz. Although professional musicians have been permitted to enter contests since 1991 there had been no great rush of professionals by 2011.⁴ Therefore the good amateurs of 2011 were capable of performing a difficult arrangement of an overture which was almost beyond the professionals of 1844.

*Le Carnaval Romain* is very different from most other classical music test pieces. In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century most test pieces that were based on classical music were transcriptions of well-known melodies from an opera or the works of a composer. Examples of this type of test piece include Godfrey’s arrangements which dominated contesting from 1870–1910.⁵ However, by the late twentieth century these arrangements had fallen out of favour for contest use and had largely been replaced by a new style of test piece that used a classical piece, melody, or the style of a composer as the inspiration for a new composition. Philip Wilby is perhaps the master of this genre of test piece, with compositions including *Paganini Variations* (based on Paganini’s *Caprice no. 24*), *Vienna Nights* (referencing Mozart’s *Piano Sonata in A, K331*) and *The Red Priest* (‘A Concerto after Vivaldi with special separations’).⁶ *Le Carnaval Romain* does not fit into either of these categories. It is an overture formed from two parts of Berlioz’s *Benvenuto Cellini*, the aria from Act 1, Scene iii and the carnival scene from Act 2.⁷ According to Hindmarsh, the opera was unpopular from the outset, even with the cast. It was the demise

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of the opera as a whole that prompted Berlioz to initially rescue the overture for concert performances before arranging *Le Carnaval Romain* six years after the opera premiered.\(^8\) Therefore this is not an opera selection of excerpts handpicked for brass band by the arranger, but rather an arrangement by the opera’s own composer and subsequently transcribed for brass band. This may explain part of the enduring popularity of the work: it was already a stand-alone concert overture before being arranged for brass band. It also provides a degree of immunity from some of the criticisms that brass band arrangements of classical music have faced.

In the nineteenth century, brass bands were held up as examples of the Victorian notion of musical edification by performing art music for working class audiences.\(^9\) In many places outside of the largest metropolitan areas brass bands were the main medium through which working class people heard art music.\(^10\) However, many of the arrangements were criticised as being inauthentic owing to being selections of the most popular melodies and sections from the operatic scores. Some of this criticism was due to the pieces being re-arranged several times from the original and therefore not containing the full artistic merit of the original work.\(^11\) This is true of both arrangements for concert use and test pieces. Herbert describes a particular concert arrangement as being a fourth-hand arrangement for a band in Merthyr Tydfil. This is an extreme example due to bandmasters writing their own arrangements in the mid-nineteenth century, before instrumentation was standardised, however it does highlight the potentially problematic relationship between band

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10 Bevan, 'Art or Sport', p. 113.
arrangements and the original classical composition. The fall in section use of this piece is not as large as that of some other test pieces, however it still suggests a significant rise in standards of playing due to its fall in section use, particularly from its 1979 use in the British Open to its 2011 use in the Regional First Section.

Lalo’s *Le Roi d’Ys* is another example of the continued use of Frank Wright’s arrangements in contest use. The opera premiered in 1888 and was a change in direction for Lalo, primarily a composer of chamber music and songs. The piece has been used six times between 1959 and 2010 and has fallen in section use from the National Championship and British Open to the Senior Trophy. However, between 1959 and 1990 the piece was only used in the top two sections of each contest series (National and Regional Championship Sections, British Open and Grand Shield) before falling in use to the Senior Trophy in 2010. This piece suggests a rise in playing standards but also demonstrates that some test pieces for the Grand Shield and British Open are interchangeable, having been used for the Grand Shield in 1984 and the British Open in 1990. As there were only twenty bands in each of these sections, this is not a big surprise and suggests that there was not a significant difference in ability between the top twenty bands (competing in the British Open) and the rest of the top forty bands (competing in the Grand Shield). After all, they are all Championship Section bands who compete against each other in the Regional Championship Section contests. However it must be noted that there is a significant difference between the top

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five or six bands and the rest of the top twenty, with the same few bands regularly winning
the Open and others competing for years without success.\textsuperscript{15} The division in quality between
the top five or six bands and the rest of the British Open and Grand Shield bands is
supported by conductor Richard Evans, who won the British Open on his first conducting
attempt in 1975 with Wingates performing \textit{Fireworks} by Elgar Howarth:

\begin{quote}
CO: So the top sections of the movement are almost a professional outfit
now?

RE: But how many are there? You see Chris, if we got a piece of paper,
write the ten top bands, you’ll get to five or six and then you’ll start
scratching your head. Does CWS Glasgow or Funeralcare, do they come
into it? You’ll get down to five, six, seven, you’ll pick the next three and
you won’t, well we won’t agree.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

This view that there are a small number of bands that are much better than the rest of the
top twenty or more supports the argument that the bands in the Grand Shield are not much
lower in standard than most of the bands in the British Open. An analysis of the British Open
winners shows only a few bands dominating. As these winning bands have been established
in the British Open for many years it creates the impression that all the bands in the British
Open are much better than bands in the Grand Shield. However, this is not the case. If you
analyse the number of bands which have won the British Open multiple times you find that
they are a smaller elite group within the section and that many bands in the British Open
are not able to perform at this level. This apparent dichotomy can create a false illusion of a
British Open field that is much stronger than the Grand Shield because the bands associated
with the British Open are the bands that repeatedly win it. The narrow field of winners
actually points to a larger pool of bands at a slightly lower level.

\textsuperscript{15} For example, only six bands won the National Finals Championship Section between 1946-1969
\textsuperscript{16} Evans, interview by Osborn, 12 November, 2014.
Alongside *Le Carnaval Romain* and *Le Roi d'Ys* there is only one other Frank Wright arrangement among the most frequently used test pieces, *The Force Of Destiny*. These three are only a small part of a long list of classical music arranged and turned into test pieces by Wright. Twelve of these have featured in the British Open and National Finals contest series. They were most popular from the 1950s to the 1970s and have since fallen out of favour, in line with the decline of arrangements which have been replaced by original works for brass band.

*The Force of Destiny* shows a significant but limited fall in section use from the 1962 National Championship Section to the 2011 National First Section, via the Grand Shield in 1973 and the Senior Cup in 1981. The 1962 winning performance by CWS (Manchester), conducted by Alex Mortimer, at the National Finals was voted the 6th most memorable winning performance by 4barsrest in 2001, which stated:

> Although they won the contest the following year as well (and by three points), it is this winning performance that is regarded as perhaps their greatest and one of the most memorable to have been heard at the Finals. Alex Mortimer had forged his reputation with the band by winning the Open in 1960 and during the next few years CWS (Manchester) under his baton were one of the finest bands in the land. Drawn last but one on the stage and conducting from a wheelchair he inspired his band to produce a performance that secured victory and a place in the annals of mythic history making.

However, when the piece was selected in 2011 some of the competing conductors had conflicting views on the difficulty and suitability of the music. One stated that:

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The Force of Destiny may not be as technically demanding as some of the contemporary test pieces that we have to play. However the piece is not to be underestimated and should sort out the wheat from the chaff.\(^{19}\)

This view was refuted by Gareth Ritter, MD of City of Cardiff, who said it was, ‘A great piece of music, there is something for everyone. It is technically demanding and full of music.’\(^{20}\)

These differing views on the technical difficulty of the piece may be owing to the differing levels of ability of the bands that these conductors led. However, they may also be owing to the difference between this piece and the pieces they were more used to competing with.

For example, Jason Smith, MD of Westoe Brass Band stated that ‘The band is enjoying playing it (even though we had hoped for something a bit more modern). Our last three set pieces have been Frank Wright overtures now.’\(^{21}\) This sentiment was echoed by Craig Ratcliffe, MD of Harrogate Band, who also said that he had been hoping for a more contemporary test piece:

Having recently had to perform ‘A Moorside Suite’, ‘Le Carnaval Romain’ and now ‘La Forza’ \textit{(La Forza del destino — The Force of Destiny)}, the band is hoping that the next area test piece reflects more contemporary tastes. Plus, whilst performing test pieces, which are arrangements is nice once in a while, two on the trot is a little much to take. Having said that audiences have enjoyed hearing ‘La Forza’ and the players have responded well to the MD’s attention to detail in particular his reference to the original orchestral score in his interpretation — a strategy that delivered results at the Areas.\(^{22}\)


\(^{20}\) Gareth Ritter, MD of City of Cardiff Band, quoted in No stated author, ‘2011 National Championships of Great Britain — First Section Runners & Riders’ 4barsrest.

\(^{21}\) Jason Smith, MD of Westoe Brass Band, quote in No stated author, ‘2011 National Championships of Great Britain — First Section Runners & Riders’ 4barsrest.

\(^{22}\) Craig Ratcliffe, MD of Harrogate Band, quote in No stated author, ‘2011 National Championships of Great Britain — First Section Runners & Riders’ 4barsrest.
Smith and Ratcliffe were not the only conductors with an opinion on the suitability of using an arrangement of a classical work as a test piece, but Mark Ager, MD of Haverhill Silver Band, did believe it was a good test piece:

First reaction thought Force of Destiny maybe a bit outdated. However now rehearsals and sectionals are in full swing and there is a realisation that there’s much more to the piece than originally thought.23

Ager’s comments noting his initial misgivings suggest, alongside the more negative comments above, that the growth of original brass band contesting repertoire had led to negative views of the use of arrangements as test pieces by the twenty-first century. Several other conductors, along with Ager, praised the piece as being ‘full of music’, one even called it a ‘smashing test piece’.24 This suggests that the conductors and players were not familiar with this piece before it was selected, as they changed their mind once rehearsals started. Therefore, changes in the brass band idiom and contest repertoire are shown to influence the perceived difficulty and suitability of a test piece. I will discuss the idiomatic changes and the place of arrangements alongside contemporary original brass band repertoire in chapter seven.

The Force of Destiny was generally well received on the occasions that it was chosen, particularly once the rehearsals started and competitors became familiar with it. This piece suggests a small but significant change in standards as it fell from use in the National Championship Section to the National First Section.

23 Mark Ager, MD of Haverhill Silver Band, quoted in No stated author, ‘2011 National Championships of Great Britain — First Section Runners & Riders’ 4barsrest.
Eric Ball is the other composer with multiple test pieces in the group which have fallen in section use. All his pieces are original compositions for brass band, although *Resurgam* is one of many test pieces which uses motifs from classical music. In this case it is the plainchant setting of *Dies Irae* from the Catholic Requiem Mass. This setting is widely quoted within classical music and other genres, with perhaps the most famous being in Hector Berlioz’s *Symphony Fantastique, movement V: Dream of a Witches Sabbath*. Both pieces quote this motif in the lower brass accompanied by the knocking of a tubular bell. The use of motifs from classical music was common in late twentieth-century pieces but very different from earlier pieces, including those of a similar age to *Resurgam*. Most test pieces with classical influences from this period were direct transcriptions, such as those of Frank Wright I have just examined.

*Resurgam* is possibly Eric Ball’s most famous work and one of the best known and highest regarded test pieces in the brass band repertoire. This piece has been performed not only in contests, but also in concerts, as well as being recorded countless times by both brass bands and wind bands since it was composed for the 1950 British Open. However, it was absent from the British Open and National Finals series from 1958 to 2011. When it returned it had fallen significantly to the Second Section Regionals. The piece follows the pattern of falling in section use shown by some of Eric Ball’s other test pieces. The pattern for this piece is similar to Kenneth Wright’s *Pride of Race*, with both pieces starting in the

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upper echelons in the middle of the twentieth century but falling significantly. However, *Resurgam* has taken much longer to reach the lower levels and has not fallen quite as far, only reaching the Regional Second Section in 2011 compared to *Pride of Race* reaching National Third Section in 1975.

There was some debate about the suitability of the piece for the Second Section in 2011. Dave Tinker reported for *4barsrest* that:

> ‘Resurgam’ is simply not a work suited to this level of competition, even in such a strong region as the North West... Technically the majority played the notes – but that is like reading out the telephone directory thinking its Shakespeare. A more personal understanding of the musical inspiration was needed – and at this level, that was nigh impossible, even with a field made up of well-matched, accurately graded, Second Section bands. The best in Kevin’s [Wadsworth, adjudicator] opinion (Morecambe and Haydock) did do that, whilst others, however technically secure, played with little emotional connection to the music. At this level that is always going to be the case when a set work as inappropriate as this is chosen.27

This report suggests that the piece was not suitable for this section, especially with the adjudicator’s remarks and opinions quoted. However, at the Midlands Regional Contest, reporter Martin Benson believed it was a suitable test piece as ‘A good standard in the Midlands showed that bands could play *Resurgam*.’28 This is an interesting set of comments, as the North West Region was one of the regions with better standards of playing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.29

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29 See Table 2 for details evidence of the comparative strength of bands in each region.
It was recognised at several of the regional contests in 2011 that the complexities of the piece were not technical but lay in musicality and interpretation. Understanding the piece is the key to a successful performance as Paul Hindmarsh recognised:

Ultimately it is an optimistic work. There is a sense of triumph in the peaceful ending, of confidence and assurance - hard won. It remains a formidable test of musical insight, sound and technique.30

Finding this sense of optimism amongst the other morbid and contemplative musical features of the work can lead to a very different musical interpretation to one which focuses on the other musical elements and therefore a very different competition result. This piece demonstrates that musicality and interpretation can be more of a challenge than technique: how you play the notes on the page is more important than just getting them right. However, it also suggests that the musical ability of both bands and conductors had increased from the mid-twentieth century and provides one of the clearest arguments for a rise in musical standards, both in technical terms and musicality.

It is interesting to note that when the piece was first selected for the British Open in 1950, ‘Lancastrian’ reported for The British Bandsman that the piece was technically difficult: ‘It is certainly a teaser and will require a first-class band to overcome the technical difficulties. There are many traps waiting for the unwary or nervous player.’31 Whilst the piece does contain technically difficult passages, it is not technically difficult compared to many other mid-twentieth century test pieces. For example, the Solo Cornet part does not contain a large number of fast semiquaver runs; with the exceptions of a seven bar passage around

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rehearsal mark 9 and a four bar passage around rehearsal mark 21 there are very few, and rehearsal mark 9 is not written at a fast tempo, being marked at 88 quavers per minute, although this does later speed up to allegro marked at 240 crotchets (written as 80 dotted minim) per minute by rehearsal mark 21. Whilst there are some tricky key signatures, Ab major for Bb instruments, and a significant number of accidentals, the notes are mostly not very fast and not very high. Neither are there many long sections without rests, with ample breathing room between most passages. However, it must be remembered that the euphonium part for this piece is just as important, melodically, and more exposed than the Solo Cornet part. This may explain the lack of technical difficulties on the Solo Cornet part compared to other test pieces.

The real traps in this piece have always been the musical ones. The religious inspirations for the work must be conveyed to the audience (and adjudicator). The title translates to ‘I shall rise again’ and part of the work is based on a passage from The Book of Wisdom chapter 3 verses 1-3. This is printed in the programme notes for the piece:

> The souls of the righteous are in the band of God,  
> And no torment shall touch them.  
> In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died;  
> Their departure was accounted to be their hurt.  
> And their journeying away from us to be their ruin:  
> But they are in peace.  

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32 Ab major is difficult for valved brass instruments because it requires the players to use the second and third valves more than other key signatures, and players find these valve combinations harder to play. Hindmarsh argued that key signatures which require players to use the ‘back valves’ frequently are much more difficult for players. Hindmarsh, interview by Osborn, 18 February, 2014.

33 As printed in the programme notes and quoted in Cooke, Eric Ball, 228.Appendix K Musical analysis, including part of programme note (by Eric Ball) of tone poem 'Resurgam'
The first line of this passage fits the first five bars of the melody, played by the euphoniums and forms the ‘faith’ motif. This is one of five sections that the piece is divided into. The positivity of this motif must be balanced against the despair of the cornet solo at the Adagio e lamentoso section, which bears the following comments on the score:

At figure 2 the music reflects a frustrated, despairing ‘what’s the use?’ mood. The Adagio e lamentoso (cornet solo) speaks of a deep sorrow (one has often asked the soloists to think of the words “Death took my love away”).

This despairing section precedes a repeat of the faith motif, before the piece moves on to one of the technically demanding sections and then moves into a section subtitled the ‘Fear of Judgment’ which quotes the Dies Irae. This ‘death’ motif must provide the sense of fear and hysteria which the composer describes. It is the contrast between these styles which makes this piece so challenging. Resurgam is not composed in movements, but only defined by the order in which the five sections are performed and therefore the performance of each section must not only seamlessly link to the previous but also provide its own character as defined by the detailed programme notes. If these contrasting sections are not performed with their own character, then the performance will be musically deficient.

Eric Ball is one of few brass band composers who have managed to bridge the gaps between light and serious music, and composing for higher and lower sections. There are many composers who are pigeon-holed as writing serious music that is very difficult, but who

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35 Both Cooke and Hindmarsh examine this section of the piece in their analysis Cooke, Eric Ball, p. 229. Hindmarsh, 'Building a Repertoire', p. 259.
either cannot write for lower sections or who have a reputation as not writing for lower sections. Equally there are many composers who are well regarded for their light music output but who have not had success with serious music. Many composers who focus solely on the brass band genre are in this latter group because the British, and indeed international, musical establishment has categorised all brass band music as light music.\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{Call of the Sea} is a good example of Eric Ball’s writing of light music for lower sections, a complete contrast to \textit{Resurgam}.

\textit{Call of the Sea} is one of Eric Ball’s most popular lower section test pieces. Unlike some composers, Eric Ball specifically composed some test pieces for lower sections, as this piece demonstrates – it has only been used in the Senior Cup and below. This makes the piece very different from many of the most frequently used test pieces because most of these test pieces have been used for higher sections at some point during their contest use. Another unusual aspect of this test piece is that it was used three times in a single year, 1954, at both the Regional Second and National Second Section contests (along with the Senior Cup). As a result, all the bands in the National Second Section contest had already played the piece six months earlier. However, this unique situation did not produce the expected outcome of bands knowing the piece very well and subsequently playing it very well, as noted by adjudicator T.J. Powell:

\begin{quote}
I had been looking forward with great expectancy to this Championship, especially as I knew that the test-piece, ‘Call of the Sea’, had been played by all the bands at their Area Contests. Consequently it was something of a disappointment to find so many failing to come up to a good standard. All bands did well in the more robust passages, but there were many weaknesses in the delicate spots, particularly in the opening stages, where
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{38} Wallace’s Boosey & Hawkes \emph{The Publishing Story} focuses on the ‘serious music side of the business’ and as a result barely mentions brass band music. Wallace, \emph{The Publishing Story}, p. vii.
tuning suffered considerably, especially that of the cornets on their lower D flats. Often, too, one was surprised to find such things as \( pp \) being much louder than an immediately previous \( p \).\(^{39}\)

This report on repeated uses of a piece in a single year suggests two things about the competing bands. First, that lack of rehearsal time was not the limiting factor in the quality of these performances, as bands would be far more familiar with this piece than usual for test pieces and the performances were not markedly better than expected. Secondly, musical interpretation was the limiting factor and for this the blame must go to the conductor. This is especially true when the comments are regarding aspects of performance such as inconsistent dynamics which should have been picked up after feedback from the previous contest use. This means that the conductors have ignored previous contest feedback, or that these mistakes crept in between the two contest uses possibly due to complacency with using a known piece, or that the adjudicator in the previous contest did not notice these problems. Unfortunately, with the use of a single piece multiple times in the same year being an exception, there is not enough evidence to examine the effect of reusing a piece on bands’ psychology and rehearsal schedules ahead of the second contest.

As an example of Eric Ball’s light music for brass band, *Call of the Sea* is very different to interpret from other serious test pieces. As we have seen, Eric Ball discussed this piece at length, but it is worth noting in this context how Ball was inspired by other forms of cultural representation of the sea.

This overture does no more than hint at such dark matters, and if the conductor needs a further picture to help in its interpretation he might do worse than look once more at the popular painting of a boy called ‘Sea

Dreams', or one of its companions (there are copies in the shops of most picture dealers.) This overture is addressed to the young in heart of all ages and is one of my favourite children\[^{40}\].

As light music for lower section bands the music has been popular with contest audiences, along with many of Eric Ball’s compositions, and fulfil[s] the requirements of being music that an adjudicator can use to judge bands as well as being a piece the audience will be able to listen to and enjoy up to twenty times. This is largely owing to Ball’s excellent use of melody. Although it is very different in style from that of many higher section test pieces, this does not mean that it is any easier to bring out the musicality in the piece, as Rodney Newton noted:

The 4th Section test is Ball’s Call of the Sea, written clearly for bands in the lower echelons of the movement. However, there is not a trace of 'writing down' to those not able to reach the brass band movement's heights - Eric Ball was acutely aware of the need for first class music for all levels of banding and this work is a fine example. Despite the absence of virtuosic writing, Call of the Sea is beautifully proportioned and demonstrates Ball’s skill as a writer of melodies, a quality that has endeared him to music lovers in general over the years. This is music very like its creator in character - unpretentious and full of integrity, which will need just as much care and attention as many more demanding pieces.\[^{41}\]

Newton picked up on one of Eric Ball’s most exceptional talents: his skill in writing good music for bands of all abilities. Many composers have failed to write test pieces for different standards, yet Eric Ball did so very well. This is part of his appeal as a composer; players at various stages in their musical education and ability can all perform his music. However, some of his lower section test pieces have fallen out of use for contests which may be

because by the end of the twentieth century they were viewed as insufficiently challenging. This piece clearly suggests a rise in playing standards as it fell from the Senior Cup and National Second Section in 1954 over its next two uses to National Fourth Section in a period of forty-nine years.

The remaining Eric Ball test piece in this group is *Journey Into Freedom*. This piece has been used four times in contests since it first appeared at the National Championship Section in 1967. By 2004 it was used for the Senior Cup and therefore, like many of Eric Ball’s test pieces, it has fallen in section use. *Journey Into Freedom* has not been in use for as long as other Eric Ball test pieces such as *Resurgam* (which has been in use twenty-four years longer) or *Main Street* (six years longer) and the fall in section use has not been as large (British Open to Regional Third Section for *Main Street*) however the fall is significant. I have found no evidence of this piece being unsuitable for any chosen contests and therefore it suggests a modest but significant rise in the standard of playing.

*An Epic Symphony*, by Percy Fletcher, is one of the oldest pieces that is used throughout the period of research and therefore has one of the longest periods of use, eighty-two years. This test piece has been used five times in that period and on initially looking at the sections for which it has been used, it broadly suggests the trend of lower section use over time. However, this is only supported by the final use, in 2008 for the Senior Trophy. All four of the previous uses were in either the National Championship or British Open contests (for which test pieces are of the same standard). This is a significant fall as the Senior Trophy is two sections below the British Open. In 2008 the Senior Trophy contained bands of either

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42 Eric Ball, 'Journey into Freedom,' in *Blitz* (Black Dyke Band, 2002).
43 Percy Fletcher, 'An Epic Symphony,' in *From Sonnets to Jazz* (Grimethorpe Colliery Band, 1997).
Championship or First Section standard. The top eight bands were all Championship Section bands (with the exception of Laganvale, an Irish band who therefore did not have a UK section grading but who had won the Irish Championship Contest in 2005), although only SWT Woodfalls made it to the National Championship Section where they were placed sixteenth. Of the remaining ten bands, seven were First Section, of which five had been placed in the top five in their region that year. Therefore, when An Epic Symphony was used at the Senior Trophy there were several bands taking part which were not of Championship Section standard and only one band which was of National Finals standard, although another five of the Championship Section bands did place within the top six in their region that year.

An examination of the comments about the Senior Trophy in 2008, the difference between the Championship and First Section bands in that contest becomes apparent. The report by Kenneth Crookston for The British Bandsman argues that this test piece was too hard for the majority of bands:

How hard can it be for 21st century Championship Section bands and conductors to perform a piece written in 1926? Percy Fletcher's An Epic Symphony has been used extensively as a test-piece for every generation in the 82 years that have elapsed since St Hilda Colliery picked up the top prize at the Crystal Palace, it has been recorded by almost every leading band and conductor over those years and the score gives every instruction necessary to create a performance of real beauty. On the evidence of last Saturday in Blackpool, however, it would appear too hard for the majority of the bands on the first rung of the British Open 'ladder' to achieve even a satisfactory performance.45

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44 'Laganvale (Metal Technology) Band History,' Laganvale (Metal Technology) Band, [18 November, 2016], http://www.laganvale.co.uk/history.html.
There are two interesting points in this quote. Firstly, Crookston describes bands competing in the Senior Trophy as ‘Championship Section’. However, in this contest over a third of bands were not Championship Section bands. Therefore, Crookston’s criticism of Championship Section bands is not entirely accurate. Secondly, this quote is an example of an attitude present among parts of the brass band community by the late twentieth century which viewed early-twentieth-century music as inferior in some ways to that of later twentieth century and contemporary music. Crookston’s first sentence almost dismisses the piece as unsuitable owing to its age; however he does describe performances as capable of having ‘real beauty’. This dismissive attitude was at least partly owing to the familiarity which the bands should have had with the piece and its supposed technical ease, rather than it being inherently poor-quality music. However, it must be noted that other members of the brass band community sang the praises of this piece as having ‘a strong claim to be the first major work of real stature for brass band by an English composer’ and ‘without question the finest brass band work to emerge from these shores before Holst’s A Moorside Suite.’

This quote also shows a dichotomy between Crookston’s views of the levels of ability in twenty-first century brass bands and the performances given. He does not use this single contest as an example that brass bands in the twenty-first century are worse or at the same level of ability as early or mid-twentieth century bands. Instead, he views the performances as a disappointing example that does not show twenty-first-century bands off to the best of their ability. This suggests that idiomatic changes in the repertoire have significantly

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changed the value placed on the challenges that this piece comprises, versus those contained in a twenty-first-century test piece.

The familiarity and the extensive list of recordings of this piece, along with the descriptive titles of each movement, made the challenge of interpreting the piece and giving the performance the necessary musicality and musical style easier, as the conductors had plenty of good examples to follow. However, reports of this contest suggest that the conductors were the people responsible for most of the deficiencies. The style of the piece does not present as many technical challenges as it does musical ones, as Kenneth Crookston noted: ‘There were some fair attempts, although the technicalities did prove to be beyond a handful of bands, but the main problems for those that failed lay with the men in the middle’.  

There is extra pressure on the musical and interpretation skills of the principal players in this piece because it contains several difficult solos. The increased pressure on a few members of the band may be the reason for the problems that bands have faced interpreting and performing this piece. This theme of technical challenges being less of a problem for bands later in the twentieth century than musical challenges reoccurs throughout the list of the most frequently used test pieces. The extent to which it affects pieces varies, with some pieces falling several sections but still posing formidable musical challenges to lower section bands, and others remaining near their starting point due to the musical challenges despite the technical challenges being less problematic. In addition, some pieces retain their technical challenges more than others, so they can still challenge the top bands on both fronts.

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Although some pieces are rightly criticised for being too difficult for the section for which they have been used at a contest, some are described as being difficult but at the right level to test the top bands in the section. The varying levels of ability within sections makes it very difficult to select test pieces of the right standard. This is especially true of the National Finals series, which contains bands from different regions which may not be of the same standard despite being in the same section. Some pieces will test the top bands and make it easy to find a winner but are beyond the ability of many of the bands at the lower end who will all perform it badly. Alternatively, some test pieces are too easy for the top bands, but all bands will be able to give a good performance. One piece which was described as very difficult for bands but still enjoyable was *Ballet for Band*. This contrasting feedback highlighting the difficulty yet demonstrating that bands enjoyed playing the piece shows just how fine a line there is between a test piece which is too difficult and one which is at the right standard.

*Ballet for Band* by Joseph Horovitz has been used five times since it was first played at the National Championship finals in 1983. In the twenty-four years between the first and most recent uses it fell in both contest series, from National Championship to Regional First and Grand Shield to Senior Trophy. This is a steady fall from the twenty best bands in the country to all First Section bands. The fall in use is similar in both contests. Seven of the bands in the Senior Trophy in 2007 were First Section and the reported comments regarding the suitability of the piece for both the Regional First in 1997 and Senior Trophy in 2007 are also similar. On both occasions it was reported that the piece might be too difficult, by *The

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British Bandsman’s reporter and by the conductor of one of the competing bands whom The
British Bandsman cites:

Spare a thought for bands in Section 1, faced with Joseph Horovitz's stylish Ballet for Band. Since its first appearance at the Royal Albert Hall in 1983, this work has delighted listeners and terrorised players. 'It's exciting, and very difficult - too difficult perhaps,' said Ian Dickinson, conductor of the Jackfield Elcock Reisen Band. 'It is requiring my band to play in a more flexible style, and they are enjoying it,' he added.49

The piece is the music for an imaginary ballet with different themes for different characters. Although the composer had clear ideas for characters when composing the piece, Horovitz prefers the audience and performers to have their own interpretation:

The characters and plot were quite clear in my mind before composing it, but I prefer the audience to exercise its own imagination rather than to be influenced by mine. The work is in three linked sections, the central one being the most lyrical. All themes are directly or more subtly derived from the opening fanfare motive, which is heard at the end.50

This increases the musical challenges for the performers, chiefly conductors, but also principal players and soloists, because they not only have to interpret the music and form their own ideas of the characters portrayed but they also must try and make this match the composer’s ideas, and more importantly the adjudicators’. Much of the music sounds comedic, almost cartoon-like, including the fanfare and tuba duet at the beginning, with the more lyrical sections sounding as if they would fit just as well as the music for calmer scenes in children’s cartoons as they would for a ballet. These wide-ranging styles provide a variety of challenges to the players and require the flexibility mentioned by Ian Dickinson above.

There are many technical challenges in the piece with the ending requiring some very fast and loud playing, which tests the stamina of the players despite the relatively short length of the test piece of about ten and a half minutes. In 2007 the adjudicators again commented that these challenges might have been too difficult for the bands for which the piece had been chosen:

Both judges felt that the detailed and very precise approach of the Yorkshire band [Stocksbridge] was just what they were looking for on a day when, in their opinion, far too many bands and conductors were unable to reconcile their competitive intentions to the style and musical character required of the lightly-scored piece. Speaking to BB [The British Bandsman], Ian Brownbill focussed on their disappointment at hearing so much poor playing: ‘We were rather surprised to hear so many bands and players unable to capture the style required, especially with regard to the dynamics. Some of the playing was poor today, with a real lack of appreciation for dynamics and balance.’51

Ballet for Band has fallen in section use but has also been criticised as being too difficult for the bands to play. Owing to the extent of the fall, this piece does still support a fall in section use. However the extent of this cannot be taken at face value given the criticism of the piece in the lower sections.

Once again it is stylistic and musical challenges that are the chief difficulty with this piece. The light scoring mentioned by the Bandsman report is at odds with the more technically demanding and frequently more heavily-scored test pieces composed around the time of this contest (2007) such as works by Philip Sparke, Peter Graham and Philip Wilby.52

On some occasions it is not the piece of music that provides the biggest challenge for the competitors but the acoustic of the contest venue. The Spanish Hall at Blackpool’s Winter

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52 Test pieces selected for use in 2006-2008 included five composed by Philip Sparke and two each from the pen of Peter Graham and Philip Wilby.
Gardens has long been recognised as having a bad acoustic for brass bands to perform in. It is up to the conductors to create a performance suitable for the venue acoustic and this is not always achieved, as noted in several performances of Gilbert Vinter’s *Spectrum*.

*Spectrum* has been in use for forty years and in those forty years has fallen in section use from the British Open to the Senior Trophy and Regional First Section. This shows a significant fall. However, the comments made about the suitability of the piece for the Senior Trophy suggest it may not be suitable for the First Section standard bands who attempted it in 2009. Kenneth Crookston commented:

> Gilbert Vinter’s Spectrum, which provided a more than adequate test for the bands competing in the Senior Trophy - in theory at least, the lowest of the three Spring Festival sections. This was a deeply dissatisfying event in many respects, with very few of the competing bands offering contentions of the test-piece tailored to suit the lively acoustic of the Spanish Hall. In terms of technical accomplishment alone, many were clearly equipped with players who had their parts of Spectrum well within their capabilities, but the raw and often grotesque sounds, produced at dynamics sometimes verging on painful, did nothing to enhance the listener’s enjoyment of what is still regarded as one of Vinter's finest brass band works.

In contrast with Crookston’s disparaging remarks about *An Epic Symphony* and other test pieces which were performed poorly by some bands at contests, his remarks about *Spectrum* praise the piece. He identifies an artistic deficiency in the players, who were technically competent but not musically competent, as the key problem with the performance. This is another example of an experienced member of the brass band community (not a musical leader, but influential in his role as editor, and later owner, of *The British Bandsman*) stating, without feeling the need to qualify or explain, that technical

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ability is not the problem for many bands performing complex test pieces. Therefore, the contextual information surrounding the use of this piece supports the argument that technical ability among bands has increased. However, this must be qualified because it is not because of a musical judgement by the appointed musical leaders of the band movement at the contest (represented by the adjudicators).

Although it remained a challenging piece for bands to perform, Spectrum became an audience favourite. This was a remarkable turnaround for a piece which received a largely negative reception at the 1969 British Open. According to reports by Ron Massey in The British Bandsman, it is credited with increasing the audience at the 1994 Grand Shield contest:

Mrs Mortimer, who was assisted by an excellent team of workers, felt that it was the test-piece, Gilbert Vinter's Spectrum, which had attracted extra supporters this year. Whatever the reason they were most welcome.

Therefore, in the opinion of the contest organiser, the piece has been performed well enough at some contests to become popular with the audience. It is also notable that the media (in particular The British Bandsman) chose to print this view and not refute it. In the eyes of at least the reporter, Massey, this is at least a plausible explanation. If the piece was too difficult for the contest, as it appears to have been in 2009, then it would not have been performed well enough to be so. The problems in that year seem to be interpretation compounded by the difficult acoustic of the Spanish Hall in Blackpool Winter Gardens.

However, the problems caused by Spectrum show a lack of preparation or skill on the part

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55 Higgins, 'What Might Have Been? The Second 50 Years of Lost Compositional Opportunities' 4barsrest.
of the conductor and players on two counts. Firstly, they should have prepared for the acoustic beforehand as it is well known to cause problems and there were plenty of reports available to them. Secondly, they failed to grasp the musical challenges of the piece. Both of these point to the players’ musicality not matching their technical skill.

Although the acoustic of the Spanish Hall has long plagued performances at the North-West Regionals, particularly for lower section bands which usually compete in there, it is far from the only problematic acoustic that bands face. The National Championship Section finals have been held at the Royal Albert Hall since they restarted after World War Two in 1945. When the building was completed the notorious echo, described as ‘one of the UK’s most enduring engineering challenges’, was immediately noticed in the first acoustic checks in 1871. However, it was not until 1968 that a suitable solution was found: the ‘mushrooms’ suspended from the ceiling, and further work was required in 1996 to improve the acoustic to an acceptable standard.57 Further examples of problematic acoustics in contest venues became a regular feature of the brass band media throughout most of the twentieth century. Some of these are due to the increasing use of conference centres and other venues not necessarily designed with acoustics as a priority for contests. These acoustic worries have never gone away, and an argument over the suitability of a potential venue for the 2019 European Championships resulted in international lawyers being involved!58

This variety of acoustics means that conductors need to be able to tailor their performance to the specific contest venue. This is also true of smaller contests, some of which are held

58 This is a serious, and rather amusing, example of the politics that can be involved in organising international brass band contests. No stated author, ‘Emotions Run High as Palanga Consults Lawyers over Euro Championship Move,’ 4barsrest, [01, 2018], http://www.4barsrest.com/news/detail.asp?id=30276.
outdoors and require a completely different playing style, no matter what the piece.

However, despite the challenges of different acoustics and the differing opinion of people choosing the music over the difficulty of a piece, often a piece is reported to be at just the right level. One of the clearest examples of this is the use of *Divertimento* for the 2005 Fourth Section.

Bryan Kelly’s *Divertimento* has been used four times in thirty-three years and has fallen from National Second to Regional Fourth Section.\(^5^9\) This is a substantial fall over a relatively short period of time, especially considering most of the fall was between 1972 (National Second) and 1986 (National Fourth). The piece was judged to be at the right standard for the Regional Fourth Section in 2005, as Philip Wilby notes:

> Section 4 has come out really well in all opinions. Bryan Kelly's *Divertimento* is interesting to rehearse and lies within the capabilities of most players. It is modern, audience-friendly and sufficiently long and varied to offer a toothsome challenge for all groups. Best of all, it is a 'mixed ability' score, offering important contributions from all players and not just section leaders. In spite of being tough on soprano cornet players, and even tougher on those groups without a player in that chair, this seems a first-class choice.\(^6^0\)

Wilby describes one of the most pressing problems for many Fourth Section bands: getting the right combination of players for a contest. There is usually one soprano cornet per band, but it is a very difficult instrument to play well. It is extremely rare for a band to have two, partly because of tuning difficulties with the upper register (which is difficult enough to manage with one instrument), and partly because good soprano players can easily move to

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\(^{6^0}\) Philip Wilby, *The British Bandsman*, 12 February 2005, p. 5.
other bands where they could have the part to themselves.\footnote{Hence the moves in the 1890s and 1970s by some bands to try out Eb trumpets in place of soprano cornets. Myers, 'Instruments of British Brass Bands', p. 156.} Soprano cornets are not essential for bands to perform most concert music: if they have important parts these are usually cued on the Solo Cornet part. However, this can cause problems in contests as the adjudicator expects to hear all the parts written on the score. A good solo cornet player with a strong upper register can cover most of the notes but they will not have the same small, sweet timbre of a soprano cornet. The problem mainly affects fourth section bands as these bands are either less serious about competing or are community bands with players of a lower standard. These bands cannot buy in players for a contest and may want to give an extra cornet player, or any other instrument, the opportunity play in the contest to cover other weaknesses in the band rather than try and find a ‘dep’ for a single contest.

The pattern of section use for this piece is similar to that of Helen Perkin’s Carnival which fell rapidly in section use during the period 1957 and 1974 but then fell less steeply until 2007. Divertimento fell in section use during the period 1972 to 1986 and fell at a slower rate following this. Both pieces show a period of falling in section use rapidly preceding a period of falling slower. The periods of rapid fall for each piece are not concurrent, but happen immediately after each other. Therefore, these pieces alone do not provide evidence of a short period of rising standards of playing in the brass band movement but a more complex picture where different pieces are falling in section use at different times.

Carnival, composed by Helen Perkin, is the only one of the most frequently used test pieces that was composed by a woman.\footnote{Helen Perkin, 'Carnival,' in Regionals 2007 (Newstead Welfare Band, 2007).} Helen Perkin is not only the sole female composer of one
of the most frequently used test pieces but she is the only female composer whose music
has featured in either the British Open or National Finals series during my period of
research. Two of her other compositions have also been selected as test pieces, *Cordell Suite* (1961 National Third Section) and *Island Heritage* (1962 British Open). There is
undoubtedly the influence of John Ireland, Helen Perkin’s mentor, in *Carnival* and it has
been suggested that Ireland may have scored the work, or assisted with the scoring.
However, Richards notes of her brass band works that ‘These works are among her most
deft in terms of their understanding of the instruments’. The pattern of section use for this
piece suggests a fall, but it only suggests this for part of the period of study. There is not a
major fall between the first two uses (British Open to Grand Shield) but this should not be
expected as they are within a five-year period. The next performance was twelve years later
in 1974 and by this time the piece was selected for a much lower section, the National Third
Section. However, the final time the piece was selected was thirty-three years later in 2007,
when it was used for the Regional Second Section. The National Third and Regional Second
Sections often use very similar test pieces and therefore out of a fifty-year usage period, this
piece only fell in section use during the first seventeen years. The comments about the use
of this piece in contests recorded by *The British Bandsman* confirm that it was of a suitable
standard for the 2007 Regional Second Section:

Carnival is a most attractive piece, full of life and makes a very welcome
return to the contest platform. Like Eric Ball’s Sinfonietta- The Wayfarer
(the test-piece for the 1st Section this year) the piece looks and sounds

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63 No stated author, 'A Woman’s Role in Banding Is...' 4barsrest.
64 No stated author, '2007 Regional Championships - Test Piece Reviews,' 4barsrest, [08 January, 2018],
simple enough on first encounter, but a close examination of the score will reveal plenty of traps for the unwary. The 2nd Section of this year’s Regional Championship should be very interesting indeed.66

By likening the piece to one of Eric Ball’s test pieces, Newton is saying that the piece has musical challenges that are potentially difficult for twenty-first-century bands to meet. Eric Ball’s test pieces are renowned not for their technical difficulties but the style and musical sound which is required to perform them successfully.

Neither Perkin or Ireland regularly composed for brass band. Alongside the test pieces I have already mentioned, Perkin only composed a march entitled Shining Spurs and Ireland composed one test piece: A Comedy Overture, and two pieces for combined choir and brass band.67 A Comedy Overture is on the list of most frequently used test pieces, with six uses.68 It also an early example of a test piece commissioned specifically for a brass band contest, in this case the National Brass Band Championships in 1934.69 It was used six times over the seventy-one year period of 1934 to 2005 and fell from the British Open to Regional First Section. This piece has an interesting pattern of use. It was only used in the very highest sections (the British Open and National Championship Section) until 1984. However, by 2005 it had fallen to Regional First Section. This pattern is similar to that of An Epic Symphony as both pieces were used in the highest sections over a long period of time and then fell to lower sections over a relatively short period of time. Whilst it is not a very large

69 Craggs, John Ireland, p. 101.
fall, it is another example of an early twentieth-century piece falling to lower section use at the early twenty-first century.

Kenneth Wright’s *Pride of Race* shows the opposite pattern to *Divertimento* and *Carnival*. In this case there is a slight rise in section use followed by a sustained large fall rather than the fall followed by a small rise shown by these pieces. *Pride of Race* is another test piece written for the National Championship for its heyday in the interwar years at the Crystal Palace. Having fallen steadily in section use since being selected for the 1945 British Open, the piece suggests a rise in standards of playing. The significant fall of this piece from National Championship to National Third Section is one of the largest falls of any piece and points to a significant rise in playing standard in the post war years as it fell from British Open to Regional Third Section in the thirty years following the war and the creation of the Regionals. This fall was considered to make the piece a difficult but not unsuitable National Third Section test piece in 1975. According to *The British Bandsman*:

> Pride of Race, written by Kenneth Wright (who died in January of this year), for the 1935 National Championships at Crystal Palace, is the formidable hurdle set for Third Section competitors. A work of immense vitality and rich harmonic texture, Pride of Race has been widely used over the years, though mostly in the upper echelons. It will be a searching test for third grade bands, but its programmatic layout will give imaginative conductors ample scope for expression.\(^70\)

The programmatic nature was considered to be an advantage for conductors, making the interpretation and expression easier. The prevalence of programmatic music in the brass band repertoire is linked to the Romantic influence in the period when the brass band

movement moved away from operatic selections to original works for contest use.\footnote{For an analysis of the Romantic influence on brass band composition and on the impact of programmatic music see Taylor, \textit{English Brass Bands and Their Music}, p. 86.}

Programmatic elements or pieces which tell a story (often explained in the programme notes) are helpful because conductors and players can research the story to help their interpretation. This is particularly true for pieces based on historical events, although it is also helpful for any programmatic piece for which background information is published. This is in line with comments on many pieces, but it is at odds with comments on the most frequently used test piece, Herbert Howells’ \textit{Pageantry}.\footnote{Herbert Howells, ‘Pageantry,’ in \textit{Blitz} (Black Dyke Band, 2002).}

Some of the test pieces do have a clear, simple pattern of section use. One of these is Gordon Jacob’s \textit{Suite in Bb}. This piece shows a continuous fall from its first use to its most recent. \textit{Suite in Bb} has been used four times for contests since its first use in the 1956 Grand Shield. As it was used in 2009 for the Regional Fourth Section this piece cannot fall any lower without being of too low a standard for these contest series. This piece suggests a continuous rise in playing ability causing a continuous fall in section use for a test piece. The piece has not been viewed as unsuitable for a chosen contest, for example in 1986 it was viewed as difficult but not out of place: ‘In Section 3, where the bands found the test-piece, Gordon Jacob’s \textit{Suite in Bb} a none-too-easy test, the first three bands go through to the final in October’.\footnote{Peter Wilson, \textit{The British Bandsman}, 15 March 1986, p. 1.}

This is one of three of the most frequently used test pieces which have been used in the lowest section of competition, the Regional Fourth Section. It will be interesting to see if these pieces continue to feature in the National Finals and British Open contest series.
because any continued use will point to continued use in the same section or a rise in
section use. Another piece which may soon disappear off the bottom of these contest
series’ standards is Salzburg Suite as it has been used in the second lowest section, National
Fourth Section.

Denis Wright’s Salzburg Suite has been used four times between 1961 and 1999. It has fallen
significantly in section use from the Senior Trophy to National Fourth Section. The fall in
section use levelled off between 1975 and 1999, with it being used in the National Fourth
Section on both occasions. This piece is an example of the late-twentieth-century trend of
using classical music as an inspiration rather than arranging classical music for test pieces.
However, it differs because it does not quote a piece directly, as Peter Wilson noted in The
British Bandsman:

Written in the style of Mozart, Denis Wright’s Salzburg Suite, set for
Section 4, was written for Herbert Moller and Concord Band of
Copenhagen. It is a companion piece to the same composer’s Handelian
Suite. In four movements, it can be likened to a miniature Mozart
symphony, though Denis Wright himself preferred to regard it as a
Divertimento. His intention was that the music might remind us of Mozart
through the medium of style rather than by copying his tunes.74

This demonstrates the changing relationship between brass band music and classical music
during the twentieth century. Whereas early composers and arrangers created
arrangements of highlights from operas, ballets or symphonies, by the second half of the
century brass bands had a much more developed repertoire of music which included pieces
which took inspiration from classical music and developed it into original fully-fledged

74 Peter Wilson, The British Bandsman, September 18 1999, p. 23.
musical works, alongside works with other inspirational starting points for their musical journey.

The final piece in this group is Robert Farnon’s *Un Vie De Matelot* (A Sailor’s Life). It was commissioned for the 1975 National Championship Section and has been used four times, most recently for the Senior Trophy in 2002. This test piece suggests a rise in standards of playing in the last quarter of the twentieth century as it has fallen in section use. The fall in section use is only to the Senior Trophy, which is three sections in the British Open Series (considering that the National Championship Section is equivalent to the British Open). This smaller fall may be due to the age of this test piece, it has only been used over a period of twenty-seven years. This means that it has had only half the time to fall (or rise) in section use that many of the Eric Ball test pieces have had.

**Conclusion**

The sixteen pieces that make up this group make it the largest of the three groups with over half of the most commonly used test pieces. Many of these pieces were originally technically very demanding. Perhaps the most interesting example is *Le Carnaval Romain* as the quote above shows that when the original version was composed, even professional wind players found it difficult. Berlioz mentions the importance of following the conductor which suggests that the timing and technicalities were the main difficulties. This is interesting as the brass players in the Regional First Section will play significantly below the standards of modern professional wind players. Therefore, this piece points to technical

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ability increases beyond the brass band movement, encompassing professional orchestral musicians too.

It is not just the technical challenges of these pieces that have been mastered but also the musical ones. The ability of lower section players and conductors to interpret these pieces has allowed them to be suitable for lower sections. However, it is these musical challenges that have limited the extent to which some of these pieces have become accessible to lower section bands and therefore limited the number of sections they have fallen. It is the extent to which the musical challenges and the other aspects of performance, such as adapting to the acoustics of the contest hall, which provide the most interesting information on changes in standards of playing. These pieces point to an almost universal and extensive technical advancement, suggesting that by the early twenty-first century brass band players in all sections can play technically better than their forbears. However, the adjudicators and reporters’ comments about the unsuitability of some test pieces for the contests for which they were chosen, suggest that this technical advancement was not matched by the advancement in musicality. The level of technical advancement may also have masked the musical challenges and led the contest organisers and music panel to select a piece for the wrong section.

Whilst the size of this group and the comments on the use of these pieces make a convincing argument for the technical advancement of brass bands, a more nuanced answer regarding overall changes of standards of playing including musical ability can only be reached once the remaining two groups of test pieces, those which have remained at the same level or show no pattern of change in section use, have been examined.
Chapter 6: Test pieces which have not fallen in section use

This chapter examines the two remaining groups of test pieces: those which have been used in the same (or similar) sections and those for which no pattern can be discerned from their use. Between them these two groups contain thirteen of the twenty-nine test pieces that are the focus of my research. Firstly, I will examine the test pieces which have been used in the same section throughout their period of use, before moving on to the pieces for which there is no discernible pattern.

The use of the test pieces which were examined in chapter five suggest that standards of playing have risen during my period of study. The pieces examined in this chapter suggest a different outcome and have allowed me to put forward a more nuanced argument about changes in standards of playing, compositional styles and the brass band idiom.

Test pieces which have been used in the same section throughout their period of use

The second group is made up of test pieces which have continued to be used in the same section. As my research focuses on two contest series merged to form a larger data set, this group includes those pieces which have not risen or fallen a significant amount. This reduces the likelihood of falsely claiming significant changes in section use based on a single section rise or fall which could be caused by the integration of the two contest series. Most of the pieces in this group have been recognised as pieces that have remained at the same level throughout their period of use (usually for the top sections). However, Thomas Keighley’s
Lorenzo has been used in The British Bandsman as an example of a piece falling in section use and demonstrating the increasing capabilities of bands.¹

Lorenzo is one of the oldest test pieces to remain in use for the majority of the twentieth century. First used in 1928 for the British Open, this test piece has been used four times. All of these uses, except for the last one in 1971, were at the British Open. In 1971 it was selected for the Grand Shield, and The British Bandsman reported that the suitability of the test piece for this section was due to improving standards of playing:

The music of Lorenzo has been heard at the Belle Vue before. As recently as 1964 it was the September test-piece. The technical and musical demands have not diminished since then; rather it is a measure of the improving standards which apply throughout the country. A worthy Grand Shield seems assured.²

It is difficult to infer any significant rise in standards of playing for this single use because the British Open and Grand Shield sections only contained about forty bands between them.³ Therefore suggesting that it is evidence of ‘improving standards which apply throughout the country’ is overstating the impact of these sections. Whilst these sections do contain bands from across most of Britain, they only contain about forty bands and therefore any improvement shown by this evidence is limited to the upper echelons of the brass band movement.

Although this piece does not demonstrate a large rise in the standard of playing, which may partly be due to the piece not being selected after 1971, it is significant because it shows that in the early 1970s members of the brass band community believed a rise in the

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¹ Thomas Keighley, 'Lorenzo,' in Brass Band Classics Volume III (Buy As You View Band, 2004).
³ Each section was maintained at about twenty bands for the majority of my period of research but sometimes contained one or two more or less. This could be due to bands withdrawing, folding, or other bands, occasionally touring foreign bands, being invited to compete.
standard of playing had taken place. The fact that the author did not feel the need to explain or support the statement with any evidence other than that of a single test piece moving down one section in seven years suggests that it may not have been a controversial one.

The reason I have placed this test piece in the group of pieces which have not changed in section use, contradicting *The British Bandsman* report, is because the change is not significant. *The British Bandsman* was looking at a single change in section use in a very short period of time whereas my research looks at a much larger group of sections over a much longer period of time. Therefore, what appears to be a significant change in the short term becomes insignificant when examined as part of the larger picture. It must be remembered that a change from use in the British Open to Grand Shield is only measuring ability in the top forty bands in Great Britain, and therefore cannot be used to infer significant changes among a wider section of the brass band movement.4

*Lorenzo* is not the only early twentieth-century test piece to have fallen out of favour with contest organisers in the second half of the century. A new generation of composers such as Peter Graham, Philip Sparke and Philip Wilby have dominated test piece writing since the 1980s with pieces such as *Harmony Music* (Sparke, 1987), *Paganini Variations* (Wilby, 1991) and *On Alderley Edge* (Graham, 1997).5 These pieces are stylistically very different from pieces by composers such as Eric Ball or Gilbert Vinter, although some pieces such as

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4 The similarity between standards in the British Open and Grand Shield is demonstrated by the twenty-first-century practice of selecting a test piece for the Grand Shield that was used for the British Open a few years previously.

Graham's *The Torchbearer - Symphonic Variations on a Theme by Eric Ball* and Edward Gregson's *Of Distant Memories (Music in an Olden Style)* deliberately take inspiration from composers of the previous generation. The commissioning of pieces in the style of composers such as Eric Ball for use in the National Championship Section recognises the lack of test pieces composed in that era that are of the right technical standard for the best twenty-first-century bands. Between 1980 and 2011 Eric Ball and Gilbert Vinter's compositions were used for the British Open, Grand Shield, Regional Championship and National Championship a total of four times each. In comparison Peter Graham, Philip Wilby and Philip Sparke's compositions have featured eight times each. These modern composers only started composing their most successful test pieces in the 1980s and 1990s, over thirty years after Ball’s most famous work, *Resurgam* premiered at the 1950 British Open. Many players playing with Championship Section bands from the late 1980s, especially those players who have had a specialist university music education, were too young to have grown up playing pieces by Ball and Vinter regularly at contests. Therefore, they were not used to competing with these pieces and may lack the understanding of this type of music gained by repeated contesting experiences. This may explain the inclusion of *Festival Music* and *Variations on a Ninth* in this group of test pieces, as discussed by Kenneth Crookston, editor of *The British Bandsman* in 2008:

There were those who contended beforehand that Festival Music may be considered 'too easy' in the competitive world of modern-day banding, where the players at the top level are used to tackling fiercely challenging

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7 Ball’s arrangement of Elgar’s *Theme and Eight Variations from the Enigma opus 3* was also selected for the 2003 National Championship Section.

8 Eric Ball, 'Festival Music,' in *Eric Ball - Festival Music* (Black Dyke Band, 2003).
works by composers like Philip Sparke, Philip Wilby or Peter Graham, but classic Ball is a totally different proposition, as most of the competing bands were to discover. Yorkshire is arguably the strongest region of them all, so those in other ‘Areas’ who are expecting an easy ride over the next few weeks are in for a big shock. ‘Easy’ it most certainly isn’t.10

The stylistic difference between Eric Ball’s test pieces and those of more recent composers may account for some of the difficulty that bands had with Festival Music in 2008. However, this argument is at odds with the inclusion of other Eric Ball test pieces such as Call of the Sea and Resurgam in test piece group one, both of which have fallen significantly. Even Tournament for Brass, which has fallen the least of the remaining Eric Ball test pieces, has fallen from use in the British Open to the Senior Cup. In 2008 Festival Music was not judged to be too difficult as Kenneth Crookston notes ‘Peter Bassano was keen to point out that none of the bands had gone for an inappropriate interpretation of the Mozart inspired work.’11 Therefore the small drop in section use from British Open to Regional Championship was judged to be the right level. Festival Music is unique among the test pieces composed by Eric Ball which have made it on to the list of most frequently used test pieces: it is the only one piece that has been exclusively used in the very highest sections. Festival Music has only been used at the National Championship, Regional Championship, Grand Shield and British Open contests, despite being in use for fifty-two years.

The music of Gilbert Vinter is of a very different style from that of Eric Ball and his test pieces have been used far fewer times (twenty-seven compared to one hundred and ten in all sections during the period of my research).12 This suggests that players are less likely to

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12 There have also been eight uses of arrangements by Eric Ball in addition to his one hundred and ten original composition uses.
be familiar with Vinter’s music in the way that they may be with Ball’s, familiarity gained through the intensive rehearsal process required for contesting. The stylistic differences between Vinter’s music and much of the rest of the brass band repertoire, compounds the stylistic challenges. In addition, Vinter’s test pieces have not become regular features for lower sections at contests, unlike Ball’s. Therefore, younger players have not had the advantage of playing his style of music when they were learning and honing their musical abilities with lower section bands.

Vinter’s Variations on a Ninth also features a series of solos and cadenzas which greatly increase the challenge for some members of the band.13 The challenge of these cadenzas forms part of both the appeal and the difficulty of this popular piece. Although solos are a very common part of a brass band test piece, especially those commissioned specifically as test pieces, there are a large number of cadenzas in this piece that test much of the band. This may also endear the piece to the listening audience as cadenzas add variety to a piece, no two soloists will play them the same as The British Bandsman noted in 1964:

> Listeners in the [Royal] Albert Hall will undoubtedly enjoy this composition, the latest in a group of works which have brought a new voice and language to the repertoire of original brass band music. Yet in one respect it looks back to the beginning of the century, when test-pieces were nothing if not show pieces for soloists. In this new work there are cadenzas for everybody (well, nearly everybody!) - soprano and Bb cornets, horn, Bb baritone, euphonium. But such cadenzas were never heard in the old operatic selections (thrilling though they often were). These are integrated into the whole: part of a complete composition.14

As The British Bandsman noted the way in which these cadenzas were integrated into the rest of the score by the composer is a significant difference between this piece and earlier

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14 No stated author, The British Bandsman, 17 October 1964 p. 3.
brass band test pieces that contained cadenzas. This is an example of how Vinter pushed the
development of the brass band idiom in new directions with his compositions.

The challenges provided by the cadenzas are not separate from the stylistic challenges
provided by the piece as a whole. The cadenzas increase the musical difficulties in the piece
by putting more of the pressure on key players, rather than just on the conductor. Despite
being a difficult test, the piece proved popular with bands from the outset.

Reporting from South Shields, Harton & Westoe Colliery Band say Gilbert
Vinter’s new piece they are to play in the Royal Albert Hall is a ‘Very good
test for all sections of the band’. Harton add that their rehearsals are going
well, and that all the members find the piece interesting. From Bristol,
Fishponds British Legion Band comment that in the Variations on a Ninth
there are ‘Very pleasing, tuneful melodies. A good test’.\cite{15}

The section use for this piece reflects the myriad of the challenges that it presents;

Variations on a Ninth is a test piece which has remained a challenge that only the upper
echelons of the brass band movement can face. First used for the National Championship
Section in 1964, it has been used four times and only for the National and Regional
Championship Sections, the British Open and the Grand Shield. Over thirty-two years
between 1964 and 1996 it has not fallen more than a single section.

Stylistic challenges in a test piece can be lessened if the test piece is programmatic.

Programmatic test pieces have a defined story or theme running through the piece with
different sections representing different events, scenes or ideas. By reading the programme
notes published with a programmatic piece, a player or conductor already has an idea of the
musical feel they need to recreate in performance. However not all test pieces are
programmatic. Abstract pieces can present enormous interpretative challenges and require

\cite{15} No stated author, The British Bandsman, 10 October 1964 p. 1.
experienced, confident musicians who can rely on their own experience and knowledge rather than the programme notes for the basis of their interpretation. Wilfred Heaton’s *Contest Music* is an example of an abstract, non-programmatic test piece as was recognised by Chris Thomas in 2007: 16

> No one would question the ability of *Contest Music* to test a band’s technical and musical abilities to the limits, but on the day, it was also interpretation that played a key part in the final outcome. As a piece conceived purely in abstract terms, *Contest Music* might not have a programmatic element to latch onto, but an overall grasp of its essentially symphonic structure, coupled with an ability to capture the austere serenity of the haunting and dangerously exposed slow movement were factors that only a very select group of bands came anywhere close to pulling off on the day. Tempi were also a cause for concern in some cases, or more specifically those performances that were slower than required to benefit the music. 17

Chris Thomas is a very experienced trombone player having played with Championship Section bands from 1985 when he joined Sun Life (also known as Stanshawe, disbanded in 1997) who came third in the National Finals the following year. 18 He is also an experienced brass band journalist writing for *Brass Band World* and *4barsrest* as well as *The British Bandsman*.

*Contest Music* has been used five times in twenty-seven years, all of these for the upper echelons of brass band contesting. Having only been used in the top two sections of both contest series (National and Regional Championship Section, British Open and Grand Shield) it suggests no major change in standards of playing. The piece is one of several that have

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16 Wilfred Heaton, 'Contest Music,' in *Music Of The Spheres* (Yorkshire Building Society Band, 2004).
been selected for the British Open then a few years later (five in this case) for the Grand Shield.

Hubert Bath’s *Freedom* is the final test piece in this group.\(^{19}\) *Freedom* has been used solely at the National Championship and British Open contests. In the sixty-five years between its first use, when it was commissioned for the National Championship in 1922, to its use in the 1987 British Open this piece, this piece was viewed as only suitable for the very best bands.\(^{20}\) Therefore this piece was designed with the requirements of testing the best bands in the country in mind. However, this does not explain why this test piece has remained in use for the top sections when other pieces including *Labour and Love* which were composed in the early twentieth century specifically for the National Championship have fallen in section use. Indeed, the use of this test piece is directly contrary to many test pieces of a similar age. The difficulty with this piece also cannot be attributed to it being abstract or a programmatic piece with limited information published about the composer’s intentions, because there are detailed programme notes about the theme for each movement:

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First Movement:
In God's fresh air, under the open sky, we stretch our arms
to the great spaces, breathing the winds and contemplating
the gentle sweetness of Nature itself.
This is Freedom.

Second Movement:
And then, the quiet interlude of Romance, the trees, the
meadows, the scent of the flowers, the little drifting clouds, and — Love,
This, too, is Freedom.

Third Movement:
And then, again, that other insuperable gift of Laughter,
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\(^{19}\) Hubert Bath, 'Freedom - Brass Band Symphony No.1,' in *Brass Band Classics Volume 4* (Buy As You View Band, 2006).

fresh and light as the salt sea breezes over the hilltops which have fluttered their songs across the laughing waves. This is Joy, Love, Vigour, and—
This, also, is Freedom.21

These programme notes written by the composer, as described on sheet music website justmusicuk, give a detailed indication of the composer’s intentions for each movement. For example, in the third movement you can hear the playful nature of the faster sections and the fresh, light breezes in the melodic sections which intersperse between the faster passages. Some of these sections are technically very difficult, even to twenty-first-century bands. The piece is also stylistically difficult, especially the changes between the slower, more melodic and faster passages in the third movement. The combination of stylistic and technical challenges is one of the reasons that this piece has remained so difficult for brass bands to perform.

These five pieces are perhaps the most interesting for my research because they show a discernible pattern of section use but it is not the same pattern that fits most pieces. The fact that these pieces have remained popular and just as difficult is the most important finding for my research. They vary widely in musical style and the challenges they present to bands. The inclusion of a single Eric Ball piece in this group despite all his other works being split evenly between the other two groups is also interesting. Eric Ball’s test pieces are likely to show more variation in use than other composers, with some staying at the same level and others changing, simply because of the number of test pieces he has written and the frequency with which they are used. The one thing that unites the pieces in this group is that they represent the different styles of test piece that had fallen out of favour for top

21 ‘Freedom(C) - Parts & Score, Test Pieces (Major Works),’ [18 November, 2016], http://www.justmusicuk.com/publications/details/JM31027.
section contests by the latter part of the twentieth century. Test pieces by composers who primarily wrote light or classical music, the giants of 1950s and 1960s test piece writing, and pieces by composers who had only written one or two test pieces fell out of favour, largely replaced by prolific brass band (or wind band) centred composers by the 1980s. Many of these pieces are still used for lower sections but it is rare to see them used for the Championship Section or British Open. Therefore, one possibility is that these pieces present significant stylistic challenges. As bands became more used to tackling technically very difficult works, they may have become better at dealing with the technical difficulties that Ball’s works present but did may not be better at musical interpretation. Their musical interpretation skills and musicality may in fact have decreased, as these pieces are of a style that was less frequently played towards the end of the twentieth century. Although many of his compositions were viewed as not technically challenging enough for the National Finals or British Open by the end of the century, the few that are, notably Festival Music, not only retain their technical challenge but increase the musical challenge of recreating the almost lost style of contest performance required.

Test Pieces which show no discernible pattern of section use
The third group is made up of test pieces which show no discernible pattern of section use throughout their period of use. There are eight test pieces in this group including works by some of the most influential test piece composers. These include composers such as Eric Ball who were products of the brass band movement and concentrated their composing efforts on this medium, and other composers such as Gilbert Vinter who had an active professional career in military band and orchestral music. This group also includes the most frequently used test piece, Herbert Howells’ Pageantry.
Five of the eight test pieces in this group were composed by Eric Ball. Although his pieces are present in all three test piece groups, Eric Ball’s compositions appear most frequently in this group. Some of Eric Ball’s test pieces in the group that show no discernible pattern of change in section use have unique circumstances that place them in this group. *A Holiday Suite* is the first of these test pieces as it was used multiple times in a single year. Very few test pieces have been used multiple times in a single year as a test piece for the National Finals and British Open contest series. All of these were composed by Eric Ball, with the other three being *Call of the Sea*, *Three Songs Without Words* and *Main Street*.\(^{22}\) There are both advantages and disadvantages to working with test pieces that were used multiple times in the same year. As *A Holiday Suite* was used for the Regional Third Section, National Third Section and Senior Trophy, all in 1953, it can be used to help calibrate my contest rankings. The piece was not described as unsuitable for any of these sections, therefore in the mid-1950s, the bands in the Senior Trophy must have been at the same level (or more likely have taken part in) the Regional and National Third Section. This calibration alone will not work for the entire period due to the creation of the First Section in 1991 and the lower sections of the British Open series not taking place for a number of years. However, it is helpful for suggesting the standards for the early years of the National Championships series in its post war format which has changed little to the present day.

There are disadvantages for my research when a test piece was used in multiple sections in the same year. It means that there are fewer data points available to track changes during my period of research, as multiple points from the same year cannot be used to identify

\(^{22}\) Eric Ball, ‘Main Street,’ in *Regionals 1999* (Tredegar Town Band, 1999).
changes over time. Therefore, interpreting the patterns from these pieces is more difficult as they can result in different patterns by selecting different uses from the same year.

*A Holiday Suite* is one of several Eric Ball test pieces which has been used repeatedly in the major contest series. Eric Ball was renowned not only as a composer who could write test pieces for the top section bands, but also for lower section bands and this piece is evidence that compositions can please both bands and the audience as well as offering the adjudicator the necessary material to judge bands. The piece was described in *The British Bandsman* in 1953:

> Whilst for contesting purposes this suite must be rehearsed in all seriousness, the proper guide to its interpretation is to realise that it is music designed to entertain - what is called, for want of a better term, 'light music.' Here are no hidden depths to be explored, but rather the need is for deftness and gaiety, even in the quiet second movement.23

The description of this as light music with no hidden depths, or particular artistic agenda, is an example of the lack of artistic influence on test pieces throughout the twentieth century. Some composers and journalists such as Paul Hindmarsh frequently believe that many twenty-first-century test pieces lack an artistic agenda, because they were composed primarily as a test piece rather than an artistic work, but this piece demonstrates that this is not a new phenomenon.24 This piece helps trace a lineage of light or commercial music, rather than highly artistic music, from the medleys of popular tunes from operas and folk songs, through to some test pieces by commercial composers such as Peter Graham and Philip Sparke.

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24 For Hindmarsh’s views on artistic influence in test pieces see Hindmarsh, interview by Osborn, 18 February, 2014.
Eric Ball’s *Three Songs Without Words* is even more difficult to find any pattern of change in section use as the problems are once again caused by multiple uses in the same year. The first two contest uses of this piece were in the same year (National Fourth Section and Junior Cup in 1956) and the remaining two contests are the same section (Junior Trophy in 1961 and 1974). As the Junior Trophy is a section between the Junior Cup and National Fourth Section it gives the possibility of either a rise or fall in section use. This demonstrates that *Three Songs Without Words* undoubtedly belongs in the group of test pieces which show no definitive patterns of change in section use.

As the Junior Trophy is only one section below the Junior Cup, this does not suggest any significant change in the standard of playing between 1956 and 1974. However, the picture is not as clear when you add in the fact that the piece was also used for the National Fourth Section in 1956. No band came in the top four of both contests which potentially suggests that bands of different abilities were playing the piece in the same year. Therefore, this piece should be viewed as a suitable lower section test piece in the second half of the twentieth century, accessible to lower section bands of varying ability that could still be used by adjudicators to judge the contests. The selection of this piece for the 1956 Junior Cup did not merit any special mention, only discussed in passing as part of a wider report on the types of test piece that *The British Bandsman* editor and reporter believed that bands should be playing:

> The test-pieces and to-day’s contests might also impress the stranger. On the whole they are of a standard which the musician may respect and have been chosen not only to meet the needs of the competition but also to give the bands something worth-while to play. The listeners will not be bored by “high-brow” compositions, but on the other hand there has been no attempt to “play down” to the lowest common denominator.25

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Much of this quote is the subjective view of the editor and/or reporter on the style of test piece that should be played. However, the statement that ‘On the whole they are of a standard which the musician may respect’ indicates that regardless of style the piece presented sufficient challenges as a test piece.

This piece does not support a strong pattern of changing ability over the mid to late twentieth century and it was not viewed as too easy for the Junior Cup in 1956. Therefore, all that can be said is that this piece suggests a very modest rise in standards of playing for lower section bands due to its single section fall from the Junior Cup to the Junior Trophy, and no change at all between 1961 and 1974. As this is a lower section test piece it may help to reveal different patterns in the rate of change of playing ability between lower and higher section bands. This could either result in the gaps between the sections growing or shrinking. By tracking the rates of change for lower section test pieces, such as this one, against the rates of change for test pieces which have been used for the higher sections, such as the British Open and National Finals Championship Section, I can identify similarities or differences in the rate of change. There is little doubt that rates of change in ability varied throughout the twentieth century and this is evidenced by the introduction of the First Section in 1991. If standards of playing had remained constant, and there was not a significant gap between the Championship Section and Second Section by the late 1980s, then there would have been no need to create the First Section in the National Finals series. Unfortunately, the lack of a pattern of change for this piece and other lower section pieces such as A Holiday Suite and Petite Suite de Ballet makes tracking any changes significantly more difficult.
Petite Suite de Ballet is another Eric Ball test piece for which it is not possible to identify a pattern in test piece use. This piece has been used five times for lower section contests. The first and last uses were in the 1949 Regional Third Section and the 1969 Regional Fourth Section. These two uses suggest a modest fall in section use, although it would not be possible to see a greater fall because the Regional Fourth is the lowest section. However, the three other uses were all for the Junior Shield (1952, 1961 and 1967). This is problematic because the Junior sections of the British Open series are difficult to place due to their short life, as the Junior Shield section was discontinued in 1974. The only way to compare these sections is by looking at the results for the lower sections of both the National Finals and British Open series and seeing if bands are featured in the results of both series in the same year. In 1952 there was only a single band which featured in the prizes at the Junior Shield and the National Finals series: Chapel-en-le-Frith, who won the North West Regional Fourth Section and came third in the Junior Shield. In 1961 Pleasley Colliery Welfare came second in the Midlands Regional Fourth Section and first in the Junior Shield. Therefore, the Junior Shield contained bands of fourth section standard. Bands who were of sufficient ability to be placed at the Regional Fourth Section were also at the right standard to get placed in the Junior Trophy. Without complete lists of results it is not possible to define this any further. However, it suggests that the Junior Shield section should be placed just above Regional Fourth Section. The limited changes in the sections for which Petite Suite de Ballet was used, combined with the conflicting directions of change, rising from the first use and falling to the last, mean that it is not possible to identify a significant pattern of change or constant section use from the limited data points for this piece.
The two remaining Eric Ball test pieces in this group are both included because of a single data point disrupting a potential pattern. It is not possible to rule either as an anomalous result (due to the piece being unsuitable for the section for which it was chosen) and therefore the test pieces must be left in this group. The first of these test pieces is *Main Street*. It was used five times between its first use in the British Open in 1961 and its use in the Regional Third Section in 1999. This piece suggests a rise in standards of playing due to its significant fall from the British Open to Regional Third Section. However, this is another test piece which highlights the problems that the creation of the First Section in 1991 has caused for both ranking contest sections and tracking patterns of continuity or change. This test piece was used for both the Regional Second Section and then the Grand Shield in 1966. At first glance this appears contradictory as twenty-first-century Second Section bands should not be able to play a test piece set for a contest which now only contains a few First Section bands and is mainly made up of Championship Section bands. The fact that the First Section did not exist in 1966 meant that the Second Section was directly below the Championship Section and therefore many bands were the equivalent of First Section bands today. This does not entirely answer the questions raised by the use of this piece for the two sections in the same year. The results for these sections show that Brodsworth Colliery Welfare Institute band did feature in the top six in both contests (fourth in the Grand Shield and second in the Yorkshire Regional Second Section). However, it must be noted that Kibworth band, as well as being placed in the results of the Grand Shield, also placed in the results of the Regional Championship Section (third in the Grand Shield and third in the Midlands Regional Championship Section). The quality of bands in the Regional Championship Section varies between regions but many of the bands who consistently placed remain in the British Open rather than the Grand Shield as they are the best bands in
the UK. These examples show that bands in different sections in one contest series can compete, and sometimes beat bands from higher sections in the other series in the same year. They also show that some bands who are rising in their ability and hence contest results, can end up staying in a section in which they can do very well for a couple of years before being promoted. This is especially true of the Regional qualifiers as bands are ranked on an average score, not a single performance. In Brodsworth’s case they won the Second Section in 1965 and then came second in 1966.

When looking at the graph for *Main Street* there is only one use which distorts an emerging pattern: the 1966 use in the Regional Second Section. As I have explained above this use is not as problematic as it first appears; however it still prevents there being a clear pattern. Therefore, this piece suggests a fall in section use but cannot be used to quantify the fall, which is why it is in this group.

**Figure 2: Main Street uses over time**

![Graph showing Main Street uses over time]

Although there is no evidence that it was too difficult for the Regional Third Section bands in 1999, the fall may not be as great as it appears as there were some comments to *The British Bandsman* that it was not difficult enough for the British Open for its first use in 1961:
Composed for the 1961 British Open Eric Ball's Main Street is no easy option for Section 3 bands, but right from the opening, beautiful sounds caress the listener - too sweet for some, perhaps, but never sentimental. Prior to the contest, a BB scribe forecast that 'listeners who like, and sometimes yearn for, melodic test-pieces, will be satisfied.' Nothing changes, it seems! Thought to be 'a little on the easy side,' for Belle Vue, it was tactfully described by Harry Mortimer as 'one of those difficult 'easy' pieces.' Section 3 conductors will probably agree.26

The view that the piece was too easy for the British Open may explain the use of the test for two contests with competitors of different standards in 1966 as the next time the piece was used. Having seen the piece used once at a contest for which it may have been too easy, the organisers of the National series may have taken a view that it was easier than the organisers of the British Open series believed.

This piece does suggest that standards rose significantly between 1961 and 1999 because there is a very significant difference in the level of test pieces set for the British Open and Regional Third Section contests. However, it is of very little use for charting the patterns of change in between these years due to the two uses in 1966.

Tournament For Brass is the final Eric Ball test piece in this group and has been used five times between 1954 and 2003. Like Main Street this is another example of an Eric Ball composition falling in section use over the second half of the twentieth century, but once again there is a single use of this piece which does not fit the pattern: selection for the Regional Second Section in 1976. In the graph below this use is coloured red. This test piece has perhaps the most interesting pattern of use because it was used three times in seven years: 1975, 1976 and 1981. Both the 1975 and 1981 uses were in the Grand Shield but in

1976 it was used for the Regional Second Section.

**Figure 10: Tournament For Brass uses over time**

There is no evidence to suggest that the 1976 use was for the wrong section but there is evidence that in the mid-1970s Grand Shield contained bands of a wider range of ability than would be expected. Tredegar Town Band who won the Grand Shield also came third in the Welsh Regional Championship Section. Therefore at least some of the top bands in the Grand Shield were in the upper reaches of the Regional Championship Sections. However, in 1975 Second Section band Coventry School of Music won the Grand Shield and also came second in the Regional Second Section contest. This shows that some Second Section standard bands were able to compete with successful Championship Section bands in the Grand Shield. As I discussed when examining the use of *Main Street*, the introduction of the First Section in 1991 has altered the pattern of use for this piece and makes the 1976 use appear to be in a lower section on the graph than was actually the case.

This piece suggests a fall in section use, regardless of 1976. If we remove the 1976 use of the piece, there is a strong pattern of falling section use from the British Open to the Senior Trophy (four sections) over forty-nine years. It suggests the theory of a rise in standards
with or without the 1976 use included. However, the rate of change suggested varies significantly depending on whether it is included. Like *Main Street*, this test piece suggests a pattern of rising standards of playing ability, as shown by falling section use, but cannot be used to track changes over time or the extent of such changes because of the data points that do not fit this pattern. The relative weakness of this evidence compared to other test pieces is the reason for their inclusion in this group.

The inclusion of so many of Eric Ball’s test pieces in this group demonstrates the varying opinions about how difficult these test pieces were for bands to play by the end of the twentieth century. All these pieces have seen uses in lower sections than the section for which they were first used, but there is no simple pattern of steady, or indeed rapid, change down the sections. They are composed in a very different style from pieces written by composers at the end of the twentieth century, such as Peter Graham, Philip Sparke and Philip Wilby and it was test pieces by these composers and their contemporaries that dominated contesting from the 1990s onwards. This change in style may have made Eric Ball pieces unfamiliar to players and is compounded by the fact that many players in the lower sections for which these test pieces have been selected were too young to have experienced the period from 1945-1980 when Ball’s test pieces were used ninety-one times.

The education of young players is reliant on their teachers and conductors of the bands for which they play. If those bands did not play many Eric Ball pieces before *Main Street* was chosen for the Regional Third Section in 1999 or *Call of the Sea* was chosen for the National Fourth Section in 2003, they may not have been equipped with the musical knowledge and experience to interpret the music in the way that the composer intended. A lack of appropriate stylistic knowledge among the players creates a much harder job for the
conductor when preparing for a contest and this can affect the results and subsequently the sections, for which the test pieces are chosen. It partly explains the phenomenon of ‘those difficult “easy” pieces.’ as Harry Mortimer described *Main Street*: these are pieces that are technically easy to play but difficult to create the sound and atmosphere which the composer intended.

At the other end of the brass band repertoire spectrum from Eric Ball’s light music test pieces, which have been selected for lower sections, is Denis Wright’s arrangement of Brahms’ *Academic Festival Overture*. This piece has never been used for a section below the Senior Trophy and does not show any apparent trend in section use. It was used four times over thirty-five years in three different sections. The first two uses are within four years at the British Open and the final two uses are both in sections below this. The third use is in the Senior Trophy and the fourth use is in the section directly above this, the Grand Shield.

This is one of a few arrangements of classical works that remained popular into the latter part of the twentieth century, despite the move away from this repertoire towards more original brass band or wind band compositions. As such it is one of only four arrangements on the list of most frequently used test pieces along with *Le Carnaval Romain*, *Le Roi d’Ys* and *The Force of Destiny*, all arranged by Frank Wright. As I have already discussed, those arrangements have fallen in section use, so it is interesting that this one has not. The others are part of Frank Wright’s large collection of classical and song arrangements frequently used in contests in the early twentieth century. Denis Wright never dominated the

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contesting repertoire in the way that Frank Wright’s arrangements did. This could partly explain Academic Festival Overture’s lack of pattern compared to Frank Wright’s arrangements, as the conductors and players may have been more familiar with his style of arranging. However, this is unlikely as Denis Wright has composed several well received test pieces including Salzburg Suite which is also on the list of most frequently used test pieces and other popular test pieces such as Tam O’Shanter’s Ride and Overture for an Epic Occasion.28 It is also notable that Salzburg Suite has a very strong pattern of falling in section use, falling from the Senior Trophy in 1961 to the National Fourth Section in 1975 and 1999.

In contrast with the single data points that place several test pieces in this group, the pattern of section use for Herbert Howells’ Pageantry is much more complicated. Pageantry is the most frequently used test piece in the National Finals and British Open contest series, having been selected eight times (four times for each series). It has remained a well-respected test piece throughout the twentieth century, with Russell and Elliot describing it as one of two ‘outstanding’ British Open test pieces from the 1930s.29 The first four uses between 1934 and 1970 were all for either the British Open or National Championship Section. After this the piece has been used for the Regional Championship Section, Grand Shield, National First Section and Senior Cup. In 1995 when the piece was selected for the Grand Shield it was noted in The British Bandsman that the piece was more accessible than when it had first been written:

> The day proved that Pageantry has lost none of its stature with the passing years. We are fortunate to have it - new percussion part and all! It might be felt that it is technically within the grasp of more bands than it was when it first appeared in 1932, but few can handle the balance of self-

28 Denis Wright, ‘Tam O’shanter’s Ride,’ in Blitz (Black Dyke Band, 2002).
control and excitement which is necessary for a performance, not to mention the deeply felt middle section, captured by only one or two bands who plumbed its anguish and conveyed its nobility.\textsuperscript{30}

The ‘new percussion part’ refers to the fact that the piece was composed more than three decades before percussion became an established, important part of contests. This piece, along with others of a similar age, have had very different performances at contests both with and without percussion. Some pieces were written with rudimentary percussion which was omitted at early contests, whereas others have subsequently had new percussion parts composed.

This report of the piece being technically manageable for more bands but still musically a challenge chimes with reports of subsequent uses of the test piece and points to a rise in the technical standard of playing. These technical improvements could be linked to the instruments being played. Developments in instrument manufacturing during the twentieth century produced instruments with faster moving valves or different mouth pieces which aided the playing of high notes.\textsuperscript{31} However the musical interpretation of the piece can only be helped by better musical education, primarily for the conductor but also for the players. It was the difficulty in interpreting the piece in the correct way that let First Section bands and conductors down in 2005, as Kenneth Crookston wrote:

Herbert Howells’ Pageantry was the chosen work in the 1st Section, a difficult test for bands at this level. There were, however, one or two experienced bands and conductors in the line-up and the expectation was that there would still be a number of satisfactory performances. In actual fact, Pageantry proved itself still to be a Championship test-piece, with even the nation’s finest 1st Section bands finding it too searching... the

\textsuperscript{30} No stated author, \textit{The British Bandsman}, 20 May 1995, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{31} For developments in brass band instruments from 1900-1945 see Myers, 'Instruments of British Brass Bands', pp. 177-82.
conductors who were successful were the ones that best knew their way around Howells' classic score.\textsuperscript{32}

The next contest for which \textit{Pageantry} was chosen reflects the analysis that this piece was still better suited to Championship Section bands than it was for the Senior Cup, a section mainly comprised of Championship Section bands with some of the higher First Section bands, four years later in 2009. However, on this occasion the technical challenges were cited as an equal problem to the musical ones. Kenneth Crookston noted the thoughts of the adjudicators on the challenges of the piece:

After the contest, Frank Renton pointed out that many bands found performing \textit{Pageantry} to be a very daunting experience. 'When you think about it,' he began, 'these are, in the main, Championship Section bands, performing a piece that was written 75 or so years ago. One would have thought that bands today would be able to play it with consummate ease, but that wasn't the case, partly because too many didn't give enough respect to the clear indications written by the composers'. Frank Renton continued, 'You really need to know the difference between forte-piano and sforzando-piano, as well as the various types of accents and other expression marks used copiously throughout the work. In addition to this, the key to unlocking the style of the music lies in the titles of the movements - King’s Herald, Cortege and Jousts - but very few of the conductors were able to achieve in their performance anything approaching a vivid portrayal of the composer's intentions.' Frank's views were confirmed by Roger Webster, who added, 'In spite of the many problems encountered, such as the opening bars being badly split by the cornets on a number of occasions and the baritone duet at the start of the second movement rarely being absolutely together and in tune, there was some very good playing in most of the bands, especially from the solo cornets and solo horns. Most of the bands were just tripped up on the technical things.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} Kenneth Crookston, \textit{The British Bandsman}, 1 October 2005, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{33} Crookston, \textit{The British Bandsman}, 16 May 2009 p. 11.
It is interesting to note that the two adjudicators for this contest offered contradictory explanations for the difficulty of the piece. Frank Renton’s comments regarding the musical interpretation of accents and dynamics reinforce Kenneth Crookston’s comments in 2005, as stated above. In addition, he notes that the programmatic nature of the music in this case did not help conductors because they did not pay attention to the information. There are often comments that music without any programmatic themes or guides to aid conductors are more difficult, such as Wilfred Heaton’s Contest Music. Roger Webster’s contrasting comments state that it was the technical aspects of the piece, noted in 2005 as being more accessible for bands, which became the downfall of many performances.

Hindmarsh described this piece in the context of works composed in the interwar years by the quartet of Ireland, Elgar, Holst and Howells, as ‘the most demanding of this group of celebrated works’. He also suggests why the piece has remained so difficult for bands to perform:

> The music presents a formidable test of ability, but its technical demands spring directly from the musical language, which is founded on English modality and an individual reinterpretation of Tudor polyphony.34

The unusual challenges that Hindmarsh identifies, and the link between the musical style and the technical difficulties, may be why this piece has proved so hard to both interpret and perform.

The comments about the suitability of Pageantry for different sections suggest a potential rise in technical standards of playing, as it was only noted in one contest that a lack of technicality among players was a problem. The standard of musical interpretation and

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musicality has either risen a very small amount or remained constant. This is demonstrated 
by adjudication remarks for contests stating that the bands’ musical interpretation let them 
down significantly. Therefore, this piece should be viewed as suitable for Regional 
Championship and Grand Shield standard as these contests did not result in the same 
comments on difficulty as the lower sections did. Viewing the piece at this level shows a 
slight decline in use from National Championship and British Open to Regional 
Championship and Grand Shield. However, these contests often select test pieces which are 
interchangeable between these sections, limiting the significance of this small fall.

*Pageantry* has been used far more times than any other test piece, but the extra number of 
data points available do not make the pattern clearer. In fact, if you take any combination of 
half of the points you end up with completely different patterns. Therefore, although there 
is a slight and very broad downward trend to use in lower sections, this is not significant 
enough to identify as a pattern. This means that this piece cannot lend any support to a rise 
in playing standards unlike some other pieces in this group which can support the theory 
but not be used for tracking the rate of change. It supports the argument that some pieces 
have remained accessible only to the top-level bands for which they were written.

The final test piece in this group is Gilbert Vinter’s *Salute to Youth* which has been used four 
times between 1962 and 2009.\(^{35}\) There is a difference of five sections (British Open to 
National First Section) between the highest and lowest uses of this test piece, which is 
significant but with each subsequent use there is a different change in direction. It is of note 
that the piece was used for the 1985 British Open and then the 1999 National First Section 
as this does suggest a small but significant change. However, the selection of test pieces

\(^{35}\) Gilbert Vinter, ‘Salute to Youth,’ in *Regionals 2009* (Williams-Fairey Engineering Band, 2009).
suitable for a section higher for the National Finals is a known practice. The first and last uses of this piece both being for the Regional Championship Section (1962 and 2009) suggest that the other uses of this piece are within the natural variation of selection, that some pieces can be used by more than a single section without being unsuitable. The piece was welcomed by bands and audience, with The British Bandsman reporting the piece as having a good reputation by its second selection in 1985:

Bands have been happy with the choice of Salute to Youth as the test-piece, if reports reaching us are anything to go by, and no one seems to be willing to treat it lightly. There is evidence that Vinter is good for the box office too, with almost every seat sold at the time of going to press.36

Peter Wilson describes how the piece was again viewed as a popular choice and not too difficult when selected for the First Section in 1999:

Salute To Youth, the Section One test, opens with Resilience, the first phrase forming the basis of almost the whole movement. The music is full-toned and the indication Eroico sets the mood. Romance, the middle movement, sets off with a soaring two-octave scale for solo cornet and ends with a massive fortissimo chord of C major, spread over the entire band. In between, the music is expressive. Relaxation, the final movement, encourages bands to play 'as quickly as possible.' No doubt today's bands will take the composer at his word. Full of effects that bands love to produce, the work should enjoy some fine performances.37

The mention of ‘effects’ is significant because musical effects became a staple of late-twentieth and twenty-first-century test pieces. Conductor and composer Philip Harper noted that he had not come across musical effects in test pieces before Philip Wilby’s seminal test piece, The New Jerusalem, in the 1990s.38 I will discuss the use of musical effects and their place in the changing idiom of the brass band in the next chapter, but it is

36 No stated author, The British Bandsman, 7 September 1985, p. 3.
37 Wilson, The British Bandsman, September 18 1999 p. 23.

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interesting to note that Peter Wilson commented on them in Vinter’s test piece, first used in 1962.

The reviews of the Regional Championship in 2009 paint a complex picture of the challenges of this test piece as reported by The British Bandsman reporters at three of the regional finals. The first is from Alan Jenkins and is primarily concerned with the musical challenges that it presents. The comments he reports from adjudicator David Read demonstrate the technical advances bands have made, but highlight the deficiencies in musical understanding that were present in the performances:

David’s [Read] comprehensive review of the contest did not brook much argument from the competing bands. Renowned as a former superb cornet soloist and principal cornet player, David pointed out that he had played the piece in 1962 with the composer conducting, and this made everyone in the hall sit up and pay a little more attention. He acknowledged that today’s brass players were better taught and were technically better than the players of his era, but judging from what he had heard, he was not prepared to credit them with a better musical understanding.³⁹

David Read is an experienced player and adjudicator and by the time he adjudicated this contest in 2009 he was a well-established and respected adjudicator. In 2003 Chris Helme reported for The British Bandsman that David Read was ‘viewed as a “safe” adjudicator in the eyes of the bandsmen themselves, in that he invariably gets the vast majority of decisions concerning the prize winners correct.’⁴⁰ His remarks are echoed by The British Bandsman’s Kenneth Crookston in his report from the Yorkshire Regionals.

The twice recent Champion Band of Great Britain, Grimethorpe Colliery, and the perennial crowd favourite, Brighouse and Rastrick, were among those that fell victim to a piece that, almost 50 years after its composition has yet again proved to be a more than worthy choice for the

³⁹ A Jenkins, The British Bandsman, 7 March 2009, p. 5.
Championship Section bands in the UK. Salute to Youth has enough 'banana skins' to trip up even the best of them, but the musical weakness currently being uncovered by Vinter's most challenging test-piece are concerning to say the least. From the opening cornet fanfare, which was either too imposing or even untuneful in many performances, to the syncopated bass feature in the closing bars of the piece, which occasionally left a picture in the mind of an entire bass section tumbling down a flight of stairs, a myriad of traps carefully laid by the composer claimed victim after victim on a day that many will want to put behind them.41

This report suggests that standards of playing, particularly musical understanding and interpretational skills, instead of advancing throughout the twentieth century to the present day, may have decreased. The Yorkshire Regional Championship section has been one of the most competitive sections throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries with the best-known bands in the world including Black Dyke, Brighouse & Rastrick and Grimethorpe Colliery all competing. These bands were consistently among the best in the world during the twentieth century so reports stating that they struggled with a piece show that this is a test piece that remained a challenge for any brass band.

However, the report from the Welsh Regional contest provides evidence that some bands did manage to perform the piece well in 2009. Once again the adjudicator was David Read and in contrast with his comments in the previous quote, Mr Read had high praise for Cory’s performance:

The quality of the qualifying performances was highly encouraging in all the five sections, topped by a Championship winning rendition of Salute to Youth from the European Champion, Cory Band, that brought the written comment from adjudicator David Read, 'Gilbert [Vinter] would have liked this. I can pay you no higher compliment!'42

As Cory were the European Champions at the time of this contest it shows that they are arguably of a better standard than the bands in the Yorkshire Regional contest. However, a test piece selected for the Regional Championship contests should be accessible to more bands than just the reigning European Champions.

These reports detail a list of technical and musical challenges that most bands failed to meet. David Read’s comments that the syncopated bass feature was too much of a technical challenge (playing the notes in the right place) to give some of the best bands in Britain. Despite the adjudicator agreeing that twenty-first-century bands were technically better than twentieth-century bands, they still fell into the same traps that were laid by the composer over half a century before. David Read’s comments stating there was no increase in musicality between 1962 and 2009 suggest that any increases in ability have been limited to technique. Read was well placed to make these comments, as he had performed the piece with the composer. Having the composer conduct the performance can give the band additional insight about the piece, as the composer is usually best placed to interpret the music having written it themselves. The reported audience reaction to Read’s remarks about performing with Vinter shows the respect which they have for the composer and their acknowledgement of Read’s suitability as an adjudicator having experienced this. There are however a very few exceptions to the argument that the composer is best placed to interpret a piece, with the most notable exception being Harry Mortimer and Fairey Band’s victory at the Belle Vue. The test piece was *Resurgam* and composer Eric Ball, who was conducting CWS Manchester, came fourth. Mortimer recalled Ball’s reaction after the contest:

> Whilst I won the contest with the Fairey Band, Eric only managed fourth place [with (CWS Manchester)]. The first to offer his sincere
congratulations, he did something which confirmed, if confirmation was needed, my opinion that he was the most noble of friends and the least conceited of musicians, avowing that I understood the piece better than he did, and found more depth in it than he had imagined.43

This is unusual because the composer knows the inspiration behind the piece and may only put a limited amount of information in programme notes or make it public in interviews or other media. However Ball himself did note that once when conducting one of his own arrangements in a contest he receive the adjudicators remarks stating that ‘We do not think that you have fully understood the composer’s intentions.’44

*Salute To Youth* points to little advancement in playing ability, certainly in musical interpretation and suggests the notion of some test pieces maintaining their place at the top end of the brass band repertoire due to their mixture of technical and musical challenges.

The test pieces that I have examined in this group can be divided into two categories. First, there are those for which there is no identifiable pattern of any significance or substance. Whilst collectively these pieces show that there is no one consistent pattern, they are of little use in answering my research question when viewed collectively as this makes it hard to draw any conclusions other than the lack of a consistent pattern. However, individually they do offer some insight, showing the stylistic differences between pieces that can make it difficult for a test piece to be selected and performed at the standard expected for a particular section. The second category are test pieces which suggest a rise in playing standards by showing a fall in section use. However, this fall is either not large enough to be significant or not easy to substantiate because of data points which do not fit with this pattern. These pieces can help strengthen the conclusions reached when examining them in

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conjunction with the test pieces which suggest a significant fall in section use. Although they may not be of any use for tracking changes over time, or only suggest small changes, they add weight to the conclusion that playing ability has increased by matching the broad trends identified and providing more sources of evidence to aid a more nuanced conclusion. As I have discussed in this chapter, the large number of Eric Ball test pieces that are technically less demanding than many other test pieces (particularly ones composed since 1960) in this group provides further evidence that technical ability has increased, that contest organisers have recognised this and that they have adjusted the sections for which test pieces are chosen accordingly. It also suggests that the stylistic challenges that these pieces offered to late-twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century bands provided a challenge for both the players trying to capture the atmosphere of the piece and subsequently the contest organisers who are selecting these pieces.

**Conclusion**
The two test piece groups examined in this chapter highlight the difficulties faced by the music selection panel and other contest organisers when choosing test pieces for contests. Some test pieces are in one of these groups because they have been selected for a section for which they are unsuitable. Subsequent uses of these pieces correct the errors but remove or change any visible pattern in the process. However other pieces in these groups show that changes in standards of ability have limited or no effect on the use of some test pieces for a variety of different reasons. The most important reason is the difference between technicality and musicality. The differences between technical improvements and the lack of musical improvement is documented by a variety of respected reporters and adjudicators reporting on uses of a variety of test pieces. These include *Contest Music,*
Pageantry and Salute to Youth. Therefore, the answer to my research question of whether standards of playing ability amongst brass band players have increased during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is much more complicated than it appears to be from the first group of test pieces. Because over half of the most frequently used test pieces are in the group which have fallen in section use during this period the answer has to start with the fact that standards of playing appear to have increased. The groups examined in this chapter do not change that. However, they add a couple of very important caveats. First, pieces which are technically difficult but musically easier to understand, interpret and perform, are more likely to have fallen in section use. This is shown by the number of times that reporters and adjudicators describe the difference between musical and technical ability, and that in many of these cases they say that technical ability has increased. Secondly, standards of playing and conducting ability have not changed at an even rate. Conductors are responsible for most of the musical interpretation and direction of a performance. Therefore, the faults with musical ability and interpretation that are frequently mentioned demonstrate that some conductors are not up to the challenge of leading a performance of a piece that their band can perform well technically. The background of changing styles of test pieces composed for brass bands and selected for contests is important for contextualising this apparent lack of musical education. The move away from composers from outside the brass band movement such as Holst, Elgar, and Vaughan Williams towards composers who compose solely for brass bands or brass and wind bands in the last quarter of the twentieth century, has had important effects on players. When this change is coupled with the rise in youth and school bands during this period, it suggests a generation of brass band players and younger conductors who started playing from the 1980s without regularly playing test pieces written by composers from
outside the brass band movement. The majority of the twenty-nine most frequently used
test pieces were written by composers who composed for other musical genres including
orchestras and choirs (Howells, Ireland, Bath and Horovitz among others) or by composers
like Ball who compose in a very different style to the majority of late-twentieth-century test
pieces. Many players could find these pieces alien due to a lack of familiarity with the style
in which they are written and should be performed. Even the formalisation of brass band
education through universities has not remedied this problem. Richard Evans taught a
repertoire class at the Royal Northern College of Music, one of the most prestigious colleges
of music for brass players – particularly brass band players, and found that they did not
know anything about the music composers such as Gilbert Vinter and Herbert Howells.45

This is only a single example from a single institution that offers brass band centred higher
education, but such a damning statement from a teacher at one of the pre-eminent music
education establishments suggests serious problem was present by the end of the twentieth
century, with a lack of knowledge of brass band repertoire among students. However, my
evidence suggests that the difficulties of each individual piece are as important as the
favoured compositional style of the composer because Vinter has a test piece in each group
and Ball’s test pieces are also distributed between all three groups.

The evidence shown by the use of the test pieces examined in this chapter and the previous
one suggests that changes to standards of playing in the brass band movement are linked to
changes in the idiom of the brass band movement. This is also suggested by evidence from
the interviews that I have conducted, including the Evans quote above.

45 Evans, interview by Osborn, 12 November, 2014.
My next chapter examines the changes in the brass band idiom, particularly those that have taken place in the second half of my research period which has seen some of the frequently used test pieces fall out of favour completely. Once I have examined these idiomatic changes I will compare them to the changes in standard of ability suggested by the evidence provided in this chapter to see if the idiomatic changes can be suggested as the primary cause of changes in standards of playing.
Chapter 7: The brass band idiom

In the process of examining the most frequently used test pieces I have discussed stylistic changes to the brass band repertoire and how this may have affected how accessible the pieces are to the competitors. To gain further insight it is necessary to examine the changes in the unique performance style and sound of the British brass band: the brass band idiom.

In *Bands: The Brass Band Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* Herbert described the brass band idiom, identifying the fixed technical and stylistic elements that contribute to the characteristics of this musical form of expression:

> Few would deny that this idiom exists and has many facets. At a purely technical level, it is possible to point to features like tone quality, articulation, pitch, the occurrence in band music of certain phrases and figurations that fit the finger and tongue movements involved in brass playing, the notion of homogeneity – the idea of the ‘organ-like’ quality of brass bands, and so on. It is, after all, these elements that provide the material for promoters of brown bread and medical insurance.¹

Perhaps the most important of the elements that Herbert describes are the homogeneity and the tongue movements that enable the players to articulate the notes. The homogeneity of the brass band is perhaps the defining tonal quality. It is the lack of different timbres that leads to the brass band being described as a ‘brass choir’ or having ‘organ-like tone’, and separates the brass band sound from that of orchestras or wind bands. As I discuss later in this chapter, the combination of saxhorns, conical bore cornets and cylindrical bore trombones provides this homogeneity, and the traditional way in which they are scored helped to create this timbre. Although brass bands have always included percussion, it was rarely integral to the performance, except when marching, before the

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second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, the brass band idiom became fully
developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with percussion in a secondary
role. The tonal quality of the brass band is well suited to the performance of melodic music,
particularly hymns, and also suits the acoustics of churches and similar buildings. This
combination of melodic music and tone became the defining features that those seeking to
represent or capitalise on the brass band movement have sought to replicate, with the
Hovis advert being perhaps the most well-known example.²

The brass band idiom that Herbert described in 1991 was still recognisable and dominant at
the end of my research period, a century after the publication of the first original test piece.
Although this idiom was the defining feature of the brass band movement throughout the
twentieth century, many late-twentieth-century and early twenty-first century test pieces
do not fit with all the facets of this performance style. The idiom developed over the
twentieth century, did not remained static. For example, many of the test pieces composed
since Herbert’s description do not fit this idiom. Some use more experimental sounds and
tones, some have very different styles of scoring and many do not make as much use of the
melodic style of playing that has defined so much of the brass band repertoire. The
composers who have moved away from the brass band idiom and introduced new styles of
composition and scoring are examined below.

In 2002 Herbert also stated that ‘The reality is that since contesting began as a spectacle of
mass entertainment, the brass band idiom has been defined by the greatest secular bands

and the finest of their players. Whilst it is true that these elite bands have defined the brass band idiom and in the early twenty-first century they could be found playing or recording music that was recognisable as ‘material for promoters of brown bread and medical insurance’, many of their contest performances would be completely alien to audiences, or indeed marketing executives seeking the very qualities described above. The sublime technical challenge of the music, the influence of modernism and other musical genres and the significant use of percussion created a different style of performance. They took the description of the brass band idiom used above and brought it to a new musical world, one that seems at times, as far away from 1913 contest performances as it is possible to get using the same brass instrumentation. Therefore, it is possible to argue that there has been a divergence in the brass band idiom, between test pieces and concert music.

Conductor and composer Philip Harper believes that the contest repertoire is generally a bit less conservative than the concert repertoire that most bands play:

I think probably most bands’ concert offerings are going to be even more conservative than what they do at competitions by their very nature really. If they don’t appeal to Mr and Mrs Joe Public, then Mr and Mrs Joe Public aren’t going to buy a ticket for the next concert and that’s the way it works.

He furthers his argument by suggesting that bands have two distinct modes of performance, artistic and entertainment, and that these modes are usually mutually exclusive:

To my mind there are two general modes a brass band can be in: either entertainment mode, which is essentially concert work, or artistic mode and some contest pieces think that they push us towards that mode and some in fact do, not all of them do. And at Cory we have the odd concert

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that is an artistic endeavour as well. In other words, we are playing ‘art music’ innovative music, music at the cutting edge, that sort of thing. But ninety five percent of the concerts we do are not for artistic purposes, they are for entertainment purposes so we’re playing, our target market is the typical man in the street who wants to come along and hear good quality music, of some good melodies, maybe some tunes that he or she knows, presented in an innovative way.5

If Harper’s beliefs are true, then it can be argued that two forces have combined to split some contemporary test pieces away from the brass band idiom. The first is the decline in brass band audiences. The stories of 100,000 people turning up to the Crystal Palace in 1913 for the National Brass Band Festival were a very distant memory by the time Harper was born, let alone became involved in the brass band movement. With bands chasing a smaller, more mainstream audience, in a much-diluted popular culture, the conservatism that Harper describes maintains the brass band idiom by ensuring that audiences hear what they expect to hear from a brass band. As a counter to this conservative force, the styles of test piece composition have changed considerably in the last fifty years. The influence of composers from outside the brass band movement, such as Vinter or Bourgeois (whose

Concerto No. 1 for Brass Band was not composed until 1974, when he was 336) and of a new generation of composers from the late 1980s including Philip Sparke and Philip Wilby has forced the brass band forwards, with twentieth-century influences from other musical idioms. Their work is significant in the development of the idiom because Wilby frequently uses a combination of well-known melodies or the style of another composer along with the traditional sound of a brass band as a starting point for a modernist musical journey.7

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7 Graham, interview by Osborn, 17 June, 2014.
also introduced the use of the ‘musical effect’ to test piece writing, which has become a staple of highly demanding twenty-first-century works, including those of Sparke and Graham.\(^8\) The work of these composers is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Herbert and Wallace’s argument that the development of the brass band idiom should be split into three periods of circa 1840-1920, 1920-1970 and 1970 onwards fits with the development of the contesting repertoire, as well as the wider brass band movement.\(^9\)

However the 1960s should be viewed as the decade in which the brass band repertoire was at a cross roads and undergoing experimentation. It is only in the last of these three periods that some parts of the contesting repertoire have fully developed a sound that is different from the concert repertoire. Herbert also makes two remarks that can sum up the changes to the brass band idiom throughout most of the twentieth century. First, that during the first half of the twentieth century

> Many brass bands were distinctive, even great. But none were blatantly radical – none kicked against tradition sufficiently strongly to be a maverick or to create a watershed in the brass band idiom.\(^10\)

This view holds true for the whole of my period of research. Throughout this time, no band built its reputation on being radical.\(^11\) All the best bands conformed to the brass band idiom and its gradual changes. The changes that did take place, especially those in the development of repertoire, owed their existence to composers and contest organisers or

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\(^8\) Harper, interview by Osborn, 13 September, 2017.

\(^9\) Herbert and Wallace, 'Aspects of Performance Practice', p. 279.


\(^11\) There have been a few experiments and recordings that have taken brass bands outside the brass band idiom, such as The Fairey Band’s Acid Brass project (1998 to present) and Tredegar Town Band’s recording of the Gavin Higgins ballet Dark Arteries in 2015. However these were undertaken by established bands whose main activities remained within the brass band idiom. Jeremy Deller, 'Acid Brass,' The Fairey Band, [18 January, 2018], http://acidbrass.com/; No stated author, 'Dark Arteries Cd - 2015,' Tredegar Town Band, [18 January, 2018], http://tredegarstownband.org/heritage-artefect/dark-arteries-cd-2016.
commissioners of test pieces, rather than to individual bands. This is despite some bands commissioning test pieces for use in own-choice contests that in some cases have been adopted into the mainstream contest repertoire.

Secondly Herbert argues that ‘The first and most important feature of this change is the slowness and subtlety of the process. This could be described as the triumph of conservatism over progress.’\(^{12}\) This is also true for the whole of my research period, as many of the voices from within the brass band movement argue.

In this chapter I will discuss some of the most frequently used test pieces that have been the focus of my thesis so far, alongside some of the other seminal test pieces composed during my period of research. This will allow me to show how the test pieces have evolved and whether test piece repertoire still sits within the traditional brass band idiom. The relatively short history of original brass band repertoire has led to an obsession with evolution and progress within the brass band movement, as described by Hindmarsh:

> Because composing for the brass band largely is a twentieth-century phenomenon, the band movement has been concerned more with ‘progress’ – with what is new and current – than with developing a perspective on its musical past.\(^{13}\)

Examples of this attitude are found in the quotes from reporters and conductors in the previous three chapters, especially those concerning older test pieces and the use of arrangements. The comments made about the suitability of *The Force of Destiny* are prime examples, particularly the comments stating that the conductors or players had hoped for a ‘more modern’ test piece. The fact that many of the competitors quoted grew to like and

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\(^{12}\) Herbert and Wallace, 'Aspects of Performance Practice', p. 293.

\(^{13}\) Hindmarsh, 'Building a Repertoire', p. 274.
respect the piece as they rehearsed it shows that the preference for modernity created biased views against good quality older test pieces with which the performers were not familiar.

As my thesis focuses on using the voices from within the brass band movement to examine ability, attitudes and perceptions of changes, in various aspects of contesting, I have used sources from within the movement to identify the seminal test pieces which are examined in this chapter (alongside some of the most frequently used ones that have already featured). Some of these sources are the interviews that I have conducted with musical leaders of the brass band movement. All my interviewees had strong views on the contesting repertoire and its evolution throughout my period of study, and several of them described the test pieces that they thought were seminal in the development of both the brass band repertoire and the brass band idiom. In addition to these interviews I have also relied upon two articles written by composer Gavin Higgins and published by 4barsrest in January 2017. These two articles, titled *What might have been? The first 50 years of lost compositional opportunities*, and *What might have been? The second 50 years of lost compositional opportunities*, compare a defining test piece composed in each decade of the twentieth century to an orchestral one from the same period. The main argument of the articles is not the area of interest for my research, instead it is the selection of the ‘defining’ test piece from each decade. Higgins is a composer who has been commissioned to write for the highest profile events for both brass band and orchestral music, with *Destroy, Trample, As Swiftly As She* commissioned by Tredegar Town Band to perform at the 2011 European Brass Band Championship and *Velocity* commissioned by the BBC for the Last Night of the Proms 2014. His musical education began in the family brass band before studying at the
Royal Northern College of Music and Royal College of Music.\textsuperscript{14} This makes him suitably placed to select the defining brass band works of the twentieth century, both as a musical leader of the brass band movement and a classically trained composer.

It is important to note that some aspects of the brass band idiom have not changed during my research period because the number and combination of brass players has changed very little since 1913. Therefore, bands are still capable of producing the organ-like sound that comes from a band made up almost entirely of conical bore brass instruments. However, the introduction of percussion has had a very significant effect, both in contests and other performances. In addition to this change in the instruments used, changes to the compositional styles used by composers of brass band music is the main force behind many of the idiomatic changes. The introduction of first romantic and then modernism influences from the orchestral world, even if they are very limited as Higgins argues, has had a decisive effect on the sound of brass band contests.

This chapter starts of by examining the development of the brass band idiom’s own voice with original contest repertoire from 1913. After this I examine the influence of the orchestral composers in the inter-war years and then the influence of Eric Ball. Next, the use of percussion in contests from 1973 must be examined, because this change was required for a new generation of test pieces composed during the 1960s to be satisfactorily performed. Following this I examine the influence of Gilbert Vinter before concluding with the late-twentieth-century developments including the emergence of a modern triumvirate

of composers who have dominated test piece composition from the 1980s to the present day.

The development of the brass band idiom from 1913-1960

A seasoned observer at the British Open in 1913 would have found the musical idiom and test piece very familiar. The test piece was a Charles Godfrey arrangement called *Souvenir of Gounod*. This was the twilight of Godfrey’s domination of the test piece repertoire which started in 1872, and his arrangements had been used at least fifty-four times in the British Open and National Championship Section. An audience member at the 1913 National Championship, on the other hand, would have discovered the dawn of a new musical age for the brass band idiom: the first original test piece *Labour and Love*, composed by theatre and light music composer Percy Fletcher. The music was deliberately designed to sound familiar to both competitors and audience, as Hindmarsh described:

> The music was all original, but, having previously been to a Crystal Palace event, he made sure that there was nothing in the style or structure that would not be understood. He shaped it like an operatic selection. The dramatic rhetoric of the fast music, the operatic character of the cornet and euphonium solos, and the recitatives for horn and for trombone, would have held no musical fears for the competing bandsmen... He also included a narrative programme, deemed an essential ingredient to help the largely untutored bandsmen characterize the music.  

If, as Hindmarsh describes, the music did not sound different from the operatic medleys that brass bands had been competing with for most of their existence up until this point, then what was its significance for the brass band idiom? After all the performance sound and style, combination of instruments and the instruments themselves had not changed. Instead

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15 For details of other ‘test pieces’ composed before 1913 see Hindmarsh, ‘Building a Repertoire’. None of them were for a full brass band and published for all bands to buy.

it was the idea that a piece of music could be composed for a brass band competition that
had an artistic agenda and message. Rather than using the best melodies and sections from
other composers’ works this was a musical work in its entirety, retaining its musical integrity
and substance. Until this point it had been easy for critics to dismiss artistic merit of the
brass band movement because they were not performing works with artistic integrity, or
they were ‘unauthentic arrangements or ruthlessly butchered selections’, as Bythell
described them.\textsuperscript{17} It must be noted that some orchestral arrangements and transcriptions
were not selections but were complete pieces, usually overtures. This includes some of the
numerous arrangements by William Rimmer. Nonetheless, the process of transcription,
which Hindmarsh describes as ‘as much an exercise of pruning and re-voicing as it is of
literal transcription’ inherently changes the character of the music.\textsuperscript{18} However, the
composition of original works, especially by serious orchestral composers, gave the brass
band an artistic substance and made the musical establishment take note, as Bevan stated:

Iles conferred an increased respectability on the repertoire and
heightened the awareness of the musical establishment when, following
the adoption of Holst’s Moorside Suite as the 1928 National test piece, he
commissioned a work from the Master of the King’s Music, Sir Edward
Elgar, in 1930. The Severn Suite was the result. Eminent composers like
John Ireland, Arthur Bliss, Herbert Howells and Ralph Vaughan Williams
were to follow.\textsuperscript{19}

The importance of Fletcher’s composition was therefore not that it marked a ground-
breaking change in the brass band idiom, as did the music of Vinter or Sparke, but that it
paved the way for a degree of respectability and opened the door for other orchestral

\textsuperscript{17} Bythell, 'Provinces Versus Metropolis in the British Brass Band Movement in the Early Twentieth Century:
The Case of William Rimmer and His Music,' p. 152. See chapter 2 for full quote.
\textsuperscript{18} Bythell, 'Provinces Versus Metropolis in the British Brass Band Movement in the Early Twentieth Century:
\textsuperscript{19} Bevan, 'Art or Sport'.

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composers to compose for brass band. Fletcher was the only composer who answered the calls for ‘better’, original brass band music, and if he had not done so then the development of the test piece repertoire, with contributions from the heavyweight orchestral composers mentioned above, might never have happened.\textsuperscript{20} Therefore the composition and use of this test piece marks the end of an era and the start of a new one for the brass band idiom. It was the end of the domination of arrangements of classical and operatic medleys and the dawn of the era of the original test piece. The change took place slowly and marked a split between Iles (who controlled the National Championship) and Rimmer - who had arranged the test pieces for the National Championship from 1910-1912, after his retirement from contest conducting.\textsuperscript{21} Rimmer’s test pieces were still used for the lower sections of the 1913 National Championship and it was after Iles took control of the British Open, in the mid-1920s, that the pattern of the use of original compositions was brought in for that contest too.\textsuperscript{22}

In the inter-war years, the original test piece repertoire came of age, greatly aided by the contributions of Holst, Elgar, Ireland and Howells.\textsuperscript{23} However only two of these composers feature on the list of most frequently used test pieces, Ireland and Bath. There are six original compositions and one arrangement in the list of most frequently used test pieces that are first used in this period. They are split between all three of my test piece groups and this reflects the variety of the compositions that made up the developing test piece

\textsuperscript{20} For details on the calls made for better music by Herbert Whiteley, among others, see Hindmarsh, ’Building a Repertoire’, p. 247.
\textsuperscript{22} Bythell, ’Provinces Versus Metropolis in the British Brass Band Movement in the Early Twentieth Century: The Case of William Rimmer and His Music,’ p. 160.
\textsuperscript{23} Hindmarsh, ’Building a Repertoire’, p. 253.
repertoire in the 1920s and 1930s. None of these composers were truly ground-breaking or adventurous in comparison to the orchestral world. For example, in the same year that *Labour and Love* was used, Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* premiered.\(^{24}\) Whilst Holst’s contribution was very different from the earlier operatic, classical and romantic arrangements, Hindmarsh describes these as, if anything, a step backwards rather than forwards:

> The idiom was light-years away from the familiar brand of romantic chromaticism. For the first time, the brass band was playing original tunes founded on modality rather than diatonic harmony: its origins were in folk song, and it unfolded entirely without contrivance.\(^{25}\)

The modality described may have fitted the piece and its themes very well, but it was certainly not taking the brass band music forwards in the same direction as the musical establishment and the more adventurous orchestral composers. Therefore, the original compositions from the inter-war period can be seen as the brass band idiom developing its own voice with its own music for the first time. It was both different from what had preceded it, and very different from the direction in which ‘classical’ music was beginning to explore. Even those composers who crossed over the genres did not compose their most ambitious or adventurous works for brass band, although this may have been to do with a relative lack of familiarity with the conventions of scoring for brass band.

Whilst the narrative of the development of contests’ repertoire in the inter-war years is one of outside influences and the development of a unique idiom with contributions from a variety of composers with different backgrounds, the narrative of the immediate post war...

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\(^{24}\) For a brief comparison of the two pieces see Higgins, 'What Might Have Been? The First 50 Years of Lost Compositional Opportunities' 4barsrest.

\(^{25}\) Hindmarsh, 'Building a Repertoire', p. 255.
years belongs to a single man: Eric Ball, the most influential brass band composer of original repertoire in the history of contesting. Alongside his considerable body of test pieces, Ball composed a wide variety of both Salvationist and secular pieces, among which his marches are particularly highly regarded.26

In 1946 his Salute to Freedom was used at the British Open and marked the beginning of a remarkable period of success in which his test pieces were selected for at least one section in the two contest series that I am studying almost every year until the early 1980s. However, it was the 1950s until the late 1960s in which Ball was the truly dominant force in the contesting repertoire. One of Ball’s greatest strengths as a composer was his ability to write for bands of different levels of ability. He described this to Arthur Taylor:

It’s a real challenge to write for school bands and lower section bands – it’s difficult to write music that’s effective, but which isn’t horrendously difficult to play. You don’t have to worry so much with top section pieces, you can let your hair down with those, and open up the band, without having to worry if the second and third cornets can cope.27

Despite his own misgivings, the suitability for and popularity of Ball’s works among lower section bands is shown by their repeated uses for lower section contests, and positive reports that these generate. Comments that include ‘good piece’ or ‘very nice piece’ are common and indicative of the affection that many bandsmen held towards these pieces.28

Ball’s part in the development of the brass band idiom is as a force for mild change and development, not radical change or revolution. Hindmarsh describes the period of 1939-

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26 For a complete catalogue of Ball’s works see Taylor, 'The Music of Eric Ball (1903-1989) a Complete Catalogue, with a Commentary of His Life and Work.'
1960 as the ‘Years of Consolidation’ and Ball himself states that his music is ‘a bit old-fashioned – back in the romantic era. Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Sibelius, that was about as far as I got.’ However at the end of the 1960s other composers were taking the brass band idiom in a very different direction, one that included both stylistic and instrumental changes and a period which included some of the most radical changes that have taken place in the brass band idiom. The stylistic changes that were about to take place made good of Ball’s own description of his work as old-fashioned. However, before I examine the stylistic changes that took place, the instrumental change which enabled them must be examined: the introduction of percussion to the contest stage.

The use of percussion in brass band contests

The introduction of percussion to the contest stage has ushered in perhaps the most significant change in both the brass band repertoire and the brass band idiom. Whilst bands have always had rudimentary percussion – bass drum, side drum and cymbals for marching, with a few auxiliary percussion instruments and maybe timpani used for concerts or novelty pieces – it was very much a musical after thought, rather than a fully-fledged section of the band, until well into the twentieth century.

Percussion has only been permitted in major contests since the early 1770s. In 1973 the National Finals allowed the use of percussion and in 1974 the British Open selected Vinter’s *James Cook Circumnavigator* as the test piece and changed the rules to allow the use of percussion. It was not previously allowed in contests because of concerns that it could

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cover up mistakes, as Bevan stated ‘Drums, with their ability to obscure weakness elsewhere, were not allowed.’ However, there were some exceptions, such as the Edinburgh International Contest which allowed percussion as early as 1952. However the introduction of percussion was conducted in a conservative manner, as Bevan described:

In order to cope with the new music, with its (mild) use of contemporary compositional techniques and increased exploitation of available timbres, a decision was made to allow percussion to participate in the National. The championship section adopted it in 1973 and, moving at a suitably deferential pace, by 1976 all bands were allowed to appear complete. This opened the way for composers like Edward Gregson, already well established as a writer for band, whose Connotations for Brass Band was the test piece in 1977.

As Bevan suggests, by the late 1970s the brass band repertoire was starting to change significantly and move away from the types of test piece that were composed pre-1970. It would be impossible to perform twenty-first-century test pieces such as Peter Graham’s *On the Shoulders of Giants* (published for the British Open in 2010 and used for the Grand Shield in 2012) with its timpani, tam-tam and bass drum opening (taken from the *Finale* of Bruckner’s *Eighth Symphony*), or Peter Meechan’s *The Legend of King Arthur* (selected for the National Championship Section in 2014), with its rock inspired drum beats, without a full percussion section. Both pieces are defined by their use of percussion, including technically difficult melodies on the tuned percussion alongside their untuned percussion parts. When these pieces are examined against the criteria that Herbert uses to describe the brass band idiom we find that some aspects are present - tone quality, articulation, pitch

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32 Bevan, ‘Art or Sport’, p. 113.
33 Newsome, *The Modern Brass Band*, p. 64.
35 *On the Shoulders of Giants* also plays homage to Sousa’s bass drummer August Helmecke in the finale movement which also contains very significant percussion parts. Peter Graham, ‘Concert Music for Brass Band,’ Gramercy Music, [18 November, 2016], http://www.gramercymusic.com/.
and the organ-like quality of homogenous brass instruments which is demonstrated in some sections. However, the use of percussion gives the music a very different sound from test pieces composed before the 1960s, as well as the technical challenges of this music, the range and speed of the notes.

Although percussion was not introduced at a major contest until 1973, its future use had become established by the late 1960s. Composers - particularly Vinter - were composing pieces that could not be satisfactorily performed without it. Many test pieces composed before 1973 had percussion parts that were not vital to the performance and the pieces could therefore be used as test pieces before percussion was permitted in contests.

However, some pieces did include vital percussion parts, such as the timpani part at the end of Vinter’s *James Cook – Circumnavigator* and the snare drum and cymbal part in Howarth’s *Fireworks* and these pieces could not have been used if the rules had not been changed. However, many percussion parts were still very basic compared to those which would follow by the end of the twentieth century. For example, *Spectrum*, the piece that was so revolutionary in many other ways when it was selected for the British Open in 1969, had a single percussion part that rhythmically copied the brass instruments for large sections of the piece, adding emphasis and enriching timbres but doing relatively little to develop the musical journey of the piece.

Newsome noted the development of percussion from 1975 to 1984 in *The Modern Brass Band* and showed that by 1984 pieces such as Gregson’s *Dances and Arias* had complex percussion requirements for three players, including:  

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36 Newsome, *The Modern Brass Band*, p. 64.
An example of a piece composed prior to 1973 did include percussion parts is *Variations for Brass Band* (1957) by Vaughan Williams which included a celeste part, despite the piece being composed for the National Championships.\(^{38}\) Ball’s *Journey Into Freedom* (1967) included the typical percussion requirements of side drum, bass drum, cymbal, triangle and tambourine, with optional timpani, but as Myers argues, the music makes sense without these parts.\(^{39}\)

The expansion of the required percussion is an example of change in the brass band idiom crossing the concert – contest divide. A fully orchestral percussion section, and sometimes more besides, is required for many late twentieth-century concert pieces (both original light music compositions and arrangements) and test pieces. The influence of popular music on the brass band repertoire is partly the cause for this. As popular music developed throughout the twentieth century the arrangements available for brass bands kept pace,

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\(^{38}\) Myers, 'Instruments of British Brass Bands', p. 185.

\(^{39}\) Myers, 'Instruments of British Brass Bands', p. 184.
moving from opera, classical and folk songs, to pop and rock arrangements, which required the extensive use of percussion.

The use of percussion vastly expanded the range of timbres available to brass band composers and conductors. The idiomatic organ-like sound of the British brass band was traditionally produced at the expense of the variety of timbres available to orchestras or wind bands, due to the reliance on saxhorn based conical bore brass instruments as the mainstay of the band. Composers writing for brass band from the 1960s started to take advantage of these new timbres in their new, adventurous and experimental compositions.

The test piece repertoire is viewed as the most significant body of work produced for brass band. Many of the contributions to the brass band repertoire by well-respected composers from outside the movement have been test pieces. Therefore, the inclusion of percussion at contests allowed the development of this significant body of artistic material and enabled composers to explore some of the compositional styles and experiments that were being used in mid-twentieth century orchestral and wind band music. Although the brass band movement has always been conservative in choice of repertoire, the omission of percussion from the contest stand risked further isolating the brass band movement from other genres of music. The cross over between wind band and brass band repertoire in the works of late-twentieth-century composers, along with the film music influences on composers such as Paul Lovatt-Cooper (himself a percussionist) demonstrate the extent to which percussion became integral to the contesting repertoire by the early twenty-first century.

The brass band contest idiom from the 1960s

The 1960s was one of the periods of greatest change in the brass band contest repertoire and idiom. However, you would not necessarily see this from looking at the list of test
pieces that were used. Eric Ball was still very dominant, with several of his test pieces being
cruned every year. The works of Rimmer, Ireland and Kenneth Wright along with some of
Frank Wright’s arrangements were still in regular use. However, some new names had
begun to appear on the list Malcolm Arnold, Bryan Kelly, Edward Gregson and most
significantly of all Gilbert Vinter.

Throughout my thesis the difference between the work of Gilbert Vinter and almost of all
his predecessors has appeared as a common theme. Vinter’s compositions have remained
relatively popular into the twenty-first century. As my database shows, his pieces have been
used 16 times since 1980 and there are only four composers whose pieces have been used
more often in this period: Eric Ball, Philip Sparke, Philip Wilby and Peter Graham. These four
composers’ works span the periods both before and after Vinter’s works were published.
Eric Ball could be described as the epitome of the brass band idiom from the inter war years
to the early 1960s, whereas the remaining three have become the dominating triumvirate of
the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Sparke’s works include influences of jazz,
cinema and the great American composers. Wilby meditates between the past and the
present with virtuoso display, romantic melodies and modernist influences. Graham
describes his work as influenced by composers including Edward Gregson. Vinter’s
compositions were very different from these composers, and were unveiled to a much more
musically conservative world than those of the later composers.

40 Hindmarsh, ‘Building a Repertoire’, p. 266.
42 Graham, interview by Osborn, 17 June, 2014.
Vinter’s position as a force for change in the brass band repertoire has been recognised within the brass band movement. In *Labour & Love* several interviewees explained his prominence to Arthur Taylor, including Edward Gregson:

I thought Vinter was an interesting composer... I thought that he was a marvellous scorer, he introduced a lot of new and novel effects in the scoring. He tended to sectionalise his scoring – in other words he would have all the cornets playing at one time – he’d use cornets and trombones together as a sort of sectional contrast to the saxhorns playing together. What composers had done before that, as far as I could see, was to integrate, to double a cornet with a horn so that you’d get an overlap of texture – it would melt, you’d get this homogeneous sound. With Vinter, well he changed all that, didn’t he? He used mutes a lot – he was very fond of mutes, different sorts of mutes. And he used percussion too. In fact the more I think about it, maybe he was the man who changed all our thinking.43

Gregson was a well-respected composer in his own right, of orchestral, choral, wind and brass band music and perhaps uniquely he has ‘forged a distinguished creative career in the wider musical world from a grounding in brass composition.’44 He was commissioned to compose a test piece, Edward Gregson, *Of Distant Memories (Music in an Olden Style)*, for the 2013 National Championship Section to celebrate the centenary of the use of the first original test piece in 1913.45 He was also cited by Peter Graham as an inspiration for Graham’s early works.46 The importance that Gregson places on Vinter, who composed most of his test pieces whilst Gregson was still receiving his musical education, and died only a year after Gregson composed his first professional commission, suggests that Vinter’s own test pieces were only part of his influence on the brass band repertoire. The fact that

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45 Gregson, ‘Of Distant Memories (Music in an Olden Style).’
46 Graham, interview by Osborn, 17 June, 2014.
he was such an inspiration to some of the most successful and respected brass band composers of the second half of the twentieth century shows how his influence continued to shape the brass band repertoire decades after his death.

Hindmarsh also supports Gregson’s view, describing Vinter as being ‘convinced that inside the brass band monochrome was a palette of brilliant colour, and he experimented constantly in the attempt to uncover it.’\textsuperscript{47} Newsome takes a slightly less revolutionary view of Vinter’s impact, describing how he ‘guided the brass band gently forward with works such as \textit{Symphony of Marches}, \textit{Triumphant Rhapsody} and \textit{Spectrum}.’

Newsome’s argument that the years 1961-70 ‘were dominated by Eric Ball and Gilbert Vinter’\textsuperscript{48} should be interrogated for my research by asking how does this relate to the changes in standards of playing in contests suggested by the selection of the most commonly used test pieces? For this I will turn to the evidence gathered in my interviews. Richard Evans suggested that by the early twenty-first century young players were not familiar with Vinter’s works, as he found out when teaching a repertoire class at the Royal Northern College of Music:

\begin{quote}
I’m a bit concerned, say take the Northern because I’m going there, and I’ll stop, and I’ll say to this band “right do we know much about Gilbert Vinter?” oh shit. I said “well what about Herbert Howells. What’s Herbert Howells’ composition? What’s his best writing?” Now he’s only written two pieces for us [brass bands] you see, this one, “and what’s the other?” They didn’t know. They don’t know anything.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{47} Hindmarsh, ‘Building a Repertoire’, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{48} Newsome, \textit{The Modern Brass Band}, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{49} Evans, interview by Osborn, 12 November, 2014.
\end{flushright}
The difference in style between Vinter and most of the rest of the brass band repertoire, and the lack of knowledge about this that Evans identifies, may be the reason that his three test pieces are split between my three test piece groups. Despite being the fifth most frequently featured composer in the period from 1980 to 2011 his test pieces are so different to many of the other test pieces that their use could continually catch out bands.

By 2009 4barsrest believed that this was certainly a problem. In their round-up of the Regional Championship Section contests they denounced many performances as not good enough, at both the contests and the Festival of Brass which took place a few weeks before hand:

The desire to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Vinter’s birth was laudable, but there was concern that the piece, written nearly half a century ago wasn’t hard enough. How wrong the sceptics turned out to be.

Just a few weeks before the series of Area contests began in Blackpool on the first weekend of March, some of the best bands in the land had shown just how difficult and relevant Vinter’s music remained at the RNCM Festival of Brass.

The composer’s exquisite canon – from ‘Salute to Youth’ to ‘Spectrum’ laid bare some pretty top rate banding conductors and performers that weekend – and that from a list that included Black Dyke, Leyland, Fairey, Desford, Foden’s and Brighouse.

It seemed that we had forgotten how to play Vinter.50

This was a damning indictment of the best British brass bands, and the comments regarding performances at the Regionals were even more pointed, stating of the North West Regional that:

Foden’s duly took the North West title for a record 16th time – their fourth victory in a row, but didn’t play well, and they knew it. That it was still good enough to win told you everything and nothing though.51

In the Midlands Regional ‘ Adjudicators Derek Broadbent and Brian Buckley had a pretty horrid time of it separating out a raft of bands all of whom found it easier to lose a contest there for the taking than to actually win it’ and ‘In the end, Desford came out top with Newstead Welfare joining them in qualification. Neutral observers were of the opinion though that the result could have gone any one of five ways on a day when Salute to Youth caused musical mayhem.’ The British Bandsman agreed with 4barsrest’s assessment of a dismal set of performances, describing the ‘raw’ and ‘grotesque’ sounds (for the full quote see Chapter five).52

All the quotes above are regarding performances of Spectrum, the only one of the three Vinter pieces which is in the group of test pieces that have fallen in section use. The fact that it proved to be such a challenge suggests that all three of his frequently used test pieces were of a style that was incomprehensible to many twenty-first-century bands. Some of Vinter’s other test pieces have been used in sections as low as the Regional Third Section and National Fourth Section, and on some occasions, have seen ‘excellent’ and ‘fine’ performances. 53 However his harder works suggest that the required musicality and musical interpretation necessary for their performance has not materialised in lower section bands.

Vinter’s works provide the strongest evidence to back up the argument that Harper made when I interviewed him: that anybody can learn musicality by listening to different types of

52 Crookston, The British Bandsman, 16 May 2009 pp. 11-12.
music, but that it cannot be formally taught without this breadth of knowledge and experience:

I think anyone can develop musicality at any time just go into a music shop and buy a CD, or get yourself a Spotify account and just listen to a lot of different music. So, my experience of people coming through the college system at the moment is perhaps they haven’t got as wide experience of different types of music which will improve their musicality as maybe another cross section of people who go to university.54

Harper’s suggestion of the role of university and college education chimes with Evans’ comments of his experiences at the Royal Northern College of Music. They were not the only interviewees to support the view that higher education has had a significant impact on the brass band idiom, and the players’ knowledge and skills. Phillip McCann, a lecturer at the University of Huddersfield as well as a world-renowned cornet player and conductor, explicitly suggested that higher education placed a preference on technique over musicality:

CO: What effect has higher education had on the standards of playing and the styles of music that are composed for brass bands?
PM: That’s a good question as well. I think from the education point of view, the system would suggest that we should have more players and more players of higher quality, but I’m not sure that that is how it is. Because quantity doesn’t always convert to quality. I think perhaps one of the downsides is maybe the concentration is directed more to technical playing as well perhaps, at the expense of the more lyrical style of playing, the more musical style of playing.55

It must be noted that the ‘universities’ that McCann refers to are the type of higher education course that Harper refers to as ‘music conservatoires’: courses which are

55 Phillip McCann, interview by Chris Osborn, 28 September, 2017.
focussed on the practical skills of playing, rather than the ‘academic’ study of music.\textsuperscript{56} In my interview with Hindmarsh, the topic also came up:

I think that in those twenty-five years technically things have got far better, bands play louder, they don’t necessarily play as subtly, they’re not prepared to play as quietly because it’s harder, because they want to impress and because they play so much better through the advent, largely because at the elite level the teaching system has changed. You know you no longer join a firm, a factory firm and are taught by the person sitting next to you, you now go to a college at the elite level, you become essentially professional standard, or you know what professional standards are and you teach. So, all of these top bands are now full of players who are technically incredibly able but are they necessarily, are their musical instincts necessarily any better? Well of course they’re not.\textsuperscript{57}

Hindmarsh is perhaps the most explicit voice in stating that the technicality is taught by higher education colleges or universities and that it does not actually increase the overall playing ability of the players because their musicality has not increased. However, he went on to say that it was not just the fault of the education system, but rather part of a larger ecosystem that was encouraging advancements in the technical challenges:

\textbf{PH}: The players are more rounded a lot of them, they know a lot more about what is going on in music wider than the brass band circle and this talking about the actual instinct, the musical instinct that you can’t teach. \\
\textbf{CO}: So, it’s not the fault of the education system? \\
\textbf{PH}: Oh no. No, no, no I just think it’s a result of training at colleges means that bands now sound and play very differently, they can play technically so much better therefore composers write for it so much better and it’s like an ever... you can’t call it progress but it’s like a big circular expansion and because they’ve got to win competitions they’ve got to out to play the next one.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} Harper, interview by Osborn, 13 September, 2017. \\
\textsuperscript{57} Hindmarsh, interview by Osborn, 18 February, 2014. \\
\textsuperscript{58} Hindmarsh, interview by Osborn, 18 February, 2014.
As Hindmarsh suggests that it is the interplay between competition and education that is responsible for the rise in the technical challenges in test pieces. This is a view that Harper also alluded to when he described the brass band movement’s attitude to progress as being driven by competition:

On a philosophical level it is probably just human nature that is driving that because we always want to better ourselves don’t we. We always want to... you know, The Olympic ideal springs to mind: ‘Higher, Faster, Stronger’. You know, you can look at, let’s look at the Olympics for example. All of the world records will not stand forever will they.59

These descriptions of the role of competition and education shaping the brass band repertoire and idiom demonstrate just how important competition is as a force for change in the brass band movement. Whilst education may be the factor that drove the changes described, it is competition that actually maintained the impetus. The suggestions that higher education, when combined with competition, may have had a detrimental effect on the ability of brass bands to perform some of the finest music in the brass band repertoire is a controversial opinion. However, does fit with some of the evidence of declining musicality by the end of the twentieth century. This was a time when the influence of higher education on the brass band movement was at its most significant, with conservatoires including brass bands as performing ensembles and links forged between them and the leading brass bands.60

One of the reasons that higher education and the wider brass band movement have focussed so heavily on technique is the composition of technically extremely difficult music

and test pieces in particular. These technically difficult works have been produced by a wide range of composers from the 1980s. Some of them have evolved the brass band idiom of Ireland, Howells and Ball through the use of modernism and different playing techniques whereas others have sought out an entirely new direction. The results have been divisive at times, reflecting the inherent conservatism present in the brass band movement, but have also been embraced in some of the most popular test pieces. None of these test pieces feature in the list of most frequently used test pieces. This is largely because these test pieces are too young to have been selected enough times, however I would suggest that if this study were to be repeated in ten or twenty years then the list would have expanded to include some of them.

Derek Bourgeois has composed some of the most technically demanding and controversial test pieces of the late twentieth century including *Blitz* and *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*. The reaction to *Blitz* when it was first used in 1981 suggested that it was good quality music that was too ‘modern’ for much of the brass band movement. *The British Bandsman* reported that:

> No doubt as Band No. 1 crashes through the jungle of the first performance, heads will shake, eyes will roll, and thoughts of the end of the world being nigh will be rife. In 10 years’ time Blitz will be as palatable as Spectrum.61

Bourgeois was frequently compared to Vinter. Both composers were revolutionary compared to the existing brass band repertoire in their times, their compositions remained controversial but both of them were subsequently adopted into the brass band canon and

their works regarded highly. When *Blitz* was selected again in 1999 *The British Bandsman* discussed their earlier prediction:

> With Blitz, Derek Bourgeois extended Elgar Howarth's line in *Fireworks* (1975) by dragging percussion to the forefront. When it erupted in 1981, terror struck more than a few 'kitchen' departments [percussion sections], but, as Howard Snell said, 'today's impossible is tomorrow's repertoire.' Blitz is not mere noise. After the ferocious opening the music subsides and desolate voices take up plaintive airs, reaching a glorious section redolent of banding's golden age. Howard Snell predicted that Blitz would outrage traditionalists but that within ten years they would find it as palatable as Vinter's (equally provocative) *Spectrum* (1969). It didn't take ten years, though some remain unconvinced.62

There have been relatively adventurous composers writing for brass band since the 1960s, Vinter, Howarth, Bourgeois who have pushed the boundaries of what is acceptable to the brass band movement at any time, before their music has been accepted by traditionalists. The very nature of their compositions meant that they were only accessible to Championship Section bands when they were initially composed. Lower section bands lacked both the musical and technical abilities to deal with such technically difficult and musically unfamiliar and alien music. However, the last thirty years of my research period also saw the formation of a new mainstream for the brass band idiom. This was formed around three prolific composers who have, as I described earlier, become a triumvirate dominating test piece composition and selection since the late 1980s. Not a single year went by between 1991 and the end of my research period in 2011 in which Sparke, Graham or Wilby did not have a test piece selected by one of the contest series that I have studied. Remarkably Wilby's *Paganini Variations* was used three times between 1991 and 2011 and several other test pieces were used twice. This suggests that a future repeat of my study would find a significantly expanded, and stylistically very different list of frequently used

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test pieces. Harper also credits Wilby with introducing a key element of these recent test pieces to the brass band repertoire: the musical effect. This is:

A series of very fast and rapid notes and simultaneously a series of very fast and rapid notes in another instrument at a different pitch and in my experience, these ‘musical effects’ you can divert from what the composer has written, you don’t have to be very prescriptive about exactly what notes you are playing as long as you get the most effective ‘effect’.63

Harper goes on to suggest that whilst Wilby introduced them and used them well, other lesser skilled composers have misused such effects to the detriment of their compositions:

He also introduced us to what I often call the ‘musical effect’. So, I don’t really recall these moments in pieces prior to Philip Wilby... And it happens all the time in Philip Wilby’s pieces. There are very, very kind of weird and wonderful and wild and wacky and delicate and aggressive and all sorts of things. All sorts of ‘musical effects’ where you don’t have to play exactly what is written. And I think some lesser skilled composers than Philip Wilby have taken that technique and developed into a monster that is completely out of control.64

One example of this appears in ...Dove Descending.65 Four bars before the Nobilimente before Figure 1, the overlapping cornet semiquaver passages are necessary for the shaping of the piece, but the soprano cornet semiquaver passage in the next bar requires every note to be correct as it is the tune. Therefore, in the tutti cornet passage the overall shaping, dynamics and sound of the section are of the utmost importance, rather than every individual note which is required from the soprano cornet.

The admiration for Wilby’s compositional skill demonstrates how he has become one of the three giants of twenty-first-century test piece composition. Wilby has taken the increase in

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technical difficulty and placed it in a context of a musical, artistic work with a sense of artistic integrity. Hindmarsh supports Harper’s view, stating that:

Wilby has embraced a view of the musical past of the band movement with perhaps the greatest sense of purpose...Meditating between the past and present, personal experience and musical function, enables him to write music which amateur performers and non-specialist audiences can enjoy, without compromising his own musical integrity.66

This musical integrity allied to technical difficulty is what defines the very best of the new brass band idiom and Hindmarsh notes how, in his opinion, Sparke has also epitomised the best in this style of test piece composition:

The challenge of producing ever more searching tests of virtuosity has been met head on by the prolific Philip Sparke (b.1951). His musical language is accessible, and direct – embodying the traditional values of popular brass band music, enlivened by the style and polish of Jazz, of the cinema, and of Americans like Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland. What distinguishes his music from much of the music written in the updated lingua franca of brass bands is the virtuoso compositional technique he displays... The closing pages of Variations on an Enigma, for example, are a tour de force of contrapuntal ingenuity; a gesture of admiration, perhaps from one brass band composer to another, Wilfred Heaton, part of whose Contest Music forms the enigmatic theme.67

What is perhaps as interesting as Hindmarsh’s view on the compositional skill that Sparke demonstrates in his compositions, is his assessment of the ‘updated lingua franca’ of brass bands. This new idiom is based upon technically extremely difficult test pieces that were the subject of criticism by several of my interviewees, chiefly Hindmarsh, Renton and Harper. Harper was very outspoken on the technical elements of this new lingua franca, stating that ‘I think there has definitely been a change in the difficulty level of the test pieces and my

own view is that is absolutely to the detriment of the music of the piece.\textsuperscript{68} However, he goes on to praise Sparke’s skill as a composer and his artistic integrity:

\begin{quote}
you just have to be very judicious in the choice of composer you use because every person is going to have slightly different artistic vision, so you have to go with someone that you know you can trust, I mean Philip Sparke is a good example, we’ve used his music a lot, Cory has used his music a lot in the past, and he always knows where he is going artistically.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

Whilst Sparke, Wilby and Graham have had far more of their compositions selected as test pieces, their prominence should not mask the importance of other composers in this period. As I have already mentioned, Gregson’s test pieces also demonstrate his mastery of the updated brass band idiom, whilst maintaining a historical vision, epitomised in \textit{Of Distant Memories}. However, this is not true of all his test pieces. According to Higgins, \textit{Connotations} brought the brass band forwards into the new era of test piece composition, demonstrated by its technical difficulty as well as its musical style:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Connotations} is still rightly considered to be one of Gregson’s finest works, and in many ways it is a piece that heralded the start of a new era in brass band composition.

This was a score that not only demanded so much technically from the players, but also introduced a new, sparser musical language to the ‘post-romantic’ literature that had dominated until it was heard at the National Finals.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Alongside Gregson’s works, those of George Lloyd found favour in the brass band movement, despite being largely ignored by parts of the musical establishment and the

\textsuperscript{68} Harper, interview by Osborn, 13 September, 2017.
\textsuperscript{69} Harper, interview by Osborn, 13 September, 2017.
\textsuperscript{70} Higgins, ‘What Might Have Been? The Second 50 Years of Lost Compositional Opportunities’ 4barsrest.
BBC.\textsuperscript{71} Higgins wrote of him that ‘while his music was considered by some as regressive, the brass band world found his tonal, melodic style appealing’.\textsuperscript{72} This suggests that aside from technical advancements, some parts of the brass band movement have not actually moved on very far from the types of music that were commonly performed before the creation of the original brass band repertoire.

While Hindmarsh, Harper and Renton have led the calls by some sections of the brass band movement for the return of better music, with more artistic integrity, it must be acknowledged that some of the music their comments are aimed at is immensely popular among sections of the brass band movement. All three were critical of music such as Peter Meechan’s \textit{The Legend of King Arthur} (selected for the National Finals Championship Section in 2014) or Paul Lovatt-Cooper’s \textit{Breath of Souls} (commissioned for the National Finals Championship Section in 2012). Hindmarsh said of Meechan’s composition that ‘I think the panel just rather liked it because it’s, it’s very commercial, I hated it’, and was even more critical of Lovatt-Cooper’s work:

> It was a horrible piece though, what a ghastly piece. I mean Paul, I like Paul a lot but what a dreadful, dreadful piece. Why, he just put tricks in and I mean there are problems with the scoring, there always are with his music, and internal balancing. But actually what he did was just write a test piece. What he didn’t say was “what have I got to say? What do I want to say?” That’s the difference. The essential difference is where you start as a composer I think.\textsuperscript{73}

However, perhaps the harshest criticism of Meechan’s composition came from Renton:

> Utter nonsense, from beginning to end. Absolute nonsense, it’s not music its quasi music. I remember Philip Sparke saying a long time ago “I am not a composer, I write music.” The same applies to most of the people who are writing for brass bands now. They are not composers. Composers take

\textsuperscript{71} Higgins, ‘What Might Have Been? The Second 50 Years of Lost Compositional Opportunities’ 4barsrest.

\textsuperscript{72} Higgins, ‘What Might Have Been? The Second 50 Years of Lost Compositional Opportunities’ 4barsrest.

\textsuperscript{73} Hindmarsh, interview by Osborn, 18 February, 2014.
a germ and develop that germ in a cogent intellectual fashion that makes
demands on the intellect of the player and the interpreter. Music writers
just pile sensation upon sensation upon sensation without any sense of
development or intellect.74

The extent of Renton’s criticism shows the strength of feeling that arguments over brass
band repertoire can generate. It is also notable that he classes Sparke in the same category,
as opposed to Hindmarsh who praised Sparke’s compositions. Hindmarsh wrote that
Sparke’s musical language ‘is accessible and direct’, praising his best music as displaying
‘virtuoso compositional technique’ and stating that ‘Evolution [Five States of Change] is a
terrific piece, coming up for the Regionals this year [2015], absolutely superb’.75 Harper also
praised Sparke, and stated that he was happy to perform Sparke’s works or commission
pieces from him.76

This suggests that whilst Renton has been one of the most high-profile brass band figures in
Britain since the late twentieth century, due to his positions as a Radio 2 presenter, host of
Brass in Concert and his conducting career, he is also one of the most hard-line figures in his
views of the direction of brass band repertoire in the twenty-first century.

These three voices are certainly not alone in criticising this music, with Iwan Fox writing for
4barsrest on the selection of Meechan’s piece that:

It would be a real shame if the undoubtedly exciting, but rather insubstantial
‘Legend of King Arthur’ is the last time we hear a composition of his on a major
brass band contest stage.77

74 Frank Renton, interview by Chris Osborn, 13 January, 2016.
77 Iwan Fox, ‘2014 National Championships of Great Britain — Test Piece Review,’ 4barsrest, [11 February,
2018], http://www.4barsrest.com/articles/2014/1468.asp.
However, both 4barsrest and Hindmarsh recognise the popularity of this style of music. In their review, 4barsrest described ‘Peter Meechan’s work gaining widespread appeal’ at the contest, and Hindmarsh said that he understood why Lovatt-Cooper’s compositions were so popular amongst bands at different levels.78

He is such a clone of Hollywood, [James] Horner and, you can call him Horner Williams if you want, they’re his big things aren’t they really. And if it wasn’t on a brass band and it was on midi, I think it would, it sounds really impressive. His problem is he can’t score. He doesn’t understand the medium properly in my view. So while its superficially very impressive like Where Eagles Sing and all that, its kitsch, its rubbish. It’s just lovely exciting and if I were doing a community band now I’d be playing some of it, I wouldn’t like it79

Hindmarsh’s comments about Lovatt-Cooper’s music being a clone of Hollywood suggest one reason why the music is so popular among twenty-first-century bands: it is easily accessible light music, that is full of melodies and sounds like the music that players hear outside of their brass banding activities. The UniBrass (University Brass Band Championship of Great Britain) entertainment contest provides one example of how popular this style of music had become amongst younger members of the brass band movement in the early twenty-first century Graham and Lovatt-Cooper were by far the most popular composers and arrangers: from 2011 to 2017 of 476 pieces chosen by the bands, 44 of them were composed or arranged by Graham and 26 of them were composed by Lovatt-Cooper.80 This demonstrates not only the popularity of this style of music, but that the calls for ‘better’ contest music being made by Renton, Hindmarsh and Harper do not seem to correlate to

79 Hindmarsh, interview by Osborn, 18 February, 2014.
80 UniBrass performance data compiled by Brian Osborn from contest programmes and notes taken at the contests.
concert music (of which the programmes at entertainment contests are comprised).

However it does demonstrate that Graham’s popularity in the early twenty-first century crossed the contest and concert music divide.

The arguments about artistic integrity and artistic vision that Harper describes bring the discussion full circle, harking back to the arguments that were put forwards for creating an original brass band contesting repertoire in the first place. Although it would be almost unthinkable for twenty-first-century brass band contests to revert solely to using arrangements over original repertoire, according to some parts of the brass band movement the creation of an idiom based on original repertoire has not solved the original problem. Instead it has, at the very highest, most difficult level, replaced pieces that were lacking in artistic merit because they were transcriptions and arrangements performed out of context, with pieces that focus so much on technique that they have little or no artistic merit. Whilst this view is of course not universally held, and even its most avid proponents sing the praises of some post-1980 test pieces, it perhaps shows the knife-edge on which a competitive arts movement has to balance, especially one to which competition is so fundamental. It must maintain the competitive ethos, with which comes the drive for ever increasing standards, whilst still maintaining its artistic integrity to maintain the respect of audiences and other musical establishments and organisations.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

There have been huge changes in the brass band movement between the commissioning of the first original test piece in 1913 and the early twenty-first century, but one thing has remained constant: the importance of contesting. The test piece contest has remained one of the primary brass banding activities and completely recognisable to anybody familiar with a contest at the turn of the twentieth century.

As I come to the conclusion of this research project I will review the questions that I set out to answer and explore to what extent I have been able to answer them. My research questions, as stated at the beginning of the thesis, were:

1. What can be deduced about the technical or musical difficulty of brass band test pieces mapped against time?
2. How has competition shaped the styles of music that are composed for brass bands?
3. What impact does competition have on the brass band movement as a community?
4. How has the centrality of competition affected the brass band movement’s position within British musical culture?

This conclusion examines each step in turn and will also discuss possible further research areas that could either support my findings or further knowledge in areas I have not been able to do myself. The first question is perhaps the easiest to answer and is the one for which I have amassed the most evidence.

Throughout my research project I have identified a broad consensus across musical leaders of the brass band movement, the brass band media (both current and across my period of research) and in the secondary literature supporting the argument that technical standards
of playing in brass bands have increased. This is true from the early period of brass band
development, in the nineteenth century, as argued by Herbert, Bythell, Russell, Dennis
Taylor and Odello, through my research period and into the twenty-first. However, the
evidence I have presented strongly suggests that the rise of technical playing standards was
not confined to the period of formation and early development of the brass band
movement but continued into the late twentieth century. Indeed, it may plausibly be argued
that it is continuing today. It is beyond reasonable doubt that the technical abilities of
players, the skills required to play the notes as they are written on the score (as fast or as
high, with the marked articulation), have increased significantly over my period of study.
The evidence for this comes from all three groups of sources that I have examined. The
majority of the most frequently used test pieces show a pattern of falling section use in
contests, which suggests that players of lesser ability, performing with bands competing in
lower sections, become increasingly able to perform them to a satisfactory standard in
contests. The musical leaders who I have interviewed agree that this is at least partly due to
a significant rise in technical ability. Some of them, including Evans, Graham and Hindmarsh
specifically stated that among Championship Section bands technical standards have
continued to rise significantly, with Hindmarsh stating that this has continued to happen for
the last twenty-five years of my research period. Fernie agreed with my other interviewees,
stating that technical ability had increased across the board but especially in the higher-level
bands. The brass band media also presents evidence for this advancement in technique. As I
have discussed, this is particularly found in reports about contests for which test pieces that
have fallen in section use are selected.
It is not possible to use the evidence that I have presented to accurately measure the rate of change in technique or the extent of change to produce a single argument on the rate of change, as the rate and amount of change suggested by each source is different.

There was a division of opinion among the interviewees about the effect of the changes to technicality and musicality on brass band performances and recordings. Paul Hindmarsh stated that the best brass band recordings were made in the mid to late twentieth century, singling out Black Dyke’s *Cloudcatcher Fells* recording from 1986 as a favourite.¹ Alan Fernie also singled out one of his favourite recordings of a similar era: ‘the old legendary performance the famous one of Geoffrey Witham playing the *Carnaval Romain* with Black Dyke and Jim Shepherd being able to touch a nerve or touch a soul with the playing rather than the technique’.² Although I argue that technicality has increased, the complex relationship with musicality and artistic intention means that for many people the era in which the ‘best’ brass band recordings were made will depend on their preferences and view of the brass band idiom. It is not surprising or necessarily contradictory that there is significant evidence for a growth in technicality but much more disagreement in sources over levels of musicality. Technicality can be judged more easily, whereas musicality is more down to taste and in contests is down to the opinion of ‘one or two men in a box’.

Therefore, their musical background and sense of musicality will have a bearing on the judging of musicality much more than on the judging of technique. It could be argued that technique is performing what is written on the score and musicality is all the aspects of performance that are not written on the score. As Vic and Sheila Gammon suggest these non-written elements change over time, even in notation based musical cultures and

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¹ Hindmarsh, interview by Osborn, 18 February, 2014. See chapter 8.
² Fernie, interview by Osborn, 21 November, 2014.
therefore this could be one of the reasons that musicality shows a different set of changes over my research period than technique:

No notational system can prescribe exactly what a piece should sound like. Western notation is moderately good at prescribing pitch and timing, less good at prescribing dynamics, hopeless at describing timbre. At any time, within a defined context, there exists practical conventions which regulate how a score is to be interpreted. These change over time, and the musicians may be largely unaware of their existence. Thus even within a musical system strongly reliant on notation, there exists a residual aural tradition in which conductors, musical directors adjudicators, and music teachers play a central role.  

Whilst they were exploring the development of working class brass bands alongside a pre-existing vernacular musical culture in their chapter, this quote does describe the nature of the notational system used for test pieces and its limitations. It therefore suggests one of the possible reasons for the difference in development of musical technique and musicality.

My second research question addressed the styles of music performed at competitions and how these styles were influenced by the competitions. The dominant style of test piece has varied significantly throughout my period of research, as the brass band idiom evolved.

There are two ways in which competition has shaped the styles of test pieces. First, the power of contest organisers and promoters, especially when commissioning test pieces, has influenced the success and popularity of composers. As Hindmarsh discussed, commissioning can have a significant impact on the creation of repertoire due to the selection of a particular composer, as well as the commissioner’s artistic agenda. Secondly, contesting enforces the musical and technical requirements of a test piece on a vast swathe

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of the brass band repertoire, as pragmatic composers must meet these criteria for their music to be used as a test piece. Therefore, competition has had both a reformist and conservative influence during my period of research. Visionary individuals, starting from John Henry Iles, have influenced the style of brass band contest music by commissioning composers from both inside and outside the brass band movement to compose test pieces for contests. Seminal works including those by Fletcher, Holst, Elgar, Bliss and Vaughan Williams have been brought into the brass band contesting repertoire and in the process enhanced the artistic reputation of the brass band repertoire.

Despite all the variety in test piece styles, from *Fireworks* to *Blitz*, *Resurgam* to *Pageantry*, all these pieces share the characteristics of a test piece. They are all a similar length, they share the fixed scoring of a contesting brass band and they were all written to be challenging to Championship Section bands of their day. Despite the many changes introduced by these pieces, and others, the DNA of a test piece has remained the same throughout my period of research and is defined by the three elements outlined above. However, this reliance on form for the majority of major artistic works does not set the brass band alone in the musical world. Whilst there is significantly more variation, the orchestral world has relied on the symphony, concerto, ballet or opera for vastly longer than the brass band movement has existed. Therefore, although some composers may view the format of the test piece as artistically limiting, this is not necessarily true.

Competition has been placed at the centre of the brass band community since the mid-nineteenth century, and this is most evident in the content of the brass band media. From periodicals to websites, contesting has always been the central focus of these publications. The different aspects of contesting have generated a wide range of articles, from contest
predictions, reviews and results, to musical examinations of test pieces, reports about the
transfer of players, and lively comment sections in which contributors have discussed
contest results. As Odello noted, periodicals were vital in creating the brass band
movement, and the focus in the brass band media on contesting throughout my period of
research demonstrates the centrality of contesting to this movement. However, this is not
sufficiently recognised in the historiography.

Competition remained a consistent core theme in the brass band community despite the
major changes that took place during the twentieth century. My interviewees all spoke of
the centrality of competition throughout their time in the brass band movement, some
going as far as saying that it was the raison d’etre. This was despite their different
backgrounds and their involvement in different aspects and levels of the brass band
movement. The centrality of competition also survived the significant changes in the
demographic make up of the brass band movement during the period in which my
interviewees were actively involved.

The demographic changes that took place in the latter half of the twentieth century that
made the brass band movement more inclusive did not go nearly far enough to offset the
number of players the movement was losing. Women and children became core members
of the groups by the middle of the century but were still not accepted at the top levels until
much later. However a significant milestone was achieved by a female soloist in 2014, when
Black Dyke’s Zoe Hancock became the first player ever to win the ‘Best Instrumentalist’
award at the British Open and National Finals Championship Section in the same year.4 This
suggests that by the early twenty-first century female players were finally being recognised

as being among the best in the brass band movement, despite a distinct lack of female composers, adjudicators and conductors at the highest levels. The lack of females in these roles may be owing to the career path that most of these professionals take. Almost all brass band conductors and adjudicators start off as players. As the involvement of significant numbers of women in the brass band movement, especially at the highest levels, is a relatively recent change, there may not have been time for significant numbers of women to develop their career to a conducting or adjudicating stage. There has been no direct effect of demographic changes on standards of playing. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the very best players were a mix of male and female players of varying ages. This suggests that the demographic changes are as much a result of the changing influence of education on the brass band movement. The relationship between education and age has had much more impact on the brass band than demographic changes. The formalisation of brass band education provided opportunities for a wider range of young people to enter the higher echelons of the brass band movement than the works band system ever allowed. With such significant changes to the people who make up the brass band community and movement it could be expected that the focus and core activities might change. However, the set test piece contest has remained at the centre of brass banding activities throughout the twentieth century. For many bands it has remained one of the two core activities, alongside performing concerts for their local audience. This demonstrates the importance of competition to the brass band movement. Harper believed that competition was vital, stating that ‘I don’t think the brass band movement would exist if there weren’t competitions really’. Therefore, although some members of the brass band

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movement believe that competition creates problems for the brass band movement, as Harper and McCann detailed in interviews, it is still seen as the lynch pin which holds the whole movement together. McCann took the opposite view to Harper, believing that the brass band movement could exist without competition, and that he did not believe competition benefitted the brass band movement. For example, he stated that ‘I hate the contesting aspect of it because it becomes nearly like a sport rather than music.’

Regardless of their views on whether contesting was beneficial to the brass band movement, all my interviewees acknowledged, or emphasised, the importance of the contesting calendar as an organising force in the brass band community. Not only do banding activities revolve around contests for all competing bands, but the lives of their players do too. With the exception of a few twentieth-century works bands, as an amateur movement, members at all levels have had to organise their banding activities around their family commitments and their jobs. The level of dedication required, as described by Harper, in the weeks and months before a contest demonstrate the influence that contesting has on the lives of all members of contesting bands in the brass band community.

To answer my fourth and final research question, the brass band movement must be examined from the outside. The brass band movement has always been separate from the orchestral and professional musical worlds in Britain. Despite the crossover of some major orchestral composers to write for brass bands, the separation continued throughout my

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6 McCann, interview by Osborn, 28 September, 2017.
7 Fernie, interview by Osborn, 21 November, 2014.
period of research. The views of Reginald Nettel and Howard Snell, both quoted by Bevan, sum up the negative attitude towards the brass band movement that some professional musicians held.⁹ My interviews with Hindmarsh and Renton have provided evidence that these views continued throughout the twentieth century. The cancellation of Renton’s BBC Radio 2 show, *Listen To The Band* as this thesis was being completed further demonstrates the extent of the marginalisation of the brass band movement.

The hey-days of brass bands’ cultural importance and their draw as a leisure activity were at the start of my period of research, and in post-war Britain the days of getting tens of thousands of people to attend a brass band contest became a cherished memory not seen again. However, the brass band movement has retained its place at the pinnacle of amateur music making in Britain. Although there were significantly weaker links with professional and classical music by the early twenty-first century than there were even in the 1970s and 1980s, the very best bands could still draw significant crowds at major concert venues nationally. The time at which the links with classical music were strongest was during the interwar period when major classical composers were commissioned to write test pieces. During my interviews reasons for this not continuing into the latter twentieth century included both financial problems and different priorities from influential figures and organisations within the brass band movement. The commissioning of famous classical composers to write brass band test pieces was just one of several attempts during the twentieth century to engage brass bands with classical music and promote them to a classical audience. Other examples include performances at the BBC Proms, most notably Grimethorpe and Black Dyke Band performing in 1974 under Elgar Howarth as the first brass

⁹ Bevan, 'Art or Sport', p. 112.
bands to appear at the Proms.\textsuperscript{10} However, brass bands have never become a regular feature at the BBC Proms or indeed at any other major classical festival.

Whilst there are classical music competitions such as the Leeds and Tchaikovsky piano competitions and BBC Young Musician of the Year, these are all examples of professional development on the career path to becoming a virtuoso soloist. As brass bands compete as an ensemble and an amateur movement they are competing for pride rather than professional connections and reputation building for future contracts. Contest performances are not rehearsed and performed as pieces of art but to try and win the favour of an individual or small panel of adjudicators. The fundamental dichotomy of music as art and music as competition which lies at the heart of the brass band movement is one of the key problems that has prevented brass bands from further integration with classical music. The essential difference is that for brass bands competing and winning is the end goal rather than a step to be taken towards their professional and artistic development. This is why funding from arts organisations has been so limited compared to classical art forms such as orchestras and operas: competition is of no interest to bodies interested in artistic merit. Therefore, brass bands have never been able to unlock the same level of support and funding that classical orchestras have. Competition has remained an almost completely alien concept to classical orchestras and is not of interest to funding bodies like the Arts Council who became increasingly important as British industry declined as a source of funding. This has also increased the divide between these two types of music. Those seeking to elevate the brass band movement through association with the classical world in the second half of the twentieth century, were not able to achieve the same level of success.

\textsuperscript{10}Iwan Fox, 'Proms Aria - the Most Important Concert in Brass Band History,' 4barsrest, 18 November, 2016, http://www.4barsrest.com/articles/2014/1460.asp#.Vx1rA_krKUk.
that John Henry Iles and others achieved in the interwar years through the composition of test pieces by respected orchestral composers. Alan Fernie was among those who believed this could bring benefits to the brass band movement but that the financial cost and musical differences were too great by the late twentieth century for this to be a realistic prospect.¹¹

The divergence from classical and professional music culture is not the most significant change to affect the position of the brass band within British culture. The vast expansion in leisure activities during the twentieth century has proved far more influential. The direct threat from other forms of music making, initially dance orchestras, big bands and later rock and popular music taking away potential musicians has taken its toll throughout my entire period of research. In addition to direct competition, increases in the range of leisure activity including sports, cinema and television and other art forms decreased the pool of potential players. The increasing diversification of leisure activities had a marginalising effect on brass bands. They were pushed from the centre of musical culture towards the periphery, especially as music making became secondary to listening to recorded music with the technological advances in music recording. Duncan Bythell described the effect of recorded music on popular culture:

> When we speak of an international popular culture today, especially in music, we are likely to think of an American-dominated world whose origins lie in the gramophone record and whose current symbols are the transistor and the personal stereo. But at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a rather different European-derived musical popular culture, whose essence lay in making music rather than merely listening to it.¹²

Bythell’s argument that two major elements have changed in British and international popular culture sums up the challenges that brass bands have faced. The Americanisation of popular culture brought in new styles of music making to compete for players, and the move towards listening to, rather than making music compounded this, as people became used to consuming music as a product rather than making music as a social activity.

The marginalisation of brass bands must not be viewed in isolation and must be examined alongside the decline in player numbers and the seemingly paradoxical rise in standards of playing. When examined through the lens of competition they align to provide a coherent argument: now that brass banding is a marginalised activity, most players involved are people who really love this style of music making and therefore have a personal incentive to better their own ability, and thereby the ability of the band in which they play. When this personal motivation is combined with the competitive spirit and friendly competition against rival bands, it has created a powerful force for bettering the musical ability of the brass band movement. However, competition is partly responsible for the marginalisation of brass banding itself and the scenes from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in which whole towns celebrated successful bands as they now celebrate football wins are consigned to history. There is a significant disconnect between contesting and community activities for many bands as Alan Fernie noted ‘I mean the band does absolutely superbly, they are absolutely chuffed with it, they think it’s great and it’s been in the newspaper and everybody says “yeah that’s fine, are you playing at the Christmas Parade next week?”’, “yeah ok, we’ll be there”’.¹³ This case suggests that brass bands compete largely for themselves rather than for the support of a local community, a view supported by the

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¹³ Fernie, interview by Osborn, 21 November, 2014. See the Brass Bands in the local community section of Chapter 6 for the full quote.
continued existence of community bands despite contest audiences decreasing drastically during the second half of the twentieth century. Whilst this is not universally true, it is indicative of the relationship between brass bands and their local communities and the fact that contesting is a largely hidden, internal activity for brass bands. This disconnect between the community and competitive activities of local brass bands is a very significant change from the early twentieth century bands who competed in front of tens of thousands of people and some of which enjoyed a very supportive relationship with their local community, as depicted (and to a degree stereotyped) in *Play Up The Band!*\(^{14}\)

Despite all the problems that the brass band movement has faced during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries it must be a cause for celebration that it has survived when some other musical art forms have not. By the turn of the millennium British brass bands were at the forefront of an international brass band network and still enhancing their musical talents. Whilst losing significant numbers of players and being confined to a niche activity, the brass band movement survived as an important local musical activity in many parts of Britain with competition as part of the core activity that kept the brass band movement alive. Although it may never regain its former popularity and national cultural significance, the journey which the brass band movement has taken shows that the particular blend of music-making and competition is still alive and relevant in twenty-first-century Britain.

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\(^{14}\) Hughes, 'Play up the Band!'
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Guide to appendix 1 contest results database

The database contains the following information:

Sheet 1: List of contests & test pieces.
1. The contests list covers the years 1853-2012, where sources have been available and when the contest sections took place.
2. It includes the following information:
   a. Year
   b. Name of contest
   c. Test piece(s)
   d. Composer(s)/Arranger(s)
   e. Quotes from The British Bandsman magazine about the contest

Sheets 2-18: Contest results
1. Each sheet contains the contest results for a single contest section including:
   a. Placing
   b. Band name
   c. Conductor
   d. Draw number
2. The Contest sections are:
   a. British Open
   b. Grand Shield
   c. Senior Cup
   d. Senior Trophy
   e. Junior Shield
   f. Junior Cup
   g. Junior Trophy
   h. National Championship Section
   i. National First Section
   j. National Second Section
   k. National Third Section
   l. National Fourth Section
   m. Regional Championship Section
   n. Regional First Section
   o. Regional Second Section
   p. Regional Third Section
   q. Regional Fourth Section
3. The results cover the period 1946-2011, where sources have been available and when the contest sections took place.
Appendix 2 transcript of Peter Graham interviewed by Chris Osborn on 17 June 2014

00:25 Start of interview

CO: Just for starters can you please explain your identity within the brass band movement?

PG: Probably at this stage my involvement is as a composer and arranger. I do a little bit of conducting and adjudication but primarily I think now my role is as a conductor, composer and arranger.

00:51

CO: And you’ve composed a series of test pieces which have been used for pretty much every major contest series. Do you know which was your first test piece selected for a major contest and roughly when that was?

PG: Yes it was a piece called Dimensions which I wrote when, in my final year as a student, an undergrad at Edinburgh University, and it was actually a piece that was written partly as an exploration for me, a kind of training piece but I submitted it for a competition, the, I think it was something like the Young Welsh Composers Competition, although I’m Scottish. They opened it up to any composer and it won the competition. It was very, owed a lot to Edward Gregson’s music, Eddie Gregson’s music has been a strong influence or was a strong influence in my early years. And the piece won the competition and was taken up by a Welsh band who broadcast it
on a programme called Bandstand in the early 1980’s and Eddie Gregson was listening. He was a selector for what was at the time the Boosey and Hawkes Regionals and Nationals and he phoned me and said “can we consider this piece for the Regional Championships at the areas?”. It was published by Boosey and Hawkes and set for I think the Second Section in 1984. So that was the first test piece that was selected.

CO: So you’ve had 30 years of your test pieces...

PG: That’s right yeah, scary isn’t it.

2:42

CO: That’s quite a long period of time. Do you think, have you noticed any changes in standards of test pieces selected for different sections?

PG: I think, certainly I’ve been aware that at Championship level the standard of pieces has become increasingly more difficult testing all levels of the band. Back in those days [1984], I don’t know what the championship piece would be at that time. I remember going to contests prior to that and things like Gilbert Vinter’s Spectrum which is a great piece but now I don’t think would be considered difficult enough to really challenge the top bands. Dimensions was Second Section in the old system, it used to be Championship Section, Second Section

CO: Before the Frist Section was introduced.

PG: Yes that’s right, Third, Fourth. And subsequently I don’t know if it’s been set again for a Regional, I can’t remember, but I know it’s, it would probably be classed
as a Third or Fourth Section piece now, so that’s kind of gone down the pecking order and it seems to me that most of the pieces for that period do move down so I’m guessing you would take from that that bands have improved, but I’m not sure that’s always the case because sometimes they struggle with them.

4:11

CO: You said pieces from that period, do you think it has happened with pieces from across the whole range of twentieth century or do you think it is period specific?

PG: Probably, I wouldn’t like to pin that down on a particular period, but I would guess it’s an on going process with some exceptions. I still think there are pieces like Indian Summer, Eric Ball’s Fourth Section piece which still features occasionally in the Fourth Section, but I think probably, you know, as long have been more original pieces, from the 50’s and 60’s that’s been the case.

CO: There are some pieces, I think Pageantry is probably one of the best examples of pieces which still remain very challenging. Do you think it’s a stylistic, the content of the piece…

PG: Yeah I do. I think, and I think because, possibly because, again I mean I’m referring to the Championship, the technical level of technique which bands possess now is quite astonishing but having said that you hear stories of bands struggling with pieces you know Eric Ball for instance, stylistically being able to capture the challenges in that. So where technique has gone, rocketed, there are certain, maybe there are certain aspects of musicality which have been lost.

06:10
CO: Is the change in standard of technique, do you believe that, what do you believe are the causes of that? Is it the instruments that they are playing or...

PG: I think that you can put it down to two things. Primarily the education system that when, we were talking about Salford earlier, Salford I think was the first, or they used to claim it to be the first institution to offer tuition or a degree programme for brass band instruments, so it’s the first instance of brass band instruments being accepted within higher education. Because before that if you were a cornet player, certainly from when I was a student, I went to Edinburgh University, but even then, where I played trumpet, it wasn’t part of my degree but if I’d asked for cornet lessons they would have looked at me like I was crazy so it was, if you were a brass player you were restricted in tuition to the orchestral instruments and Salford changed that, they looked around, and it’s kind of, it’s ironic isn’t it that now that you’re looking to encourage local involvement and I think there were some forward looking people at that time who said we’re right in the middle, the heart of brass band country, we’ve got these kids all around playing with local brass bands, let’s offer them sort of progression. So I think it’s that, because through that you see, take the euphonium, you get these guys coming through, Steven Mead teaching now at the RNCM, he has done for a number of years and the euphonium players going through his studio and baritone players, and you’ve got all of the brass band instruments really being pushed. So I think a lot of it is down to that and alongside that you’ll get composers being encouraged to write, one of my ex-students, Peter Meechan was at the RNCM and didn’t really have any connection with brass bands other than to have a drink with his mate Dave Thornton who is a euphonium player
who said “why don’t you write me a piece?” because Pete was finding difficulty in getting performances I think at the time. So suddenly he gets this virtuoso brass player who is saying write me a piece and I’ll play it and I’ll play it all over the world and you see lots of instances of that so I think that also pushed, pushed technique, but I mean there will be other reasons but off the top of my head these are the two that...

08:55

CO: And if education has had a big factor on the technique of certainly the top players who have gone to university and studied these degrees, do you think that, you mentioned that some of the musicality has potentially been lost, is that down to the education of the players, the education of the conductors?

PG: You know it’s, there’s the irony that musicality, when you think about the players who were taught within the brass band, so you know a senior player would take somebody under their wing and maybe something there was lost. I mean I don’t know, and maybe we are sometimes a bit hard on the players suggesting that it’s been lost because, you know, ive heard some great players who can do it, maybe it’s just one of these things that some can and some can’t, but I don’t know, it’s, there are conductors too who can deliver it and others who don’t seem to do it well.

CO: So if technique can be taught is it, is musicality and that side of it more, do you believe you either have that or you don’t?
PG: Maybe to some extent, but also maybe, I mean and I’m, this is completely hypothetical, maybe technique has become the focus and not enough consideration has been to, when I talk to the old players who really can deliver a line, they all talk about listening to singers and listening to, you know, violinists and broader musical experiences, it may be not enough of that goes stuff, it’s hard to pin it down.

11:01

CO: You mentioned singers and violinists of course, where do you think influences on brass band music from other sources of music, classical, wind band, choral, how do you think that’s changed the brass band repertoire?

PG: In recent years?

CO: yes primarily in recent years whilst you have been composing.

PG: Well a lot of the early stuff, even Gregson to some extent, but certainly Eric Ball, Wilfred Heaton, a lot of these guys came through the Salvation Army and of course fundamental to that is hymn tunes and using a particular kind of language, but then Gregson was one of the first, I think one of the first composers to write for brass band who actually studied in a conservatoire in the university sector, Eric Ball didn’t, Eric Ball was self-taught, [Wilfred] Heaton was self-taught, Gilbert Vinter, he was a bassoon player wasn’t he, he might have studied at the Academy but I think you get this transition from self-taught composers to somebody like Gregson who was educated in the university system and exposed to a much wider range of music and being forced to listen to contemporary music in the 60’s the cutting edge stuff and
that had a bearing on how his music transformed, he’s not a modernist by any stretch of the imagination but certainly there are modernist elements within his music. So you get a composer like that and the same thing, well definitely with Phil Wilby. He was a university educated composer and very well, actually early on he was a modernist and then he sort of, to some extent turned from that but again these guys were both products of the university system. So really these are the ones I can think of, then you have Phillip Sparke who was actually, he was also trained at the Academy but he has a much lighter touch so yeah I guess it’s the, from around about the 60’s through to the present time that’s, like the players transition, that’s been the education of the composers.

13:54

CO: The age where brass bands contest using arrangements of orchestral or symphonies or operas, that kind of stuff, is long gone, but there is still a big classical influence on many test pieces. Works such as your own On the Shoulders of Giants taking inspiration from Bruckner and Phillip Wilby’s Paganini Variations obviously taking inspiration from Paganini. Where do you think the original brass band repertoire taking these classical influences, why do you think it is still so prevalent?

PG: I think mostly it’s about immediate communication. When you’re talking about test pieces they’re a kind of unique form of construction. I really see them along the lines of the kind of music a film composer would produce they’re very, they have to be functional pieces so they have to tick lots of boxes. I mean I’ve done that, I think it’s only that once I used a classical quote, I cant think of any others in my work. The reason for that one was specific, well there’s two reasons actually. Because it was
being used at, as an own choice piece by the Cory band at the Europeans it had to connect immediately with an audience so it had to be something that was, well in my view it had to be tonal and give sort of familiar vibes. But also there was a kind of picture to that in the whole piece was, what was it again? I’m trying to think of that one. Oh yeah it was about, the giants were the brass players from days gone by so the first movement was a kind of

CO: The Chicago Symphony Brass

PG: That’s right and they were long associated with that kind of German Romantic repertoire, so Mahler and Bruckner. Bruckner writes, his brass writing is fantastic and I think translates quite easily and then the other two movements in that piece also refer to, reference other brass players so that’s the reason. It was kind of a story lead that. Although the interesting thing about that one was that I had no intention of using Bruckner at the beginning. I was going to use, originally that was going to be a trumpet opening, solo trumpet and I think I was going to use Strauss and bit’s of Richard Strauss but when I talked to the conductor, and I’d already sort of primed him because he was going to borrow a player at that time, Phil Cob who is now at the LSO, he played with Cory I think the year before on flugel as a guest and I said it would be great to get him up standing, he’s a great trumpet player, he can deliver this, you know, fantastic line and then the band can follow, and pretty much a couple of weeks before the piece had to be delivered I was speaking to Bob [Childs?] about it and he said “is it ready yet?” and I said “I’m just working on this first movement with the trumpet solo”. “oh we can’t have that, we can’t have the trumpet I haven’t got, he’s not coming he’s not doing it and I don’t have any
replacement and we need to start with something that really builds confidence so is a big *tutti*’ so this was all weeks before the event so that was panic so really that’s why I went to Bruckner. I started thinking it’s got to be low brass, big sound, so it’s got to be something like, instead of the Strauss it was going to be Bruckner. But to come back to your original question, Phil Wilby I’m sure he uses, he references these pieces to connect with the audience, he always talks about the triangle, the holy trinity of composer, audience and performer and he has done that on many occasions so you will hear, I think Phil said he gives something to the audience that they relate to and then he might push them a bit with some modernist stuff. There is that sort of conflict going on all of the time.

18:17

CO: A lot of your pieces, even the ones that aren’t test pieces, do tend to take inspiration from a certain person, piece of music, that sort of thing. You’ve got *Cat’s Tales* which takes a whole load of different inspirations from different pieces, and several other. Why, is it again about communication? Selecting those...

PG: I think so yeah, but they are always, I mean you know that you can pin a story on something but the music, there is a famous story about *Kennilworth* and Sir Arthur Bliss, you know it had all of these various sections about these great castles, but he actually put the label on it later, the music was written so it could really refer to anything in some ways and I think it is the same with a lot of pieces, you come up with the piece and then the idea of the story will follow. I’ve just finished a piece which the National Youth Band did called *Metropolis 1927* and I’d actually written the music and I was really struggling for a title and something to give it, the music
was all there, but I was, I really couldn’t get a handle on what this was saying and it just hit me in the car, the same journey as I’ve made tonight on the way I was writing it in [can’t tell what he says], and I just thought about this film and everything, all of the elements that I had in the piece which are the sort of dark moments and the “religioso” modal stuff, there are a lot of jazz elements, all of these appear in the movie so suddenly I was like, couldn’t believe it, it all started to come into focus. So the band played it and, the Youth Band played it and it all made complete sense but that title was just, it was just luck really but it, it’s partly that, it’s partly about communication. *Cat’s Tales* was because that was commissioned by an septet or an octet and the girl who commissioned it, she lead the group, she loves cats, and said can you write a piece about cats. So I actually started writing a piece looking at the tiger, and you know these different types of cats and I thought this is just so naff and then I thought, you know playing on the words cats, I lived in New York for three years and in those days you got, it was, they all had this particular sort of language, you talk about cool cats and jazz cats and then it stuck me, I could transfer that so cats has a different meaning. So it’s all about a combination of connecting with audiences and also something that will fit the music. That’s why when you were talking about, you suggested Hylton I thought this is a godsend because that’s the most difficult thing is to get the story and something to hang it on. After that that pretty much all fell into place. So that’s it, communication and luck.

21:30

CO: What do, the contesting nature of the brass band is obviously very different to a lot of musical genres, even very different to ones like wind bands, it’s still a very
different form of competing. What effect do you think that has on the brass band repertoire?

PG: Actually when you started saying that, that’s another reason for the, one of the main reasons for the amazing technical ability of bands, competition, is often cited as being that. In terms of repertoire, certainly I think there is an attraction for composers to write test pieces, it’s become, I mean even when I was, when I started writing the golden aim, the aim was I want to write a test piece and have it played in the albert hall. That was the ultimate because you have all of these bands playing the same piece. So maybe it’s, it’s an attraction to a lot of composers to have that luxury of making sure that you write a piece and it doesn’t disappear it actually gets performance in a competition and also in some fantastic venues and of course students of mine, they see that they see you writing a test piece and then if you’re lucky it gets taken up, it might be written for a specific event, but it gets taken up all over the world, so you’ll see pieces being played in New Zealand, Australia, Scandinavia, so there is a real attraction or composers.

CO: Does it create duality in brass band repertoire? A divide between pieces that are, compare test pieces and the pieces that are concert items and everything else?

PG: Yeah I think it does and whether that’s down to the bands spending much more time rehearsing this one piece of music than they will for concerts. I couldn’t believe, I started working at Black Dyke, I was associate conductor for a while, and you know they literally will spend weeks and weeks on a test piece for whichever competition. They’ll break it right down, they’ll go to sectional rehearsals and then their conductor says “can you do this concert?” in where ever it was, in fact it was a
weekend of concerts, the first thing I ever did with them. It was a *Friday Night is Music Night*, a live broadcast, that was the first one, on the Saturday we were doing a concert in Bradford, a full night two hour concert and I think there was even something on the Sunday. So he said, “I’ll give you, you can have a rehearsal.” So it was one rehearsal for these three concerts. I mean all that music was duplicated with some tweaks but I thought god you’re offering me two hours to do, pretty much, not hundreds of pieces but you’ll spend weeks and weeks on one test piece. So maybe that, there is that in the players’ minds a divide between the test pieces and they often wont play these on concerts either, unless it’s a more serious type of concert.

25:00

CO: Do you think that that duality then means that, do test pieces present a true representation and performances at contests provide a true representation of the ability and musical standards of the brass band movement?

PG: That’s a, well, all you can do is you can listen to the bands perform these situations and. What I do hear is, this isn’t the case with all bands, but I do hear about bands who will present a fantastic performance at the Albert Hall or wherever and people will go the next week to hear them in concert thinking this is, you know, the champion band finding that they’ve got half the band are deps, they’ve got a different conductor, and they just sort of do the routine and go through the repertoire, so in some instances it does give a false impression of the standard but for some bands, we talked about Black Dyke, I know that they are pretty consistent with, I mean they’ll still have to bring in deps occasionally but they have the, I think
of all the bands they seem to be the most stable and they try to maintain the, you know, the band which presents on the contest stage will pretty much be the same band who will deliver the concert the next week. And they unusually are a band who will put on a test piece. I did a piece with them for the Europeans, an own choice and they’ve already scheduled it, they played it in a concert in Germany, I mean this is a tough thing but, they’ve scheduled it for a concert, they are doing a concert in Switzerland which is a , it’s not what you would call a serious tough concert, most of it will be light music but they will slot this piece in as well.

CO: What piece is it sorry?

PG: It’s called *The Triumph of Time* and it’s a very tough piece to bring off and calls for six percussion for instance, that’s one of the things, your bands percussion section for instance will get everybody on board for the competition but then they’re not really going to carry six percussionists around with them for concerts.

CO: No because three of them will be sat around twiddling their thumbs.

PG: Yeah, for the rest of the evening, yeah.

27:35

CO: And finally, you’ve mentioned a lot about the top bands, and the fact that a lot of them are obviously university educated players, do you think, have you noticed a divide between the top bands in terms of standards are they pulling away from the rest of the movement or are they, is there still a fairly even spread between...
PG: No I think there is definitely a kind of champions league and we are only talking about a handful of bands.

CO: So we are definitely aren’t talking about all of the Championship Section

PG: No

CO: You’re talking roughly how many?

PG: Well I think it’s maybe half a dozen, no more than that, that’s off the top of my head I mean if I was to think about the bands I would class as real superb bands, Cory, Brighouse, Black Dyke, Fodens. Now after that who are we looking at? I mean Leyland is a good band, Fairey, Tredegar of course,

CO: Grimethorpe?

PG: Grimethorpe, erm I’d probably need to see a list and pick them out.

CO: So no more than, even at the British Open or the National Finals you’re only going to have no more than half of the bands in that...

PG: Yeah, well the British Open is generally recognised to be the toughest domestic competition. I think the European now is by far the toughest competition, but, so you’d have to look at the line up at the Open and definitely there will be a gulf, and I think the same bands, I mean sometimes you get lucky and bands will deliver a great performance, I mean Yorkshire, the Yorkshire Area, Carlton Main is a very fine band, they won the Yorkshire Area, Rothwell, Marsden even, but most of the time you are looking at a real champions league...

CO: What do you think causes that champions league to exist?
PG: I think it’s down to, maybe it’s a financial thing that these bands have a tradition of funding from, you know, whatever source and they try to, it’s not always been the case because look at a band like YBS which was just unbeatable in the early part, from 2000 on but the funding dropped off and all the players scattered, I mean there was nothing else to it but the money disappeared.

CO: They instantly dropped down didn’t they?

PG: Because the bands, they, to entice the best players you have to offer money, it’s not, we call it an amateur movement but it’s not really at that level because you’re not going to get the best players if you’re not going to be able to offer them some kind of incentive and that can vary, you know, form a full time salary almost, I think, to really decent expenses. So I think it’s financial, if there is money around you’ll see a band just take off. I mean Brighouse is an interesting case in point, they’ve had loads of money over the years because they invested wisely, you know that whole thing they did in the 70’s,

CO: Floral Dance

PG: Floral Dance, and banked all of that money but I hear now that they are really spending big and how long that can continue I don’t know, but there is a recognition because I know the conductor of Brighouse very well, that if you want to win the competitions you are going to have to get the best players, there is no point, you can have the best conductor in the world but if you don’t have the key players you aren’t going to win and if you haven’t got the money to attract the key players you aren’t going to get the key players. So I think a lot of it is to do with money and income.
Some of the bands, you know they’re fortunate. Brighouse have investments, Grimethorpe get decent sponsorship, I think Cory used to get fantastic sponsorship, probably not so much now but still enough to keep them going. Black Dyke had great sponsorship but now really are having to work very hard, I don’t think there is a busier band in the country. They’re doing concerts, I mean they have a sheet telling you how many engagements, it’s absolutely insane, it’s like 50 a year, so it almost equates to one a week and these are big paying jobs so that’s the way they maintain the funding, it’s just the earnings isn’t it.

32:40 end of interview.
Richard Evans: So my identity of course I’m Richard Evans. Within the brass band movement well obviously I’ve done a lot of MDing [musical directing]. I started off when I was in Devon which was about 1940 something and I’ve just build myself. I’ve played a lot with pretty good bands. I finished up with, the last band I played with was Black Dyke. Then I came back and played a little bit with Leyland. No really the last band I played with was Black Dyke. I had two years there and since then I’ve hung the trumpet up and conducted and I’ve conducted throughout. My biggest chance was 1975 when I was given the chance of conducting Wingates Temperance band as it was called then and I was very lucky that I won the British Open in ’75, my first attempt at conducting there, I’d played there before.

CO: And the test piece for that was *Fireworks*

RE: *Fireworks* by Elgar Howarth. I was only talking to Elgar Howarth a few weeks ago. In fact he came to the summer school and it was ironic that they wanted to do interviews there with our guests and we sat together and all these delegates were looking down and I interviewed him for about an hour and he looked at me and said “it’s funny isn’t it 1975 when I’d written *Fireworks* and you conducted and won it, it...
really put the both of us on the map a bit.” and it did, it really did. And ironically he said, I said what are your favourite pieces that you’ve written?, and he said “well obviously Fireworks is one of them but the one I really like very much but it wasn’t accepted was Songs for B.L.” Have you ever come across it?

00:02:10

CO: I don’t know it very well, no.

RE: No. It’s quite interesting because at that time my BNFL band we used to have something like 4 or 5 weeks break in the summer. And we always, the final rehearsal before we had the break I always used to run the British Open piece and the National Finals piece and those were the two pieces I used to run through because we were sight reading them and then we would go off for 4 or 5 week holiday and come back, well break from the band, and then come back and start working on them. And I said “right we’ll get the British Open piece” and that was Revelation by Philip Wilby. Quite different cos we had to do some...

CO: yes

RE: choreography and move about. But generally we found this is going to be interesting working on this. And then “right get the next one out.” Songs for B.L. Well I have the greatest respect for Elgar Howarth and always will have because he’s a brilliant musician and brilliant conductor. He can conduct two in that hand and three in that hand at the same time. So you know that’s hard.

CO: yes

RE: And we got the piece out and it really was, oh this is rude to say, but almost like a Mickey Mouse piece. The trombones at one time were just giggling away and he said “its Tom and Jerry music this, Mr Evans.” Anyway we all were giggling and laughing and then at the end of it Alan Wycherley stood up, he said “just to let you know gentlemen”, cos we hadn’t got girls in the band at that time, “gentlemen, we have to play this at the Royal Albert Hall.” and it sobered everybody up. So I said “right off we go, thankyou, have a good holiday and come back soon” and there was a small queue of three players. One was a trombone player, one of the trombone players and he said “I’ll play at London Mr Evans but I’m not coming to any rehearsals.”

00:04:11

CO: Why?
RE: There was a Bb bass player said “I’m leaving after London. I’m not playing this SH one T” he said. And my second cornet player said “yeah I’m finishing after that, this is not, I’ve not joined banding to play this.” So I fully understand, understood what they were saying. So I didn’t, I never ever criticised Elgar Howarth or the piece that way. I didn’t criticise it how it was, how he’d written, but I criticised the person or the people who chose it. I said “this piece has been badly chosen by the panel who choses music to play in the Albert Hall.” I said “it won’t be popular with the crowd” and Elgar Howarth must have picked this up and thought I was having a personal attack on him. We didn’t speak for two years and then in fact he threw his toys out of the pram. He let me have an arrangement of, well his arrangement of the Harry James concerto for Trumpet for Russell Gray and I found out that he had heard a Scottish youth band playing it on the radio. He assumed I’d loaned this to Simon Curwin but Simon Curwin had done a rogue arrangement he sent this nasty letter saying “I will have it back.” So I said to the librarian “just post it back to him”. And I said “don’t put anything in because I didn’t want him...”. And so we had to go, for the company we went to Korea and Japan. And I said “right we never looked at this piece” and when we got back it was only a week to go. And we were in Korea and it was like, I said “right get that piece out. We’ve got today off and we’ll practice this” after 20 minutes, it was so hot and nobody wanted do ti it, I said “oh forget it. We’ll not bother”. We got back home and we had one rehearsal, and we were 5th. We were fifth!

CO: fifth!

RE: We had a heck of a band though.

CO: yeah

RE: And apparently in the middle of the performance Garry Howarth had turned to somebody in the box and said “for a band who don’t like it, their giving it a damned good stab at”, something like that. So yeah.

00:06:42

CO: the box was clearly doing its work then.

RE: Yeah it was.

CO: You mentioned choice of test piece there,

RE: Yes

CO: and how important that is. What do you think is the most important factor when considering a test piece for a contest?
RE: Well I’m on the panel, you know, to choose music. I’ve got to admit that within this panel that is promoted by Capital Promotions, Philip Morris comes in the meetings, number one, take the Albert Hall, number one I think it costs him over £40,000. Whatever you say but there is a commercial venture there.

CO: Yes

RE: So commercially it has to be considered. After, you know there was a bit of controversy in the group. We met in the BBC, Paul Hindmarsh was on the group there and all day we chatted about the pieces and it came to thinking about the London piece and rather amazingly he didn’t say anything, we were saying “right what about this piece? What about that piece? I don’t know”. We hadn’t really come to any sort of decision and when I got home Alan Hope who was the secretary there because he is very close to Philip Morris, he said then “right what we’ve decided” he said “you’re not going to believe me but I’m going to tell you.” I said “what?” he said “Paul Hindmarsh has just rung me to say he’d forgotten” now all day we were there and forgotten to tell me, “I’ve given John Pickard the commission for the piece for London” and we went “what?” and John Maines, I’ve forget who, oh Brian Buckley and me. So I said well “I’m totally against that so we don’t want it.” And John Maines said the same and I think Brian said the same. So then he whinges back, he said “I told him and I’ve signed a contract and he’s going to sue me.” We all said “well let him sue you.”

CO: yeah?

RE: “We’ve not said anything.” And in the end because nobody would benefit we said “ok we’ll go along with it but you must fall on your sword.” And that’s why he left the group. So, did you hear Eden at all?

CO: I’ve heard it yes.

RE: Ok, a fair old test, we got distinct instruction to make sure you choose a piece the audience will like so we went straight to an oldy, Judges Of The Secret Court. Oh the outcry, a lot of it came Paul Hindmarsh, he said “outdated, a very poor arrangement, awful, one of his poorest pieces.” I thinking “I’m sorry but I thought it was fabulous especially when it was in London in ’61 or something like that” and we found out that when it was performed Philip Morris said “you know we had 4000 people in nearly all day long.” That was one of the best, and that, so therefore commercially you’ve got to think about that because if he had had a poor attendance we might have been playing in Fulham Town Hall next year. So that’s number one in my opinion. Ok yeah, you have to stretch the bands, this is where I’m not, I don’t think I’m in the majority. Howard Snell said to Eikanger [Norwegian band] one European year when they were in, he wanted to play Resurgam for their own choice. Now the look on your face again...

CO: It’s not the most challenging test piece notes wise.
00:11:07

RE: No, I know what you mean, you’re talking technically.

CO: Yes, musicality it’s a different ball game.

RE: So I think I would have been on the side of the band because they said “oh no we’re not playing that, no it’s not challenging enough.” So it depends on what you think is challenging you see and this is where in my opinion we are losing the direction because I was in the Royal Northern [College of Music] last Tuesday, I do a repertoire class now and then, perhaps a couple of times a term. I got Pageantry out, they couldn’t play it, they just couldn’t. They didn’t know how to play it. Then I got Salute To Youth, they struggled with that. I got the Vaughan Williams Variations [For Brass Band], have you ever played that?

CO: No I haven’t played it myself.

RE: It’s the only piece we’ve [the brass band movement] that he wrote, thankfully. Well you know Tommy Beecham, Thomas Beecham was conducting his fourth symphony. He hated it. He hated Vaughan Williams he said “he’s never written a tune in his life” you know and all that, “he steals folk tunes” and all that and it’s right in a way. It goes on a bit that fourth symphony and he’s conducting away and the leader leans forwards with his bow and taps on him, “yes?” he said, “Sir Thomas, the music’s stopped.” And he said “oh so it has.” What a line that is hey? You’ve got to be brave to be able to do that. And He’d been going on for about…and the orchestra is like “what’s he conducting for? We’ve stopped, it’s the last note.” Fabulous, he did it obviously on purpose, “oh so it has” he said. Yeah so, right. The other difficulty I think in choosing, it’s good to pick the top section and the fourth section. It gets more difficult when you close in because we’ve such a varied standard of ability in our bands throughout the country. Some bands, I was going to say Scotland, but take one of the weakest areas, I would say, well I thought it was the South East but it’s not. The weakest area is in the North, that’s in Darlington.

CO: Well that’s a section dominated by...

RE: Ever Ready?

CO: yeah for donkey’s years.

RE: yeah, and I conducted them the day I came back from, 1st November, because Brian Tate, Brian was principle cornet for 30 years and then he played he played with Brighouse and I knew him then. I’ve known him a long long time and he died of cancer. And Philip his son said “will you come and conduct this band?” I said “I’m on a cruise.” We got home Friday and I had to drive 3 hours up there to do it. So they’re not a good band, and I know for a fact because I conducted Barton Town band and I brought them right up, they went to London but very poor. Then you see you get bands in Yorkshire and in, actually in Wales and in the North West and they want...
something, their first section bands want something really to bite into so that’s the problem.

14:34

You say so how do we choose them? So we listen them, we don’t want to be accused of not progressing because if it was me I’d pick that, I’d go back all the time, I’m a great traditionalist. I honestly think, Geoff Whitham and I used to argue, “now lad” he said, “they’re not as good as we were” I said “oh come on Geoff, some of the stuff they’re playing now, I couldn’t get near that.” “oh I’m not talking about that lad, music.” He’s right and I think one of the things that’s sadly missing is these weekend slow melody contests. We used to do them every weekend, Maurice and I used to do them every weekend and that used...

Tilson (?) Thomas was in Vienna with Bowsfield, he told me this, Bowsfield, Tilson Thomas said “tell me then why is it Murphy, every music we get out at the LSO, every music, every style he knows, he just picks his trumpet up and he changes style. How does he do that?” he said “well he’s a genius anyway,” but he said, “he went to slow melody contests every week.” “What are those” he said. When he explained to him he said “what a good idea.”

So I honestly think that. But we’ve got to be, this year, again, we’re fully aware that we’re losing bands like mad, it’s not fashionable.

16:15

CO: Do you think that’s getting worse now?

RE: Oh yes

CO: Are bands going at a faster rate now than they have been?

RE: Of definitely, in my opinion. And also I’m sure I read something from Yamaha, somebody from Yamaha said there’ll be no brass bands in 50 years time. Now I don’t think that because you’ll always have grass roots bands, like village bands playing at Remembrance Day.

CO: Do you think the top end of banding will still always be there?

RE: Well in my opinion there are only two bands about now and that’s Cory’s and Black Dyke and they are streets ahead of the others now. Really streets ahead.

CO: But that’s not always, in the last few years, been represented in contest results, has it?

RE: No, no, Tredegar came up and are still pretty good. Fairey’s are building a band a bit now, Foden’s are always going to be about but then, this is what scares me. Like
you I’m concerned about this top end of the band, but that’s not banding. It needs to be but you see, you’ve got this massive pool of brass players down there and if they can play a test piece they don’t aspire to go any higher. Now there’s your bedrock of banding and we don’t seem to look after them because they don’t need looking after, they look after themselves. In a way it’s concerning because associations have disappeared and it’s all down to apathy. It really is. It’s awful to say and I’m not a grumpy old man but I’ve had the best of banding, by far. You know some of my older friends couldn’t go banding now, and I struggle sometimes. I go to bands like Brighouse and there are four empty chairs, Leyland is never a full band and its life today has so many commitments. Now, alright they say employment is improving but you still need to look after your job. You can’t say, my horn player bless him, he died of cancer some time ago, his boss came to him and said I need “you to work so and so”, “oh he said I can’t work then” “Why not” he said “it’s the British Open, Free Trade Hall in Manchester”. He said “I was waiting for my boss to say you’re going to have to choose between your band and your job.” He said “I would have chosen my band” but that’s gone, it’s not there anymore, so people are aware.

Last night was my last rehearsal for Brass in Concert because tomorrow I’m going down to the worshipful company dinner, Friday we’re going up to Durham, did you know there are 7 of us going up to Durham University band from Leyland and doing a seminar with them on Saturday and the bands coming up to Brass in Concert. So they’re running the programme through on Thursday, they’ve got a concert with Hugh Thomas, and I’ll be playing it again on Saturday but last night there were only two percussionists instead of four, the bass trombone wasn’t there and there was somebody else missing, the assistant principle missing and I won’t see them until Saturday now. That’s what’s happening where ever I go. I’m going and there’s not a full band and it’s the norm so there’s no use bemoaning the fact because I understand. I understand that’s going to be how it is but you can’t rehearse an empty chair can you. And it affects psychologically the outlook of the band.

20:57

CO: Does that lead to a change? We’ve talked about technique versus musicality and technique is obviously something you can go and practice on your own but musically building a band, is that something that is affected by these empty chairs?

RE: Yes of course because what you find yourself doing, I’ve found myself and you must find this, you rehearse this bit with two people missing now when they come you’ve got to do it again for these two people and it just chips away at it. Now when you’ve got a band like Cory’s and Black Dyke they’ve got money, well I don’t think Cory’s have got that much but they’ve got this power thing going, and they did have lots of money. Dyke of course pay their players so you play second cornet at Dyke and you go and see Nick [Childs] and you say “look I’ve got to be in China that day” and that’s alright providing you make sure there is a dep there and you get a dep in and that’s part of the contract. So you've got a dep in and he’s got a full band every time. And that works so it’s a more professional outlook and it is professional almost because they’re out nearly every weekend, I think were they in Sweden or
something yesterday? They’re all over the place. Leyland is a good band but they’ve very little money. Money’s gone now. The time when I had BNFL, I got the tick from BNFL, we’d been fourteen years with Leyland and then Leyland DAF actually and they sent for me and they said look we’re having the receivers coming in soon, get out. When he said that to me I said “oh well...” he said “well I’ve had somebody looking for another sponsor for you for many months”, I said “what a pity”, I liked the man but I said “why didn’t you let me know? I’d have had a better chance.” He said “no you’re going to finish at Christmas.” I said “that’s too soon, it’s about three weeks, I can’t find anyone.” “Look” I said “I’ve got so much in the bank account, it’ll run me till March, will you let me have another 3 months?” “yeah ok he said” so I went in front of the band and I said look, told them all. I said “I’m fairly confident, I’ve got quite a few contacts I know, I’m fairly confident I can get sponsorship. But” I said, “I’m looking at you. You know this is a great band, if anyone leaves the band, I will be second. I can sell you the way you are but say if you went...” because I know Foden’s came looking after Wycherley, they were like vultures waiting. I said “promise we’ll all keep together because I’ll get on with it now, I’ve got plenty of people to go and see. But if one of you leaves I will be the second one” and we would have gone then and bless them they didn’t. They didn’t move. I was teaching a lad trumpet, he was having a lesson and he said “our managing director is a clarinet player you know.” I said “what? A clarinet player? What’s his name?” “John Smith”, that’s a good one isn’t it, “at Springfield, at BNFL, just outside Preston.” So I said “get me some numbers” he got me the numbers and I got to his secretary. I said “I would like to invite the managing director and his wife to come to a concert in the Guildhall, Preston, with the [Band of the Royal] Marines and Leyland Band and he came. I delegated one of the guys at the interval to go straight to pick him up, him and his wife, and take him to the reception. He said as they were walking back he was in front of them and he heard his wife say “ooh isn’t it lovely? Can we sponsor this band?” He was going “Oh yeah come on!” The directors of Leyland were there as well and they had a lovely reception after and they said “Mr Smith you know why you’re here don’t you.” And he came up to me and he said “right”, we were dining very close to each other, and he said “right, come and see me next week.” I went to see him and I had CDs and all sorts, and I walked into his door and he said “you don’t need to play me anything, I know what you want and I want it. All I’ve got to do is convince the CEO.” He was called Neville Chamberlain. He said “He’s coming to our plant tomorrow so when we’re walking I’ll talk to him. He rang me up and he said “Neville is quite interested in it, I’ll furnish him with more details and you and I are going to meet him down in Warrington, Risley.” I remember band practice was that night so I said to Wycherley, because he was like assistant conductor, I said “I’m going to this meeting at Risley, don’t know how long I’ll be but if I’m not back just start conducting.” And I sat in this office and Neville didn’t come in but his senior director was there, it was always his directors, and he said “Right I’ve got things gentlemen”, he said “the chairman, the CEO thinks its expensive but he wants to sponsor this brass band for five years at one hundred thousand pounds a year.”

CO: What?
RE: I know, that’s what we got. And I got it up actually. I got it up to one hundred and twenty.

CO: One hundred and twenty thousand a year?

RE: A year.

27:50

CO: For what in return?

RE: To sponsor the band, that’s all. That’s it. Running costs. It’s very very sad but there was a general election coming up, round about ninety seven, nineteen ninety seven something like that, and I think the edit went out that there was a new CEO coming in, and the edit went out that tidy the company up ready for privatisation so the band. They didn’t just do that, but I got very close to the directors, I mean it was “Richard” and so on. David, david somebody was like marketing director, “David” I said, “we’re got five years with ninety two to ninety seven. I’m getting inquiries for 1998, 1999, 2000.” “Take them” he said. Take them. And then this came along and they virtually went. Of course nothing happened, they wanted us back but it was too late then, I’d jumped into somebody else’s bed. I’d jumped into David Whelan because I knew him. David wanted them. We played in the same Wigan boys club band when we were lads. But god it was hard work, evil man. It was like being in bed with a scorpion, you never know when the tail was coming over to kill you. And he kept poking me in the chest and saying I want to sponsor you. He wasn’t bothered about the band, he said “I want to sponsor you because I know the band will follow you.” And I said “Well David I couln’t have your sponsorship without somebody like Tony Lentwith (?)”, that was his best pal and a friend of mine, he was a doctor, he was the main man at Pilkingtons development section. This John Smith was with me and he was driving me, you see I had left my car at Charnock Richard and he said “stop talking David” he said, “Richard wants me, we’re having the band so let’s agree, I’ll deal a lot with Richard.” And he did, he was so helpful. The only trouble was his wife wanted to be band manager. She knew nothing about it. And so she had Friends of BNFL Band and she took over. We had an office, I just went one or two days a week to this place right near, outside the main gate of Springfield. Next time I went, all the union people were there, next time I went she’d got rid of them, stuck them on the ground floor in two little rooms and we were in the third little room upstairs. She’d ring me up and say “can you come down?” and I’d say “why Margaret?” “well I want to know what you want me to do today.” I said well “you’re running the friends, that’s separate.” And she got James Gourlay, the flute player, Gourlay isn’t it?

CO: Yes.

RE: And he was one of the friends, she made things happen but what I didn’t realise, they were skimming money off to pay for the band and she was saying “oh we’ll need fourteen thousand pounds for the band this year.” She was making little bears
with BNFL band on or something. He kept ringing me and he was a good mate, he rang me and said “Richard”, we went to his house for dinner a few times, he said “you’d be wise, you know, to let Margaret be band manager.” I said “John, she doesn’t know anything about banding.” And it was building up and building up and building up and next thing a memo comes up, you’ve got to go to one of these American style planning meetings, leadership and that. Have you been to them? You fill forms in. He paid out, twelve hundred quid it cost. I got some, one or two people in the band, band manager, my secretary, and they’re all sat there at the Bartle hall or something. We had a lovely lunch and that. And it went on and on and on. Then about four o’clock she stood up with tears streaming down “I couldn’t work with that man any minute more.” That was it. Well I thought I’ve upset the fan now and I was in this place, and of course all the union people knew what was going on and a director came and said “can I have a word.” Well we were mates, I was mates with all of the directors. He said “come on, we’ll walk outside.” This sounds ominous. He said “can you find anywhere else? Another office? No he said not on this site, somewhere else.” And he said “I shouldn’t tell you this but John Smith has told me I’ve to get rid of you.” I mean we aren’t talking about shooting. And he said “so most of us don’t want that to happen anyway, but we’ve got to be careful. So just watch your back.” I went in next week, my secretary and I, and on my door there was a big sign that said “don’t fuck with the band.” And as we got there the people from the union came out and said “bloody hell, how did you do that?” I said “what?” He was summoned down to Warrington and he was asked to put his car keys out and dismissed, summarily dismissed. But they didn’t dismiss him totally. Apparently he’d been pulled over at board meetings and said “can you get your wife under control.” And he said no. But anyway he finished in America. Funnily enough we had a trip over with him. I never saw his wife again. And we were ok so everything was alright. And as I say we went over to America about four times, Japan a couple of times, Korea. We’d never been to Korea before, that was a bit… And on the continent, we used to do gigs and it was great. Again with John Smith’s help, he said “can you come down for an hour, and have dinner?” They’d asked for a business plan and I’m not into business plans so it’s sort of cross that... but don’t forget one hundred thousand pounds. Put twenty on there he said, “why?”. This was before, “if you get Margaret to be your band manager she’ll need twenty thousand for salary.” I thought oh this is naughty. I went home and I submitted this plan and I had to go down again a week after, one of the finance directors I think saw me and he said “well Richard I’ve got to say that’ the best business plan I’ve ever read.” And I’m thinking my... so in a way providing your face fits you can get away with anything. I could have pushed that, and I got a Ford Mondeo for nothing you know, I didn’t have to pay for it, that was on top of my salary.

36:20

CO: All this talk of money, what does this mean for brass bands as an amateur movement?

RE: In fact we were right up in Scotland last week. Kingdom band, two bands have done this, Kingdom band in Scotland.
CO: Is that Aberdeen?

RE: No it’s not as far up as that. Kingdom and I think it’s Dunfermline or somewhere like that. It’s not as far as that, that’s Bon Accord.

CO: Yes.

RE: And they actually put the band room up for sale. They were short of money and it was an asset so they were selling it. I think it was something silly like fourteen thousand or something. Tesco and Morrissons got in a war over it and they got two hundred and eighty thousand pounds for it. And then they decided what they wanted to do was, they wanted a good band so they said “we’ll bring pros in” and that’s what they did for a few years, the Belgium people and that, coming in for a week, two thousand quid. This is an example of how people wasted money that way. Now I spoke with Linda Nicholson not long ago. I said “are you rehearsing?” “I’m rehearsing Kingdom.” Oh I said “I’m rehearsing Dalmellington.” She said “I bet you get better rehearsals than me.” I said “damn well, it’s wonderful, it’s a full band every time.” She said “I’ll be lucky if I’ve twelve people there.” So that’s how it’s destroyed that band. I don’t know how on earth they do this thing, look at Desford. That Peter Smith, he’s crook but, they just buy a band in. Well that’s not banding. That’s not banding.

CO: No.

RE: Ok what I did, it was just for BNFL band, so I made sure that everybody had a retainer. They were paid. They weren’t paid very much but they were paid. That’ the reason one hundred thousand doesn’t go a long way you know.

CO: No, when there’s twenty eight players.

RE: It’s not a lot. And Nick Childs has always said, I never even thought of it, he calls me the million pound bandsman, no the million pound brass bands man. Yeah, because he reckons I’ve brought one million pounds into brass banding for sponsorship and I suppose I have. Because I’ve got over half a million then.

CO: just in one five year chunk.

RE: Just in five years. And before that I had Leyland Vehicles, Leyland DAF for fourteen years, so yeah. And I never thought about that because money goes. But it bothers me, the future bothers me because bands struggle to keep lights on.

CO: There are plenty of examples of as soon as funding goes that’s it. I think YBS might be the most spectacular example.

RE: Yes that really was yes. And David, he did that, he’s done that at Brighouse because all of a sudden Brighouse, being tight there are about twenty people on the
committee “five pound for that? No we’re not paying that”, you know. So they must have funds because they had, talking aside about Floral Dance, they must have had six figures out of that, but of course they lock it away that. But they had, I don’t know whether you knew, they had a block of a building.

CO: Yes

RE: With all shops, and they’ve sold that, so they must have some sort of an investment plan there. But I did pick up that two accountants had said to the trustees or the committee if you keep haemorrhaging money at the rate you are doing you’ll be broke in two year’s time. Because David’s [King] not cheap.

CO: Especially when he is based on the other side of the world.

RE: Well yeah but the lad from Leyland, trombone player Danny Brook, they got him to go over there and it was fifty pound a rehearsal and fifty pound a job. That soon adds up and that’s just him. What about David Thornton. I managed to persuade David to come to Leyland just, I was trying to resurrect it a bit because it was like doldrums and I pulled on some favours, some guys who had been in the band, and had left and I got them all to come, and I got them down. The big coup was David, David Thornton. I said “look we can’t offer you money but we will support you, we can offer you, you can be the assistant conductor and I’ll back off a few times so” and he’s busy playing solos anyway. So listen, he said “yeah I like the idea” and that’s a great coup because he’s a fabulous player. And three weeks later Pam and I were at Lake Garda at Limone, lovely. We’d just finished about a three hour lunch and limonchello, fabulous and the sun was shining and the phone went. And it was David Thornton. I thought hello what’s this? Er…er… “spit it out David come on” he said “well er…Brighouse have offered me…live changing money.” I said “oh right ok. I’m on my holiday so thanks for spoiling that. It sounds like it’s a fait accompli and I can’t change that so good luck.” And I switched the phone off. So if he said that, life changing money and Stewart Linguard is the band manager, that’s how they’d managed to pay him. So there is money going out of there. Again, its awful to say it but who are the best football teams? The ones who spend money. It’s the way of the world. And its lovely to have this loyalty which is a bit rare isn’t it.

CO: Do you think any of the top bands rely more on loyalty than money?

RE:P I would say the only band that does that is Foden’s because it’s like a family band, it really is. Then again they keep changing, they have to change.

CO: Their principles have been in seat for years.

RE: That’s right you’ve got somebody like Mark Wilkinson who’s been there for twenty two years so, then you go to Fareys and they’ve got somebody like Jimmy Leggat and Brian Taylor. Brian Taylor has been there fifty, sixty, a long time so then again you look round, I took Farey’s for a while and you look round and there’s only
a few I can recognise so that’s changing. This business about being in a band all your life, you go down to your fourth section bands, that’s where you’ll see them.

CO: So the top sections of the movement are almost a professional outfit now?

RE: But how many are there? You see Chris, if we got a piece of paper, write the ten top bands, you’ll get to five or six and then you’ll start scratching your head. Does CWS Glasgow or Funeralcare, do they come into it? You’ll get down to five, six, seven, you’ll pick the next three and you won’t, well we won’t agree.

44:45

CO: Who are your top ten?

RE: Well at the moment I think Dyke, I heard Dyke at the Open and they were unbeatable I thought, it was so organised it really was and that’s one of the biggest things, is being organised. Cory’s yeah, their success has been well won, the successes before but when they came on and I listened to them I thought you’re showboating here, they were really. And then one thing, again being an old man, fabulous performance really, they weren’t as good as Dyke but they were very close, and then Philip Harper went on and then a think I’ve never ever seen before, he came back on again. You don’t do that at contests and I thought don’t do that Philip, you don’t need to. You’re good enough. Then amazingly, I would rate them, is Flowers, that was very good. But you see they’ve got one man who has come in that band and has just changed it and that’s David Childs. David Childs has changed that band totally. I’ve only seen that done once before and it’s when Lyndon Baglin went to Stanshawe, he changed them. Because normally you say you’re a very good player, assuming you and I are very good players, so we go to this band that’s not as good as us and we go down to their level but David Childs, the same as Lyndon, Lyndon was up there and he said “no, come on up to me” and he got them up to him. So that’s the difference. So how are we doing anyway?

CO: Dyke, Cory, in this top ten.

RE: Oh yes, Dyke, Cory, I think I’d put Flowers third, Fodens, I’ve not heard the new Fairey but I don’t rate Garry so, he needs somebody to show him how to do it and then he does it. They used to say when he was at Fodens, Mike Fowles is good, Mike Fowles used to do it and Garry would come in and see what he did. Then somebody like Jim Gourlay would go in, he took over from Garry for the contests and they said they couldn’t believe it, he just knew the piece inside out but Garry didn’t do it himself. I’ve great respect for the lad I taught, that’s Ian Porthouse so I’d put Tredegar there. I wouldn’t leave Leyland out but I’d put them about seventh it’s the ones after that. Who have I missed out?

CO: Grimethorpe, Brighouse?
RE: Oh yes, well of course Brighouse, I’d put Brighouse about but then again it’s a different band every time you go. I always thought the word band means a group of people but these, there’s too much changing. Grimethorpe, well it’s the most negative group of people I’ve ever been in front of. They used to make me so depressed. I used to go there, it was from here [Preston], I used to leave at four and I’d get back about half past eleven, that’s for a rehearsal. I’d email Barry (?), the librarian, I want this this and this… and he would get that out. So I would drive over from four, sometimes I would be there from five past, ten past six, sometimes half past depending on the traffic, bloody awful drive. And I’d get there, I hadn’t even got the key to the band room so I’d have to sit outside until Barry (?) came. Then I’d go in there’d be the music, a stool and a big stand, and seven o clock till nine the rehearsal was and then one or two would start coming up and the music would be on their stands and they’d come in and say “who the fuck has picked this shit?” and I said “I have, me I picked it.” They’d play the same bloody programme all the time, you know why, because there’s so many deps and within ten minutes they’d flattened me and I wanted to get off home. And yet when they wanted to switch it on, bloody hell they could, but they didn’t want to switch it on.

49:55

CO: Do you think education, formal education, be that in colleges, schools, universities, what effect do you think that has had on the brass band movement?

RE: Well I’m amazed its not given us far more players but it hasn’t. Huddersfield is good, Salford turns them out, and the Northern [RNCM] of course and I think oh where have they gone? And what you put together, UniBrass, wow this is what we needed. People going from, I’ve got no band to oh I’ve got a uni band and that will have been good but I don’t think we can even equate that to why we are losing banding, this bloody apathy. Alright this will be a bit different Brass in Concert because you’ve got a ticket to go in, but take Blackpool. We go to Blackpool and what do bands do? They go straight in the bar and get pissed out of their heads and that’s it. People say no wonder we’re not taken seriously be professional players well I suppose that extreme view, “oh look at the brass”...

CO: So is the social side of banding to its detriment then?

RE: It is and yet it keeps a band together. Yeah it does keep the band together.

CO: Like you were saying, Fodens is almost a family band.

RE: They are, they’re all having babies, and they are actually thinking of having a crèche in the band room! See they are all at it and its lovely that they all stick together. And there is a core there in Leyland that’ll always be there.

CO: You say that social side has its downsides when it comes to contesting.
RE: It does. I’m awful I’m painting a black picture and it’s not. We’ve got a guy up there, Michael Robertson at Carnoustie [and District Youth Band] he’s a pied piper, he’s unbelievable, he’s been doing this for years. It was six years ago I think he said to me “will you come up? I’ve got some good players, I teach at Carnoustie school, I’ve got a lot of good players I want to turn it into a band and call it the Angus County youth band. So I went up there on the Friday night, we were having a little bit of a reception and a concert on the Sunday afternoon and the chief exec of Angus County Council was going to be there. I went up on the Friday night and there as fifty of them and I thought bloody hell and he said “what do you think?” I said “this is marvellous”, you know, it really was. And he’s such a humble…”oh nice of you to think so. Thank you.” I said “Michael, you’re a genius!” So to cut the story short, Sunday afternoon we are playing and this CEO of the council was like, so excited, we had a little reception after and he said “this is wonderful Michael! Well done Richard and well done Michael.” I said “well he’s taught them all.” He said “right Andrew, we must have the Angus County Youth Band and this will be it. Andrew” this was the music advisor for Angus County Council – a viola player need I say any more. He said “Andrew, come here” Andrew Ross, and I looked at him and I said “well you look a real prat” and I wasn’t wrong! I looked at Michael, Michael Robertson who is very respectful, and he said “Andrew I want you to work with Richard and Michael” and I saw Michael and he went like that [motions falling movement] and I said “Michael, what’s that for?”, and he’s one of those, you hold his hand and it’s like a limp piece of lettuce. So we got everybody high as kites and he came to me, Michael, and said “I tell you now, nothing will happen.” I said “oh come on, everybody’s buzzing” and of course nothing happened so in the end I said “why don’t you just form your own?” And that’s why he calls it Carnoussie Schools Band and it went [motions up], they won everything and I was conducting for a while and I saw “Michael it’s your…”, [Michael said] “would you mind if I conducted for…”. I said “No, Michael it’s your blood band” and of course he’s won everything since then. So there are pockets of great, well, increase. He said “come up to the band, all these good players”. I mean you’ve got Walters, bass trombone player, bass trombone player, he’s a composer as well, he’s having trials with orchestras. Ross knight, a tuba player, both of these won the BBC young brass player of the year, he’s a knockout. Ones playing with the Scottish National Orchestra and all these players, and he’s trained them all. He said to me, you know, “it’s hard work when they all move away.” “Oh right I said.” This was last Friday. He said “come up, you’ll find it a lot different.” And I went up, this is his lowest band, and I said “Oh hello” and I thought I do know most of them because most go to NYBBS they are either in the Childrens Band or the Reserve Band or the Big Band although the big band is decimated. Anyway, so I thought bloody hell, he’s done it again, they’re great you know.

56:20

CO: Is education like that changing the demographic of banding?

RE: Yeah in a way because again its common sense, down to individual tutors. I’m a bit concerned, say take the Northern because I’m going there and I’ll stop and I’ll say to this band “right do we know much about Gilbert Vinter?” oh shit. I said “well what
about Herbert Howells. What’s Herbert Howells’ composition? What’s his best writing?” Now he’s only written two pieces for us [brass bands] you see, this one, “and what’s the other?” They didn’t know. They don’t know anything. Its just like that, they just want to play and they didn’t know he was a great choral writer, things like that. I said “right Vaughan Williams what’s he well known for? And does he write folk music?” And so they’re not being taught correctly and some of them think, I did pick up, I’m not picking on David. The first time I went a couple of years ago he said ten thirty until one and we got to about eleven thirty and I said “right ok let’s have five minutes”. They went “what?” I said “we’ll have a five minute break.” “Oh normally with Mr Childs we have forty five minutes.” Forty five minutes sitting in a refectory drinking coffee. This is it you see, they’ve got cushy jobs and they get lazy and lazy. People like David Thornton, they’re pretty good. He’s a good teacher.

CO: So there are young players coming into banding.

RE: Yes.

CO: in these pockets, but do you see them then make their way up through the end of their education, be that university, be that schools or whatever. Do they make it into adult banding? Do you see the same faces?

RE: No I don’t see that. Now if we want a player to come, say I’m with Leyland, “yeah I will do. Who’s picking me up and who pays me?” so they won’t do it for nothing anymore because that’s what’s going on. People are getting paid so if he’s getting it I’m having some. So that’s not, in banding, and really there’s no future in banding. That’s what I’m scared of. There’s no future in banding. Trumpet player? Yes, there’s a future there. There can be.

CO: it’s hard work.

RE: A bit precarious and you do need to get there but banding, I think it’s banding either needs to get back to as it was an amateur. You see you said that Chris, and how do you get them to go back to amateurs now? They’ve been brain washed the Royal Northern there’s been an article on facebook, you must have read it some player form was it Faireys band, no he wasn’t mentioned or she wasn’t mentioned, said to this fourth section band “well I’ll come and play solos for you at your concert, a particular concert.” And apparently now it’s coming near, the person’s said “oh money, yeah” and the money he said first, or she said first it’s gone up I think by six fold or eight fold and they’ve told them they can’t have it and there’s a hoo har, people saying... Have you not read it?

CO: I’ve seen people commenting on it

RE: and it said they need to be named and shamed or something. That’s an isolated case but looking for a universal picture, no I can’t see how it can change the way it is and it’s only on a spiral that way. So because Dyke again have proven that Dyke is the best known band in the world and will stay that way and in all fairness to Nick
you must say he’s a very clever businessman, he’s made a lot of money out of it and he’s made sure he’s built big fortresses round him. All his trustees are people he’s appointed so they’re not going to get rid of him and they reckon Jim Watson was the same and they said he’s impregnable. But then I think it was Kevin Crockford and Bob Childs, they managed to get rid of him so I don’t know. I can’t see Nick being ousted at all because they’re making money, he’s had a successful year this year so it’s paid the way for another ten years, or as long as he wants it. So that’s impregnable. All the rest, see he’s there, everything’s super we’d love to say, I mean they do gigs and they charge five thousand quid and they get it. Cory’s not the same but Philip is doing a great job there. Now when you start to come further down I can’t see, in fact im absolutely certain, Ian Porthouse won’t be getting big money, neither Paul Holland [musical director Flowers band]. I know the lad from, see again one of my biggest things, we were successful at Leyland and BNFL because I was never away, it was my band and I ran it. The odd time I’d bring somebody like Roy Newsome in but I was sitting behind watching him, Howard Snell in things like that and that’s what’s not happening now. David King is doing it by proxy almost and I saw something saying PLC [Paul Lovatt Cooper] is going to do a couple of concerts with them. They’re playing people in there, it’s like when Bob Childs and Nick got together, he had an hour and he had an hour and the bands saying “do I play long crotchets? He likes long crotchets.” It doesn’t work Chris. It only works when there is one man there. I’m sure that Garry Cutt is not there all the time. So you want somebody there, that’s why I think Flowers do so well because Paul Holland is there all the time. It needs somebody driving it. They think they can do it “oh I’ll come next time” you know, Alan Withington goes over there, they haven’t been very successful have they? For the last few years. He just comes in, charges four thousand pounds for the week, that’s a lot of money, and it doesn’t work.

CO: What affect does contesting have on the band movement?

RE: The way I feel at the moment is contesting can almost be a killer for some bands because bands go and they get knocked every time, band, bang, bang and they go “oh I can’t be bothered.” Again, and this is where I remember taking, it was at Lancaster University, I took Wigan Metro Band for a residential weekend, we had a great time, about fifty of them there. I said “hands up”, good band this, “hands up those who play in big [adult] bands?” four of them put their hands up out of fifty and I said “why?” “Boring.” You see when you are in a youth band they go on trips to Holland or Belgium but the trips they are a lot of fun. Have you ever been to that Blackpool Tower youth entertainment?

CO: I’ve never actually been but I’ve seen a lot of videos and the stuff they do is fantastic stuff.

RE: Absolutely buzzing all day long and at the end they are cheering each other, because I’ve done it a few times now I said “can you show us this energy and enthusiasm you’ve got for each other? Can you help us in the big band world because we’ve not got this.” And it seems to die when they go into banding. How many people go into the results at Blackpool? Most of them. Its “oh I see Leyland got
third. Give us another pint.” So then I said “boring? Well why is it boring?” “well” he said, “its committee run and they tell us what we can’t do and when it comes to new year you get one piece every rehearsal because that’s the area test piece.” And he said “that’s not music making.” This is why it bothers me and I’m thinking whatever band is going to the final they dissect every bar and have you seen some of the names of those adjudicators?

CO: I haven’t seen this year’s ones.

RE: Right I saw it. I read down and I thought my grandmother’s going to be on this list. I mean I’m totally opposed to ABBA [Association of Brass Band Adjudicators]. I said its just a waste of time because number one you just have to pay twenty five quid and you’re in. I said “you’ve never vetted anybody.” “No, no we’re going to.” I said “you can’t do it once they’re in!” They gave them all a sheet self-assessment, yeah you’re smiling, it’s like you...

CO: I’ll become an adjudicator!

RE: It’s like you assessing yourself now for your doctorate. “are you good at?” “Oh yes I’m brilliant. Oh yes”. And eighty two percent of those judges, and if you’ve read some of the names they can’t even play an instrument properly, never mind they’ve not won anything, they’ve not done anything. Oh yeah they’re judging. Eighty two percent said they would be capable of judging the European contest. Eighty two percent. And Derek Broadbent came up to me and said “we want you back in.” I said “no Derek I’m not.” “Why?” I said “when I saw that list...” “yeah we’re doing something.” “why, have I got to wait for them all to die? And some of them are mates!” The one that I managed to stop judging was Alan Hope who is a dear pal, we are very good friends and I was conducting Tredegar down in Porthcawl years ago and you know when you play and we’d opened up with a March, hit it straight in the back, he was judging and I thought the programme was great, the band played superbly and they were the best band there. So I couldn’t find out the result, that was Saturday and we’d played and I’d been away from Pam for a while so I drove home a four hour drive. I got home and tried to ring, tried to ring and then I got one of them Sunday night and I said “how did we get on?” I tell you Iwan Fox, he was playing sop, he won the soloist prize, we won the entertainment prize. “We were fourth” he said. I said “What?” he said “everybody laughed”. Is said “well I’m not laughing.” So I rang him [Alan Hope] up. “What the hell were you doing yesterday?” I said “you were totally incompetent.” I said it four times. I said “I’m not talking about winning or losing, you were incompetent.” I said “I tell you want, a band you put third, above me, and they broke down.” “oh yeah, it was unfortunate that.” Anyway the next day it was music panel meeting at BBC at Manchester so we were parking ours cars and I said “oh are you sulking because I had a go at you? at least I told you to your face.” You know, I said “you know why I said that, because you shouldn’t be judging, you can’t do it.” And he never judged since and we are still mates.

CO: In terms of repertoire.
RE: What time is that?

CO: It’s just gone twelve. Are you ok for another ten, fifteen minutes?

RE: Yeah, yeah. There are plenty of buses that go to Lancaster!

CO: In terms of repertoire what do you think contesting does to the band movement?

RE: It doesn’t add to the repertoire much because how many times have you heard, to say the London pieces, some of the lower sections I’m rather pleased that some of the lower sections we are choosing pieces that can be used on concerts but you can’t...

CO: They aren’t going to play *Breath Of Souls* in a

RE: or *Spirit*, I’m talking about European ones or *Eden*. Only in places like the Royal Northern, the Festival.

CO: The Northern Brass Arts Festival.

RE: Yeah, that’s fine and Paul puts that together but nobody wants them anymore. I mean did you, I don’t know if you read it I get the Times only because we like to do the crossword and I like to read about concert reviews. Mozart’s *Idomeneo* was at the royal opera house last week they booed, they were booed off. They got one star, for turning up I think. They came on with a massive plastic fish. They said “oh yeah it’s an Austrian director.” Again, like talking to Garry Howarth, you can only speak about it when you have experience it. Years ago, I’d been working with [can’t hear band name] for twelve years, loved it, used to love the band. He rang me up and said, [can’t her name] who runs the band, and said “Richard you need to come over here soon.” I said “well I’m coming next week.” “Can you come sooner?” he said “the band is very low.” I said “yeah.” “This piece, it’s dreadful.” It was *Hymns At Heaven’s Gate*, Elgar Howarth and he said “on the top it says ‘for my mother and father’ . Did he not like his mother and father?” he said, really and he was honest. SO I went over there and the band were low as a snakes belly and I must admit it was absolute shit. General Booth meets the lord, or something. You know how he writes these things and it’s across a four-four bar and you’ve got seven-five and you think what the hell? It was awful and McCann was judging and we played and I thought we played ok and McCann was up on the stage, standing there and he saw me and just went like that [gestures] and I thought, we haven’t won this one and I got sacked, well they didn’t have me anymore. Amazingly there was a piece of Philip Wilby’s up for the first section, *Lazarus* it was called, do you know *Lazarus*?

CO: Yes

RE: When you get there it’s very strict you know when you get there. Friday night you get there and you go to a jury’s meeting and then you go and have a superb
dinner, it’s posh. Montreux, it’s so brilliant. Marcus Barb was in charge of the judges, the jury and Philip Wilby was going to do this top section, *Hymns at Heaven’s Gate* with two other people and he said “Mr Wilby, may I have a word” and it was in front of everybody “have you recorded this piece we commissioned you? Have you recorded it?” and he said “er...yes.” “well” he said, “we commissioned you for that music and you gave us something so how did you have music because it belongs to us? Did you record it? Because he’s a clever buggar you see, “did you use the proof copies?” “er...yes” because he knew, and he poked him in the chest and he said “if you allow that work to go out commercially I will sue you.” Wilby said to me “I wanted to go home then. I really wanted to go home on the Friday. I thought I’m in trouble now.” Stupid man, he shouldn’t have done it. Saturday comes, if you’re working on the Saturday you just get locked in the hotel, they won’t let you out. All the meals come, you’re on your own in your room. So he said to Marcus Barb “I’d like to listen to my piece” you know, the bands playing it, he said “Indeed you cannot.” He said “then I wanted to go home again.” He got into the box and there was a woman and a man, three of them there. *Hymns At Heaven’s Gate*. He admitted to me flying home and he said “after the second band had played this woman refused to speak English, I got on alright but they were totally alien to me and in the end I just pushed it away. So he said I didn’t have any part in that. I said “well that’s nice, because it cost me my job.” I’ve never forgiven him for that. And this, you know coming back to these pieces, you’ve got to pick stuff, it’s different in Norway and in Switzerland because they seem to like these way out pieces. Is there somebody called Clark writing? A fellow called Clark he writes about the world, no? Outer limits, anyway I was judging last year and I judged the first section, these are the own choices in the championship, they call the Excellence well I’m sitting there and I thought what is going on here? And there were two, three blokes with a remote control thing. I’m watching what’s going on, and you’ll know the name, and these six people got on and they had big wind pipes and they were running around and somebody pressed a smoke thing flashing lights and then all of a sudden these, and I’m not joking this is in a show, in the contest flying saucers about that big [gestures the size of a dustbin lid] with flashing lights came down and then aeroplanes going in between. “what the? Is this?” and Alan, you ask Alan Fernie who was sitting behind me and when it finished Alan virtually jumped on me held me here, held me down because he knew I was going to jump up and and I was going to really. He held me and “don’t” he said, “don’t”.

CO: Do you think then with contesting and concerts being so different, which one do you think gives a more true representation of the brass band movement?

RE: I always say it’s a bit straight forward because you never lose a concert. That’s the end of it, you don’t lose a concert. If we were doing it right why don’t we get more people listening to it? How many times have you played to about six people, if you’re drawn number one in some contest and there’s six people watching? It doesn’t happen abroad, there’s usually a lot of people in. And they do the same thing you know [gestures drinking], but they do it, when there is something going on they are in. I don’t know, it must be our psyche, I don’t know. It’s awful, I’m sounding negative but we’ve lost it.
CO: Just finally, where do you think brass banding sits within British music, British culture at the moment?

RE: Paul Hindmarsh told me once it was quite amazing that on a Monday morning all the producers sat round a big table and the head producer or controller said “right now let’s talk about the week ahead.” And they’ve all got their clip boards, and I know this sounds a bit way out but there might be two people, they are going to record some Mongolian nose flute music or something and they had Jesus sandals on, a ripped t-shirt you know and they would go through it and he would say “right now Paul, brass bands”. and Paul said to me you won’t believe this but at least seventy percent of them virtually, turned their chairs round and talked about something else. And I’m thinking that, yeah. We have no central kind of government of our own to promote us. Michael Kilroy is not doing a bad job but that’s only for funding and things like that and they’ve got one lone voice I think in parliament and she’s quite happy to, she’s going to be crap she just talks down, she wants quite a lot of money. There’s one up in, Fiona Hislop in Scotland, she’s guaranteed ten million pounds for brass banding in Scotland. She wants a band in every town and gives them, again they are totally out well government is totally out of touch with us, five thousand pounds. That’s not going to form a band is it.

CO: No. So the position of brass banding, is that because of the attitude of banding itself?

RE: yes.

CO: Or the arts organisations, the government, the broadcasters?

RE: Well I would say it’s a mixture in the sense it’s our fault for being so apathetic. They’re apathetic and also critical of the fact that there are entrepreneurs that making it work. “I don’t like that money, he must be rolling in it.” He has to put half of that up before they’ve come. SO there’s that and then the Bandsman, they and Brass Band World. They don’t sell that many now, it still makes a profit. And then government, government is typical of government, it just words not deeds. So they say “oh yes we must look into that” and that’s as far as it goes. There is no, we need a central, I’ve never understood why you go to New Zealand and they’ve got full time staff running the band movement. Ok it’s a man and two secretary clerk things, women but it’s a full time thing. Norway have got one. We haven’t, we’ve got that thing over in Barnsley, it’s the registry there or something. We’ve got that and then a set of trustees, you’ve never seen any paperwork coming, any minutes or anything they’ve done?

CO: No.

RE: Yeah we need, in order to make it work. The world’s lost all its strong people, the world has except tyrants, they can get away with it. The government, and local government, everybody even banding has gone like that. There’s nobody goes into a
band now and is, you know, severe and strong and says “no don’t do that” and make them sit up. I find that now I’m going to Leyland, I think, that’s my band I’m now the MD emeritus. What did I say? I was going in on Sunday now they had done Armistice Day bless them and I like them for that. And I really needed them for that rehearsal and Chris Doran who is a good lad, he’s the one who won a through was it Cadburys Dream or something like that? To write about what your dream would be. Did you know about that?

CO: I heard something.

RE: Yes and they got brand new uniforms and everything and got to London paid and that. And Chris said to me “I’m just thinking Mr Evans” it should have been two until four, “maybe just an hour and a half.” And I’m thinking I’m being told. You haven’t got control any more. Nick would have control.

CO: There was just one point before we finish that I wanted to come back on. When we were talking about test pieces, do you think the standard of test piece has changed?

RE: Ahh yes, that’s a very good. Yes. The standard technically yes has gone, I’m talking about the top section here, the standard of the technique in these test pieces is amazing now. Really some of the stuff. Musically no, I think it’s gone the other way. I get comments which are good and we’ve picked some but I can’t think of anything, an example, but there’s “wow that slow movement’s hard”. It’s down to dynamics and playing musically and lyrically we have lost that art and playing quietly, well it never happens unless you hear and band and you think wow there is something there.
CO: So if you could just explain your identity within the brass band movement?

AF: I suppose I do many, many things. The main thing I do, actually I suppose I love brass bands. That’s the main thing but I’m lucky enough to be able to write music for bands, I’m fortunate enough to be asked to conduct bands and I can play the trombone a bit.

CO: So what’s your primary interaction with brass bands? Is it composer, adjudicator, conductor?

AF: I think as a writer.

CO: You’ve written a great deal of music that has been used in competitions and concerts. Can you explain the process you go through when writing a piece of music for a brass band? Just a generic plan.

AF: Well first of all find out what the piece is to be, what shape it’s to be, think in my head how it’s going to sound, imagine how it’s going to sound, think of the band who
have asked me to write it or the band who will be playing it, the kind of bands that
will be playing it and taking all, balancing all the factors from there. Is it playable? Do
I like it? Do I think it will work?

CO: You’ve had pieces of music used for competitions as test pieces, are they pieces
you have written specifically for competitions or as test pieces or have you written
them as concert pieces and they have been chosen?

AF: There has been a bit of everything. I’ve written pieces specifically for contests,
I’ve also had pieces that weren’t written for contests but have been chosen for
contests. So there has been a bit of everything and I’ve written occasional test
pieces hoping they would be chosen for contests.

CO: Have they been chosen?

AF: Some of them have yeah.

CO: The pieces that you have written not for competitions, can you explain what you
thought they would be used for and how they came to be used for a competition?

AF: Mainly for concert use actually. One piece that seems to have appeared as a test
piece is... [food arrives]
AF: It’s a good little place. They kind of sprung it on us at the last minute when the contest was going to be cancelled the day before, this Brass In The Park thing, and then about forty bass bands descended on here for the day and I think they went “wow we can make a lot of money here”.

CO: So has that stopped now?

AF: [nods]

CO: Why?

AF: The organising band, Grange Band didn’t want to do it anymore.

CO: Oh right, that’s sad.

AF: It’s actually a project that we are going to consider resurrecting because SABBA of course have got all this money for development stuff. When I saw SABB I mean the Scottish Brass Band Association. They have all kinds of money available for development and projects and they’ve asked me to do some project work and this will be one of the projects I’ll be interested in resurrecting because it’s a good day and I think it’s missed. Especially for the younger bands not the more serious contests.
CO: Are there many local contests round here?

AF: Not in this area no. In Scotland there’s not actually that many contests. We’ve got the National which is the Area contest, people call it the National, the Scottish National. And then this next couple of weekends we’ve got Youth Contest and the Scottish Open which I think they were hoping was going to attract some of the bigger bands but it’s not. It’s just down a slight division. There’s a couple of big contests in April May time and we have one in the borders in November which seems to be very successful.

CO: Are there enough bands round here to do that? To do contests? Or is it just...

AF: I think there’s only about sixty contesting bands in Scotland and they will all play a contest at some point, some of them play more than others. My band, I conduct a band in Hawick [Saxhorn Band] in the borders and we only contest twice a year, we’re busy doing other stuff all the time.

CO: Yes. I find it strange the idea of going to ten contests a year which some bands round me do because on the Isle of Man we’d go to one and do the Manx Music Festival, It’s so expensive it’s just not worth it.

AF: No there are some bands that if you say there is a contest they will be there.

CO: Is that across all the sections or is it more towards the top end?
AF: More in the middle. The very, very top end very much keep themselves to
themselves. In Scotland they always say there is a big two or a big three - the
Rangers and Celtic – The Co-op Band and Whitburn. Kirkintilloch to a point as well
but they’ve kind of drifted off a bit. It’s quite a funny story with Kirkintilloch because
they started a junior band and it became a very good junior band so they registered
them as a fourth section band then they came piling through the sections and now in
Championship Section along with Kirkintilloch.

CO: They’ve got two bands in Championship Section?

AF: Yes.

CO: I didn’t realise they had two in. I had seen them going up through the rankings
but I hadn’t realised they had got two in Championship Section.

AF: Yes. Which band is which we never know.

CO: SO there’s basically no definition between their two bands?

AF: There is, yes. It’s a strange situation.

CO: Are they both conducted by the same person?
AF: No, I think they are now two completely different organisations anyway. They’ve finally split. It hasn’t done the big band any good I don’t think.

CO: No. Richard [Evans] was saying that we are haemorrhaging bands and there are some people who say in fifty years there won’t be any bands, and that’s not true but it won’t be far off. It’s interesting to see that some are getting so big they are splitting in half.

AF: yes.

07:50

CO: What state do you think the brass band movement’s in, in terms of numbers of bands

AF: I think it’s healthy at some level. If you look below the top level it’s very healthy. All those bands will try and make bands good places for people to be in, different music that’s hopefully entertaining to play and they can relate to the public a bit more.

CO: Is there a problem with the top end then?

AF: Yeah there is, we lose the public a bit sometimes they’re just not interested in doing concerts and they’re only interested in going to the big things themselves you know. They’re not really interested in relating to what’s going on you know.
CO: And is that as much of a problem in Scotland as it is...?

AF: I don’t know what the situation down south is at all. One of the differences, especially in the north of England is you’ve got a band every twenty streets whereas here there I a band every twenty miles.

CO: Yes.

AF: There aren’t as many bands.

CO: So is Scotland a region dominated by two or three bands rather than...

AF: Yes at the top level, yes either the Co-op or Whitburn. They tend to bring in the best players, they tend to hoover the best players up from other bands as well, who lets face it, young kids playing in my youth band and they hit a certain stage and who’s to deny them the a chance to play at the European Championships, having a chance to play at the [Royal] Albert Hall. You can’t deny them that.

CO: Well at least they are taking the youth rather than flying people in as you said earlier.

AF: No it’s a bit of both. They get the very best players, they take the very best youth players.
CO: I suppose in terms of numbers it’s different to the North West [region] and Yorkshire.

AF: There’s lots and lots of bands aren’t there.

CO: Is it fairly balanced throughout the sections here?

AF: Not bad, yeah, not bad.

CO: Because there are some regions that have, the lower sections of the North West are brilliant whereas you get up there’s not quite the top.

AF: I think they engineer sections here so it’s all very even. The top section is kept at ten and I think the first section is kept at ten and they keep everything about ten or eleven until you get to the fourth section. There was a while here when the fourth section was struggling badly. A lot of that was actually down to the choice of test piece. I’m sure of it. I conducted a band, the last time I won the Scottish Championships 2011, I think it was and the fourth section test piece was a piece that had been set called *The Talisman*. I was just hysterically difficult, it was just way too difficult. It was also a particularly joyless piece of music, it wasn’t a cheerful piece of music to rehearse through the dark nights of January and February and there was only five bands turned up. We came on first and we played ok, we kind of scratched our way through it and then for some reason, I don’t know why, I actually stayed and listened to listen to the contest rather than go and get changed. I just sat in the hall,
and I knew we’d won it because we were the best. It just got worse and worse, the bands just couldn’t play it and you felt really sorry for them.

12:00

CO: Is it the second section test piece this year, the Handel one based on the hymn...

AF: The [Variations on] Maccabeus?

CO: Yes, I’ve heard that’s fiendish and probably too difficult for the section, but that might just be some players complaining.

AF: Richard’s [Evans] an architect of that type of thing. Richard wants to test the bands, he doesn’t want the bands to have it easy.

CO: Do you think sometimes they are too difficult?

AF: There was a piece a couple of years ago for the Second Section called Images of the Millennium which is horrific to play. It has hardly ever been played since as far as I can make out. As well as conducting band for it I judged one area, and again it was the same thing only five bands showed up. This was in north east England. Only five bands showed up, one band could play it and the rest just couldn’t, simply just couldn’t play it. At least two of them, if it had been a boxing match it would have been “right ok, you’ve had a great day, just stop now.”
CO: I remember hearing the Fourth Section, the National Fourth Section, it must have been about four years ago now when it first moved from Harrogate and they had *Henry V* as the test and at the end the adjudicators got up and said “some people said is this piece too difficult? Based on what we have heard today it probably is.” Some of the bands really struggled with that one.

AF: I think we’ve got to be very, very careful when we’re choosing the test pieces and I know that Richard, he’s on the panel that chooses the pieces and he always tells me “it needs to be a test”, It needs to be a test.

CO: But a test that you are not going to fail.

AF: I conduct a fourth section band as I said and technically you could say that they are the worst band in Scotland, we’ve been last in the areas for the last two years, one was very undeserved. In fact we won the local contest last week.

CO: You’ll hopefully do better next year then.

AF: Well it’s made up of players who, I’ve got twelve year olds, eleven year olds in the band, the baritone player is eighty four and has played with the band for seventy years and all that kind of stuff. It’s full of lovely, lovely people who just want to come along to the band room twice a week and enjoy themselves and have fun and they are very particular in the music they play, you know, they’ll tell me quite honestly,
especially with my own writing as well which I find refreshing “we like that, we don’t like that, no we don’t like playing that one” so they’ve got to be very careful when they are choosing test pieces at that level.

CO: Does contesting jar with the community element of these bands?

AF: Yes. As I say this band here, Harwick, and the like, if you look at the league tables we are the worst band in Scotland but the people in Harwick know that their band is the best band in the world. They think it’s great and we are doing well, we’re doing a lot of great community things so when we go to a contest, we went to the contest and people...we went to one contest the other week and there were fifteen people in the audience. Fifteen people who knew about brass bands and we were well praised by everybody who heard us but the people in Hawick didn’t hear us, they didn’t care, you know. We’ve come home with a great big trophy and a cheque for one hundred pounds, so what?

CO: They think the community stuff is more important?

AF: Yes, I mean the band does absolutely superbly, they are absolutely chuffed with it, they think it’s great and it’s been in the newspaper and everybody says “yeah that’s fine, are you playing at the Christmas Parade next week?” “yeah ok, we’ll be there”.

CO: Does contesting give a false image of the standards of playing and music
selection in brass bands?

AF: It can do. It can do and it helps the standard of playing, it really does help the standard of playing. It focuses a band, especially a band who are contesting now and again, it really focuses their ability for that one weekend. It really does help in that respect. But as I say the general public couldn’t give a toss about it, about contests. We like it, as bandsmen we think its fantastic. I don’t know if it’s a useful analogy, recently I was at a car show, there’s a big vintage car show takes place in my town every year and for some reason this was the first year we could go to it and the Sunday is the public day and we could just go and have a look at the cars, have a look at the old lorries and tractors. That’s one thing. The Saturday is their big competitive day of course it’s closed to the public, nobody can see and of course they are all very hysterical about that getting everything polished up and as far as they are concerned the big event was over by the time joe public came in on the Sunday. It’s quite funny because my next door neighbour he does that kind of thing and he says “no the Saturday is the big day, get the car all ready for that and then just have a bevvie on the Saturday night, sit about, everybody is walking about on the Sunday.”

CO: So does banding disregard the public too much with contests?

AF: I don’t think the public would be interested to listen to the same piece of music nineteen times in one afternoon.
CO: Is that behind the growth in entertainment contests?

AF: Probably, oh definitely, without any doubt.

CO: To fill the gap between your stand contests and your... to satisfy that ambition and competitive edge...

AF: Yes a test piece contest to me is almost like an exam, an examination it’s not really a public appearance. It’s like a test or an examination whereas entertainment contests yes there is a bit more kind of leeway to entertain, to do things and to show your band off in the best light.

CO: You said that contests have been great for improving the standard of bands, have you noticed any change in standards of playing, technically and musically over the years.

AF: Yes, especially the highest level. Technique has gone over the hill and back again, you know. I remember 2004 at the European Championships in Glasgow, I remember thinking what on earth can your write now for these people to play? Because they can play anything. I’d been lucky enough to write the B Section test piece that year [Airs and Dances] and that was very entertaining to listen to those bands do that but in the afternoon the standard was just astonishing. I didn’t actually listen to the European Championships again until this year, 2014, ten years later and it’s almost like the technique has taken over the music. The technique is so good that you’re
dying out for music.

CO: The musicality isn’t there?

AF: Yeah. There was one band came on and played Philip Sparke, maybe ten years old because it had been first heard back here in Glasgow back in 2004.

CO: What piece was that?

AF: *Music of the Spheres* and the person I was sitting with listening to them, it was a band from Austria, and he turned round and said “this sounds really good this sound interesting.” It’s because it’s got a tune, it’s got tunes going through it, and they just looked at each other and said “yeah you’re right, you’re absolutely right.”

CO: So is there a difference in the last ten years of losing the melodies from test pieces?

AF: Absolutely, absolutely. I had a really interesting experience a couple of years ago in Norway. I was lucky enough to be in the Norwegian Championships where on the Saturday they have their own choice and they do all their little things, the Norwegians in particular like contemporary music more so than we do. I can’t imagine, I don’t know if it’s a national conditioning towards that sort of thing but they seem to like that kind of music a bit more. But the set test piece on the Friday afternoon had been and Eric Ball piece and none of the bands knew what to do, they
were flummoxed you know, they were treating it like a great big symphony, they were treating it in a big manner. There was nobody actually just played the music it was quite extraordinary and then on the Saturday they were more at home sounding like seagulls and all the rest.

CO: So do you think a band would struggle more with and Eric Ball piece, *Resurgam* or stuff like that compared to recent pieces, *Legend of King Arthur, Breath of Souls*?

AF: Yes. Yes, I think they would be able to play it technically but performances we remember, the old legendary performances and some of the old legendary performers. I mean the one, it happened before I was born but I’ve heard the recording, the famous one of Geoffrey Witham playing the *Carnival Romain* with Black Dyke and Jim Shepherd being able to touch a nerve or touch a soul with the playing rather than the technique. I think we’ve kind of lost that a bit.

CO: So if an Eric Ball test piece was set for the National Finals this year, what do you think would happen?

AF: The bands would complain it’s not difficult enough.

CO: And what would the adjudicators say?

AF: The adjudicators will say nothing. They will do their business and hopefully look for the music. I certainly always look for the music when I’m an adjudicator. I look for
the music, I’m not interested in technique, I don’t particularly think brass instruments sound their best when they are beings creamed up the very top of their range and also I’m a trombone player so semi quavers don’t impress me, you know. Yeah, hopefully I’d look for something beyond the music. If you listen to a great orchestra play Moazart or Brahms, yeah technically they can play it, it’s fine but there is much more to it than that.

CO: Do you think they would find the musicality they are looking for?

AF: I would hope so, I would hope so.

CO: Do you think it would bring a different result to something like this year’s Legend of King Arthur?

AF: I don’t know, I’m not really been involved in that level of banding for a long time but it would certainly be a bit more of a leveller between the very, very best bands. It would also bring some bands who have very, very good soloists who have been there for many years, maybe give them, those particular players, because they used to do that, “let’s go and see so and so because so and so has been sitting on euphonium for twenty years and is consistently brilliant” and I know one band this year with Legend of King Arthur they didn’t do very well because their conductor, this young guy told me the conductor kept trying to find the music and I didn’t think there was very much in it.
CO: There’s a lot of notes on a page, an awful lot of notes on a page.

AF: Far too many notes on a page but as a writer I always try and write less notes, I’m always trying to say more with less.

23:43

CO: So the people in banding, the level you’re doing a lot of work with youth bands, fourth section. Have you noticed a change in the demographics and the people in banding?

AF: er...slightly, they’re maybe getting a bit older. We’re doing our best here in Scotland certainly to try and address that you know by bringing younger people in and getting more people in but not hugely so, no.

CO: If there is a shift towards older people do you have any ideas why?

AF: People who have been banding a long time simply don’t want to give it up. Whereas maybe a lot of people who take up banding when they are younger then the family comes along and jobs and all the kind of thing.

CO: The real world.
AF: The real world and they can’t devote enough time. One aspect here in Scotland I’ve noticed with a difference with English banding is it’s less intense. I know a lot of bands in England and I know one or two conductors who are trying to do this here in Scotland hold a rehearsal every night for a fortnight, you very rarely get that here before a contest. Monday and Thursday are band nights and that’s it you know, Wednesday I do something else, Tuesday my wife goes out to the bingo I’ve got to look after the kids so there’s less intensity in that respect. I know some bands here have been trying that and to a certain extent from a musical point of view and from a contest result point of view it works very well but I know one band where a lot of the players were what we called [?], they didn’t want to do it anymore, you know. “Do we really have to go ten nights in a row to rehearse the same piece of music?” I would find that boring actually to be honest.

CO: So is the unique situation in Scotland, you mention the distance between the bands, does that feed into the attitude of banding?

AF: There’s slight differences in where we come from. I live in the borders where each town has a band, the band is an integral part of the town’s summer events so therefore it’s an integral part of the town overall. There’s also tremendous loyalty between all the bandsmen to your town band. People very rarely change bands in the borders, very rarely have swapping or leaving to go and join another band, it doesn’t happen.
CO: Is that across all standards?

AF: In the borders it’s really, we’re looking at Second, Third to Fourth Section bands, it’s because of the demographics because they don’t bring a lot of players in themselves, rather train their youngsters up to play, the standard very rarely gets above First Section and that’s absolutely fine. Up here in the central belt it’s a bit more different and players will swap bands more.

CO: That’s interesting because Richard Evans was telling me there is no loyalty in, he was talking partly about the top end of banding but also more generally, there’s no loyalty in the bands. No matter what section, if they are a contesting band there is very little loyalty in there and that’s been to the detriment of the movement.

AF: I think so.

CO: You seem to have persevered it.

AF: Yeah, in the borders, as I say it’s a unique environment but they are very, very loyal to their town, you know. They’ll help each other. They’ll help each other for guest players for concerts and contests and stuff but for instance my band, Harwick, have got a very, very talented young man, our principle cornet player, but I know his family are rooted in the town and he’s not going to go anywhere until he leaves to go to university. I think physically he lives on a farm way above the town anyway so it would be difficult for him to get to another band but I know that I’m going to have
him until he leaves school which is great but he could easily play in a Championship Section band but he doesn’t want to. He simply doesn’t want to.

CO: You mentioned that you try to write more with less with pieces. What do you think is the most important part of a test piece, of who it appeals to and the elements.

AF: The players. The players, they have to have something decent to rehearse and so yeah, I suppose technical passages do, you have to put them in now and again. I’m not a big fan of them which is why I’ve not had an awful lot of test pieces chosen but I’ve had one or two. I like to try and make my music less technical which means that it’s less attractive I suppose for some contests use unless it’s at a lower level like Fourth Section or Youth level.

CO: So do you see a distinct approach between writing for top sections and lower sections?

AF: Oh yes.

CO: Because composers have been quoted as saying I don’t know what I would do if I was asked to write a Fourth Section test piece because I don’t know how to do it.

AF: Yes I’ve spoken to a few.
CO: And what do you think then?

AF: I just look at the piece of music, I mean I suppose you write what you kind of like, what you’re influenced by and I know a lot of the music I listen to is very uncluttered, very empty, I suppose I’m a minimalist in that respect you know, I just, I’m not impressed by lots and lots of semi quaver work. I don’t work at the computer, I work at the piano and my piano skills aren’t brilliant. As I say a lot of what I hear in bands it’s very good it’s very clever and it’s clearly interesting and clearly challenging to the players but it float my boat musically at all. You know it doesn’t really interest me but the thing is I do recognise that people do like that kind of music and it has to be written.

CO: And it’ the players that are driving that?

AF: I think so, I think so. I think there is this tremendous thing with a lot of new music these days for brass band it seems to be driven by players rather than musical ideas. Composers will write something and they’ll always consult the player and say “well what can we put in here for you? What do you want?” rather than the composer actually saying “now here is what I’ve written can you show me what a good musician you are and interpret in that way. Too many pieces for me are just technical displays, there’s no real music in them, and yet these are the ones that seem to be more and more popular. I’m looking at the music, I’m thinking of Paul Lovatt Cooper which to me has just got lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of notes and it doesn’t really say anything about who Paul Lovatt Cooper is.”
CO: The interesting view that I have of Paul Lovatt Cooper’s music is you see pieces like *Breath of Souls* and *Where Eagles Sing* and there’s just notes and notes and notes on a page but when you see his lower section stuff, *Dark Side Of The Moon* being the prime contender, there’s nothing. There’s semibreves and minims.

AF: Oh yes. *Dark Side Of The Moon* is an interesting one. I had to conduct it in a third section contest, it was the area piece actually and I have to admit I didn’t like it at all and I should actually have turned my stick over to somebody else in the band and said “listen I can’t do this” because at the time I remember I had a fabulous young tuba player in the band who’s now moved on with the SNO and all kinds of stuff but she had to play bottom C for ten minutes.

CO: Yes.

AF: There wasn’t any challenge at all.

CO: No.

AF: But then I programmed the piece in a concert and the place went berserk, they thought it was wonderful, the audience thought it was wonderful so I have to hold back and say “ok, but it’s not for me.”

CO: No and it’s not for the tuba players, either. Having played that test piece it’s not
the most exciting to rehearse.

AF: I felt really sorry for her, she came to every rehearsal as well.

CO: About ten years ago, fifteen years ago, we saw a spate of writing of longer pieces in movements, I’m mainly thinking of Peter Graham and Philip Sparke’s work, *Hymn of the Highlands, Windows of the World*, that sort of stuff.

AF: Oh yes.

CO: That isn’t contest work, its extended writing for brass band, some of it goes up to thirty, thirty five minutes and there’s not a huge amount of that sort of stuff. Those pieces seem to have been popular, there’s endless CDs with them on. Do you think contesting has any effect on the structure of pieces and restricts writing like that?

AF: Well yes I think, I mean for a test piece contest you’ll have to keep it a certain length because of just the sheer logistics of getting twenty bands on and off the stage in one day. I mean there have been a few disasters where we’ve miss timed pieces, the famous National Finals that finished at twenty to one in the morning where they just got the timing of the piece wrong but generally you’d being looking at about a twelve minute piece for a contest just because of that. Those particular pieces, the Philip Sparke and Peter Graham pieces are popular because they are good and those two gentlemen know the band very well and know bandsmen and
they know exactly what they want to play but they’re not... I think one of them at least was commissioned as a Brass in Concert programme.

CO: Yes Hymn of the Highlands was something like that.

AF: So it was like a complete mini concert on its own but the other thing about those ones is you can take movements of them and just play them individually. But generally the test piece, about ten, twelve for lower sections, fifteen for maybe a Championship Section, slightly more for the Championship is accepted.

CO: Does that put composers off writing anything longer because it won’t sell in the same quantities it would for a test piece?

AF: It hasn’t put me off, probably because my introduction to music has been through the brass band, I’m a bandsman, have been from day one so I understand what’s required. I don’t know about other more serious composers or composers outside the movement. Now that’s something I feel that we could maybe encourage, one of the problems we have with that is because our instrumentation is just so damned weird. You know compared with the general conventional writing a brass band, now if you look at the old days where they did commission people like John Ireland and Arthur Bliss who came from outside the movement to write but they were always advised by people like Henery Geehl or Frank Wright so I always think there might be a role for somebody to do that. To commission a composer from outside the movement and to maybe see where we can go and give them some
advice, have somebody advising them on what to write. One of the problems there is of course these days is finance. If you are asking a Thomas Addis who is a great composer, to write a piece of music for brass band that would be sensational but you would be looking at five figures at least, at the very, very, very least and what organisations are going to do that? Can you imagine a piece that’s going to cost an awful lot, it’s just not going to happen is it.

CO: Is why we see, there are a lot of, The National Finals, The Open commissioning pieces for the top sections but are there fewer for lower sections in terms of pieces commissioned specifically for contests?

AF: Yes. I think there is a historical thing in Britain of bands not wanting to pay the composers anything. They’ll pay the players and the conductors, that’s absolutely fine but the poor buggar who writes the music… it’s another matter. You will find an awful lot of the test pieces in places abroad have been commissioned by bands abroad or have been commissioned by the Dutch band association or things like that. I know, particularly myself I’ve had a few commissions from Switzerland for extended pieces and they are quite happy to pay for music. One thing that they do with the top section level and I don’t think the UK takes part in this, I think it has done but it was criticised, a lot of the continental associations like Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, maybe even Norway and Sweden will club together and commission one piece for their National per year. That’s happened a couple of times where it’s been the same test piece for all the National Championships which takes place roughly kind of in the Winter time, kind of in November through to January,
February in Norway. But the UK hasn’t been part of that. I think it was once but we got a piece which a lot of the bands didn’t like so...

CO: They decided not to do it again.

AF: That’s it, or perhaps it cost them, whoever “them” are too much money because who’s in charge?

CO: Do you think that money is a major issue facing the banding movement in terms of commissioning of test pieces and competitions and also in terms of funding individual bands?

AF: I think so. I think so, I think there is an awful lot... there might be, I could be completely wrong on this. There are quite a lot of guys who have earned a lot of money from the brass bands, er..., without putting very much back sometimes. Whereas a lot of the bands in the continent, a lot of the top bands in England and the UK they will pay their players you know, players will go for wherever the biggest chequebook is, you tend not to find that with the bands over in the continent. Although strangely enough more and more you’re getting the continental players coming over here to play. But for instance I know in, where was it, I think it was in America that the players all pay to play, they paid fifty pounds a year for the privilege to play in the band you know. And that was a few years ago now so I’m taking it as a bit more. So I can’t see that happening here.
CO: The people who you say have earned a lot of money without putting much back where do they fit in the band? Are they conductors, composers, players?

AF: I think generally there is a lot of conductors isn’t there. There’s conductors and soloists you know who seem to make a very nice and profitable living from doing what they do. That might be, I don’t know whether that’s a controversial thing to say. Perhaps also as well there is maybe a commercial as well. A lot of them are supported by instrument companies for...

CO: Yamaha for example

AF: Yes Yamaha for being a corporate artists and all that sort of thing, advertising and stuff and I don’t know if I’m controversial in saying this but whenever I’ve spoken to people who are involved in it they see it as “yeah it just keeps me going because I don’t actually play the product, I don’t actually like it very much but my picture will appear in a glossy magazine showing it off” this is all off record. Raw brass is the, have you seen it? Raw flugel. I know the person who is promoting this says it is rubbish. I sat next to him at a hotel in Switzerland and he told me this. It doesn't ring true.

CO: Is brass banding still an amateur movement?

AF: Yes.
CO: Yes? If it’s got all this money that you say people are making how can it be?

AF: That’s at the very top level. At the proper level, at the real level aw what bands operate yes I would say it is amateur. I’m talking here in Scotland, it’s not such a big deal I don’t think there is very many players who get anything back from playing with a band financially. They will probably put much more in. I don’t think there is any...

CO: Where does that stop?

AF: Sorry?

CO: Where does that stop? In terms of you say in the main body of the movement.

AF: I think at the very, very top level, your top ten bands, top twenty bands.

CO: Your Championship Section?

AF: Yes. I mean I’ve heard of bands, their players will play, one band in particular they’ve recently replaced a player he was moving on and another player was moving up but they had to play both players at a contest because this one, the chap who was leaving, was still on his contract to play at the contest so they to play four trombones. I thought that was quite bizarre.
CO: Yes, it’s not a musical decision.

AF: It’s not a musical decision but his contract said he had to play so therefore he had to play. How much he played I don’t know but he was there definitely.

CO: He sat on stage.

AF: I mean I’ve not really experienced very, very highest that level of banding. I’ve had brief, kind of brushes with it but nothing...

CO: Do you see a divide between what you do and the top...

AF: Oh yes.

CO: that is created by that different situation?

AF: I think from what I do in my writing, that’s one of the things, I mean a band like Black Dyke will play Fourth Section music and then record it the next day and that’s fine but the kind of bands I conduct and the kind of bands that I’ve played with and worked with yeah it’s not at the very highest level. Whereas at the highest level you hear stories, there was talk years and years ago I enquired, Grimethorpe were looking for a trombone player, I was out of work and they phoned and said “do you want a job down the pit?” and stuff like that and I seriously thought about it. I met them and I thought no I don’t but I know for a fact that although ostensibly they were miners that they would work two days a week that’s it, and just play in the
band. They’d come and have their breakfast in the pit canteen, go and have a two hour rehearsal and that would be their day and they were miners so I’ve never experienced banding at that level.

CO: Do you think that still exists?

AF: No that doesn’t exist anywhere but I think players do have a huge commitment to it, they put in a massive commitment but I think the trouble is a lot of them are well rewarded for it as well, at the highest level. There is also a kind of a freelance professional one or two who just kind of float around and play with this band, play with that band, play with that band and pick up a cheque, it’s not enough to live on. I know a few guys who do that kind of thing, it’s not enough to live on, they have to do other things but it helps.

CO: So if there is only a few people who can make a living out of the top bands, the works band idea is dead, does the individual financial situation of players, make sure that once they enter the real world after they have been a youth band player and whatever, is that affecting how many people stay in the movement?

AF: I don’t think so. I don’t think so, you’ll get the odd wastage, you’ll get the odd player who decides banding isn’t for them or probably gets a teaching job and it’s difficult to motivate yourself after that spent teaching music all day in school to go and teach music at a band at night, that’s quite a difficult thing to do but I don’t
think it’s an enormous wastage. I don’t think it affects it hugely.

44:10

CO: Where do you think the brass band movement is going?

AF: I think it should go certainly more towards being an educational thing. It’s a terrific thing for kids, it’s a great social thing for kids and a good thing for them to be involved in. I also think it’s also got a real place in historical perspective because we are here today at an industrial museum and brass bands you could say are a kind of throw back to that kind of thing, it’s that kind of music. I mean sometimes that’s frowned upon, I think it’s something to be celebrated, I think it’s something that can be, round about here in this area for instance pit bands still exist and it’s that link to the past to the miners because this was the miners music it was the working peoples’ music and it’s thriving. Sometimes it’s thriving in surprising places, in more affluent areas like Carnoustie but in places like this it is still thriving big time too. I know as I teach in this village here the kids get a kick out of being part of the Silver Band.

CO: What do you think is the biggest change that you have seen in banding?
AF: oh that’s a good question. Apart from the obvious one that they’ve lost the [miners] hats and they’ve got drums and women and stuff which let’s face it at some levels is a huge change for some of the bands, Mr Evans included, that’s definitely Mr Evans. I think repertoire is, a band can play anything now, you can find a brass band playing anything thanks to more enlightened arrangers, greater access to recorded music and... styles you know, more bandsmen are adept at playing jazz styles.

CO: So the old adage that brass bands swing like a rusty gate is no longer true?

AF: Well it’s not, if you look technically, if you look at a Jazz purist, the brass bands still don’t swing, but they sound pretty good. It’s not swing music as you would imagine, that’s a different way of doing things all together. There has been a couple of bands who have tried to do that kind of thing but significantly it hasn’t really gone down that well with dare I say it, adjudicators but then again there are certainly adjudicators who would appreciate more, but repertoire I think is a big change, yes.

CO: And what’s driven that change?

AF: A desire to make the band a more attractive place I think. Certainly for attracting youngsters to come and play it’s much better if you want to play it’s much better if you want to play music, play music like The Muppets [theme tune] rather than Recollections of Franz Liszt, you know, it’s a much more dynamic thing, “listen the band can do this”. I actually started myself, although it’s a Sousa march, I was
amazed that my local band could the theme music to Monty Python all those years ago back in 1972. That was a huge attraction to me. I’ll always remember that, you know, because I was a big fan of the TV programme when it was on and all of a sudden the Silver Band started playing the tune. Obviously because they thought maybe we could attract somebody here, playing this old Sousa march.

CO: If you look at the wind band repertoire in comparison to the brass bands, you’ll see that within a month of a pop song coming out its arranged, or a film theme soundtrack, it’s arranged, largely driven by the American market and all of the high school and university bands with all the young players. Is brass banding moving in that sort of direction?

AF: Definitely so, I think Philip Spark is doing that isn’t he. The company who he works for, I think they get a stock arrangement a piece, for instance my band played the soundtrack to Brave at a concert earlier this year and as far as I can tell it is exactly the same arrangement you get for the wind band and you get for orchestra as well and all Philip has done is transcribe it for brass band. And it works, it seems to go down very well. I don’t see any problem with that at all.

CO: What will that do to brass band audiences?

AF: Attract more? Certainly I think the arrangements work, the arrangements work very well. So if it makes the music accessible to the audiences I think it’s a good thing.
CO: You said that brass bands have such a weird set of instruments, do you notice a
difference between playing arranged music and specifically written music from the
brass band repertoire?

AF: It depends. It depends on what kind of music, it’s all a stylistic kind of thing. For
instance a very, very extreme example, in the trombones, the different kind kinds of
trombones we use, that’s changed over the years, if you look back at the brass band
historically they use very narrow bore ones and trombones like the G trombone.
That’s changed more into the kind of big symphonic trombone and the large bore
was used in the orchestra for the power to get the sound over but you’ll then get
some players who stand up and play Tommy Dorsey ballad on the most enormous
trombone which doesn’t, to me, work. You know, Tommy Dorsey played a very small
bore trombone and it seems to work better. That’s just one of the things there.
Stylistically as well just the way just the way you would play a melody in the manner
of a well-known pop song, just imagine the way that the person who is singing this
song would sing it and you get some players playing it like they’re playing a march,
you know, rather than trying to adapt that style. But apart from that, no, there’s not
a huge difference.

CO: Is there anything else you think that has happened in the brass band movement
or that has been a result of contesting and has influenced concerts? So is there any
other aspect of the movement that contesting has enforced changes upon?
AF: Yes, I think the whole Brass in Concert thing has been a revolution it really has, it develops the repertoire. I mean every year in November we have this Brass in Concert thing that happens and you can tell that, these days especially, I think there was one band this year played one or two stock arrangements you know, old arrangements that had been done before. They were, I think they were bottom of the pile actually, they were last because every other band went for innovation, went for new music, went for trying new ideas, commissioned new pieces from new composers and those pieces eventually will trickle down to mainstream banding and that can only be a good thing. That’s been going on for years because a lot of the standard pieces we know for instance pieces like Procession to the Minster, all the Howard Snell things, all the Ray Farr things, all the Elgar Howarth things, they started life as pieces in this Brass in Concert setup, Granada TV Band of the Year at that time as well and that will happen, that will keep happening and that’s a great thing. A very, very good thing indeed.
Appendix 5 transcript of Paul Hindmarsh interviewed by Chris Osborn on 18 February 2015

0:00:08

PH: Yes because I was, because there are so many issues apart from what you have written there, which is interesting, obviously you’ll ask me questions, but a lot of the thrust of it is also musical as well as historical. Anyway, fire away.

0:00:23

CO: To start with can you introduce your identity within the brass band movement and within music generally because you do a lot of stuff outside of brass banding.

PH: I do yes. I was brought up with the Salvation Army so my background is, the first music I heard was probably brass bands, before I was born if you see what I mean. So brass bands, brass music and brass bands, has always been part of my musical background and the Salvation Army being a very particular sort of approach, not like contesting bands it’s very different as you probably know. After that I went to the... obviously I’m musically talented I’m told as a kid, brass and singing, not piano but I did a bit. I went to the Royal College of Music on a Saturday morning class like they have, you know the Saturday morning schools. University in Birmingham and then a
change in direction, I went into postgraduate work and I also became a professional singer. So I stopped the trombone playing, I was a trombone player, quite decent. So my early career was a mixture of academic and singing and I worked in the university in Glasgow but then in [19]85 I came down to Manchester as a BBC producer, I got a job at the BBC, largely to work in chamber music because it was a chamber music job but as it developed really, my own specialities are really to do with brass and voice. So by the time I finished at Radio 3 I was producing all the brass programmes, all the wind programmes and a lot of the choral programmes.

CO: How many brass and wind programmes were there at the time?

PH: Well it’s interesting, I managed the decline really. When I took it over they wanted to reduce the numbers. When I took it over in [19]88 or [19]89 there was I think it was almost a weekly programme called Bandstand. But the controller then wanted to stop it weekly because he thought there wasn’t enough music, and he was right. There wasn’t enough music and the performances weren’t consistent enough to sustain it. So I came up with the idea of Festival of Brass and that’s when that happened in 1990. So I used to do that, between eight and ten programmes, we recorded them at weekends in Manchester and they were broadcast. And I did other programmes as well, largely based on live performance rather than studio performance, a series of brass recordings. But by the time I left or by the time the BBC said they didn’t want that series any more that was all that was left. So when it stopped in [19]97 that was it. No more dedicated brass band origination through the
BBC. Then I went on to do other things, I do a lot of orchestral and choral music but at the same time as that I was writing and reviewing so I had another sort of career outside the BBC which was editing, writing and researching. I left in 2006, took early retirement in 2006 to do largely what I do now which is a lot of the freelance work, predominately around brass. I’m the features editor of *British Bandsman*, I edited *Brass Band World* for a couple of years, didn’t enjoy that much because it was not owned by brass people, they didn’t really understand it, it’s better now. So I’ve been doing *British Bandsman* work for 4 or 5 years now alongside the Festival of Brass, producing CDs, producing the odd radio programme, sleeve notes, programme notes, researching, writing books I’ve got two on the go one on Frank Bridge, one on Wilfred Heaton. And I got the Isle Medal as well in 2005. For brass band people that’s... I was very honoured to get that to be honest.

CO: It’s the most prestigious award there is for brass bands.

PH: It is really.

0:04:44

CO: You said that your time at the BBC was managing a decline in brass and wind programming, how do you see...

PH: Well that’s how I see it in retrospect.

CO: How did you see it at the time?
PH: Yes like a firewall. I thought I was the only person interested in it and I had to battle to get anything on the air to be honest because I was a great fan and I could see the quality. The issue was in Radio 3, the Radio 3 audience, it was perceived and I think it’s probably true if you look at the figures that when brass bands came on Radio 3 the audience stopped listening and turned off. Well you can’t, increasingly that, as the radio station became more conscious of serving its audience rather than producers coming up with ideas and having a cultural agenda, it’s much more audience driven, it was just thought that there were too many and I would agree with this and this is where I didn’t really... I could understand where they are coming from, the repertoire just wasn’t strong enough. Although there was plenty of it, test pieces aren’t necessarily the things that are going to inform or entertain a wider audience. They are very much in house objects unless they transcend the barrier of test piece which is very interesting, which is a whole other research topic to be honest. I’ve commissioned a lot of music, brass band music, about forty pieces now. Some important ones like *Paganini Variations*, *Maunsell Forts* by John McCabe, *Eden* by John Pickard but I always made sure the idea was strong and that it would have a life outside of contesting because I always saw that the contest was very much... although it maintains standards, I’m getting to one of your questions here, although it maintains standards even actually down to Fourth Section bands. You think of the difference between the little village band and the little village choir, you’d rather go and listen to the village band wouldn’t you because they’re conscious of what so and so is doing and they’re conscious of competition which keeps the standard high even right down at that level and at the top of course its...
professional level. The problem is there isn’t the repertoire to match outside of contesting.

0:07:10

CO: So the decline in the wider media coverage of brass and wind music, you said it’s a victim of its own methods because it needs contesting...

PH: I think it’s a victim of its own methods. Wind band I can’t speak for, and there is still, even on Radio 3 there’s hardly any and Classic FM nothing nor brass band. I had a set to with one of their presenters at the Festival of Brass about it. We had a really heated argument about it in a forum, various people got on his back and he’s right. They were right because there is a perception that’s not the same as reality, that’s how I see it. We’re insiders, in academic speak. We’re talking from the insider level so we know what the strengths and weaknesses are but outside of the frame there is no knowledge and that knowledge really comes from the fact that in brass band terms I think they’re so busy competing and pot hunting they’re not being aware that they are meant to, that the whole point of playing is not just to compete its actually to deliver something to somebody else who is listening in the audience and I think they’ve forgotten it in brass band terms and therefore the audience hasn’t come with them. So there has been this decline and because the audience was always served through industry and that’s another really important issue. You think of what happened after the... really 25 years ago when bands were sponsored there was a readymade audience and it didn’t matter that there weren’t loads of people
listening to it and there was also a contact with industry. People, workers, knew about the band, they knew about bands elsewhere. Now that contact has gone as well so bands are very much out on a limb in a sense. So as I see it, and they’ve lost through circumstances and through some of their own methods, I think they’ve lost touch to a wider public. There’s still a following buts it’s not as... I don’t think it has, it certainly hasn’t got the breadth or numbers that it used to have. You think, when you go back two or three generations thousands and thousands of them would turn up, doesn’t happen now.

0:09:37

CO: Where does community sit with this then? If contesting banding is a victim of its own methods and has lost its audience because test pieces are not appealing to the wider public, where does community banding as a leisure activity sit with this?

PH: I think that’s crucially important because in essence brass bands, Philip Sparke mentioned this to me when we were talking about it, brass bands play for themselves. At the community level what could be better than being a, you know, like a choir, that’s part of what you do. It’s part of your leisure time, it’s part of your hobby activity and where you’re playing and practicing is as important as giving a concert. And actually those community bands, hundreds of them, they do have an audience. You can go to a community concert and you know you are going to fill your hall just as an amateur choir will because they’ve got parents and friends and supporters and locality. And as long as they are serving their community in that way
and they appear in public on parade on armistice day and that sort of thing, Remembrance Sunday and Christmas I think that is a really, really important function. I used to conduct a band in the nineties called Besses o’ th’ Barn when it was a Championship [Section] band. I went to conduct a rehearsal the other day and they are in the Third Section now and there was only half a band there and they are really struggling. And it’s only really dawned on them there’s that band in the middle of nowhere between Bury and Manchester and they weren’t playing to anybody, they didn’t have an audience. You’ve got to make your, and that’s where I think the youth bands and the community bands have a real purpose. It’s not talking about high flown artistic endeavour, it’s not Cory or Black Dyke. That’s really where I’m talking about losing their audience, those great bands. When people listen to them they go “I had no idea”.

CO: So you see a divide in the brass band movement?

PH: Yes definitely.

CO: between the community, strictly amateur, local level and the top end of banding?

PH: Yes I think there is and I think the grey area occurs really about halfway, three quarters of the way, two thirds of the way through the Championship Section and there is, because really I think when I first started doing serious brass band programming twenty five years ago you could say there were eight to ten bands who had an agenda which wasn’t just fixed in their locality, they were going on the road, giving concerts, even with Besses o’ th’ Barn, they had a bit of a name then, we were
going all over the country doing concerts but now and I’d leave Scotland out of this largely because they have their own infrastructure, I’m talking about England and Wales here. Really now the only bands, Black Dyke, Brighouse, Grimethorpe, Cory, Tredegar. Five bands on the road doing concerts and Tredegar aren’t doing many and Faireys aren’t doing that many. Fodens look after themselves. Foden’s is an interesting case, if you want to I’ll talk about that later if you like, about how you generate you, and Black Dyke as well, how you generate your audience at that high level and how you manage your support infrastructure. But below that, below those few bands they won’t have a following and to be honest if you are going to joe public there is really only one band with a name, Black Dyke. And Grimethorpe, if you want Brassed Off you go to Grimethorpe or you want something, you turn up and it’s going to be adventurous it’s going to be Grimethorpe and thereafter... For general public, for the general public I could put a concert on and Black Dyke will double my audience and the programme might be the same as what any other band is given. Cory can’t fill a concert here [Bridgewater Hall].

0:13:43

CO: So we’ve talked about the general media side of things, if we just turn back to the repertoire, you say you’ve commissioned around forty test pieces.

PH: Yes, not test pieces. I don’t like the word, I would say, I don’t like the word, I’ve never commissioned a test piece. I’ve commissioned music that has been used for test pieces and are continuing to do so and if they are used as a test piece, I’ve never, I’ve actually... Eden I actually commissioned to be used at the [Royal] Albert Hall and it’s the only one that was commissioned without a concert premiere first. I
suppose you could say yes I’ve done one test piece although it’s an exceptional piece of music in its own right but no generally I’ve never commissioned a test piece, 

*Paganini [Variations]* wasn’t commissioned as a test piece.

CO: What was the... *Paganini* has turned into one of the most famous test pieces...

PH: Yes I commissioned it for Grimethorpe when they won the BBC Brass Band of the Year in 1990 I think. We used to have a, we ran a little... the band that gave the most interesting broadcast was given the BBC Band of the Year and as their prize the BBC, at my instigation commissioned Philip Wilby and I got Philip to write his second brass band piece and the one that took off. But as soon as it arrived, when it arrived on my desk and actually I played it through at Besses first of all before it went to Grimethorpe and thought “oh it’s a test piece here” so I phoned Harry Mortimer up the following day and said “I’ve got this, do you want it?”

CO: So the fact that it turned into a test piece was nothing to do with yourself then?

PH: Well I had the inkling. You’ve got to be pragmatic about these things and I thought if its Philip Wilby make it Championship [Section], make it hard and if it’s the right sort of piece it might get used. Similarly *Whitsun Wakes* by Michael Ball which I commissioned to be played here by Black Dyke but at the same time I said to Michael “if you do this and this and this and this...” then we might get it used as a test piece and it was taken up by the [British] Open.

0:15:57

CO: So do you consciously, or sub consciously, tend to work within the restraints of test pieces? The length, the difficulty.
PH: It depends what you mean. I suppose I operate in a sense, I’m more interventionist than a lot of people who commission because of my background at the BBC and because I have a strong, I think I have a strong artistic motivation myself because I’ve commissioned some things where I’ve been very closely involved. When I go to commission something I always ask the composer, I always give a brief, I don’t just say “can you write this for me?” I say “look, I’m looking for this, it’s for this band, it needs to be...” You know the reason test pieces are around fifteen minutes is because their lips fall off afterwards, that’s why they’re that length “it needs to be around this length, make it hard, don’t overdo the percussion.” That’s all the people I’ve ever written to, I’ve said “make it for three percussion [players]. If you want to use solo stuff make it clever, don’t just put cadenzas in.” So I’ve sort of done that along the line but always making sure that it wasn’t just an episodic test piece like some of the ones that are being written at the moment but making sure that it had a... and choosing the right composer is very important, that it has an artistic agenda to it.

CO: Your talk of solos and cadenzas there is very interesting given the 2014 and 2012 commissions for the [Championship Section] Nationals Peter Meechan’s [The Legend of] King Arthur, which had some use of solos and compare that to 2012...

PH: Arthur wasn’t commissioned for the Albert Hall, that was, the brief of that was, it was commissioned by a band in Switzerland for an own choice test piece and that is another, those own choice pieces some of them are really good but they are particular animals and it’s very difficult sometimes to place them because they are written with a particular... you know “I want this here and I want a solo here...”
Simon Dobson, I work for Veber editing music and Simon Dobson wrote one called *Journey of the Lone Wolf* for Black Dyke as a test piece for them, they never used it in the end, but that had all tricks for him, and a bit for him and a bit for them. It doesn’t always make a great piece in my view but, so that was, Pete’s piece was written for Michael Bach’s band in Lucerne, and then I think the panel just rather liked it because it’s, it’s very commercial, I hated it.

CO: But if you compare that to the 2012 commission which was done for the Nationals, *Breath of Souls* which had an extensive use of cadenzas...

PH: It was a horrible piece though, what a ghastly piece. I mean Paul, I like Paul a lot but what a dreadful, dreadful piece. Why, he just put tricks in and I mean there are problem with the scoring, there always are with his music, and internal balancing. But actually what he did was just write a test piece. What he didn’t say was “what have I got to say? What do I want to say?” That’s the difference. The essential difference is where you start as a composer I think. “What do I want to convey?” or “Am I going to write a test piece?” If you say “are you going to write a test piece?” you then give yourself tick box lists of things you’ve got to include and it can be very dissatisfying, as in that piece. If you have a similar agenda but you “right but I want to convey this... but it’s going to be a test piece” you’ll come up with something like Eddie Gregson wrote, what’s it called? The piece that went right back... *[Of Distant Memories] (Music in an Olden Style)* which did all the test piecey things but it was properly composed, properly conceived and it had a meaning to it.

CO: What I find interesting is your saying “be very careful putting solos and cadenzas in” whereas the 2012 test piece was basically a series of cadenzas.
PH: Well its rubbish, if you want to test a band fine, I don’t have a problem with it if that’s what you want to use to just test a band but what’s the point of just testing a band? When they are just going to play to a judge? And most bands to be honest with you hated it because they weren’t giving anything other than playing tricks. You’ve got to have, I always feel that’s my big thing about brass bands and it only happens in brass banding. Now I’ve been involved in competitions with choirs and pianists, I used to do a lot of the Leeds competitions, that’s a slightly different thing because it’s the young artists, but their concern there isn’t necessarily, yes it’s to show off, but it isn’t just to see how well they can play, it’s to enjoy themselves and make sure the audience enjoy themselves as well.

0:20:47

CO: There was two things that Alan Fernie said to me when I interviewed him as part of this project. The first was that “no composer has ever written their greatest thoughts for brass bands” and the second...

PH: No composer’s?

CO: Written their greatest thoughts for brass bands.

PH: No that’s rubbish. Don’t agree. What are you talking about by composers? What does he mean by that though? There are some composers who only write for brass bands. How’s he going to or him himself for a start? How are you going to talk to Philip Sparke “you’ve not written your greatest thoughts for brass bands.” “well where have I written them then?” he doesn’t write for orchestra.
CO: And his second point was communication between band and audience and how composers deal with communication. It’s something also Peter Graham spoke about when I interviewed him, with examples of use of, for example Paganini Variations it starts with a melody that is known to the audience and goes on a journey.

PH: Peter is very conscious of an audience I mean think of the piece that is being done for the Regional Championships this year, based on Eric Ball’s music. A lot of his melodies are based upon, because he is very thoughtful and clever composer he knows for example he’s obviously analysed Eric Ball’s melodic language, how do you wrap up your audience in your music [sings 3 notes, concert pitch Bb, G, G, the opening of Resurgam], a major sixth and then every tune Peter writes starts with a major sixth because its involving, it draws you in. It doesn’t set you at a distance like a fourth or a fifth does so yes he is very conscious of that. My feeling is a composer shouldn’t necessarily need to be writing for his audience.

CO: Who should he be writing for?

PH: Himself! What’s the point otherwise? If you’re not going to write... It’s a big, big subject this actually about who you write for. A composer has got to be... if you just apply methods and tricks in order to appeal to an audience you can end up with Breath of Souls if you write from your own language something that you are comfortable with, something which you have absorbed as part of your DNA, whatever that might be, you’ll end up with Harmony Music, fantastic. Whereas if you’re thinking of... a lot of these composers are my friends so I have to be careful what I say here, but if you... when I’m commissioning, let’s go from another angle. When I’m commissioning a composer because I know what their music is like, its
actually who I ask to write that’s the most important thing not what they are going to write because I know that music will be appropriate for that audience. I don’t think it’s the composer’s job necessarily unless he really wants to, to say “right I’m going to write like this” unless he’s just a commercial composer, which Alan Fernie is, he’s a commercial writer, he’s got to sell stuff he’s got to appeal to an audience but if you are talking of coming from an artistic point of view then really I say “no I’m going to have him because it’s a concert here [Bridgewater Hall] and it’s a classical audience” or if it’s the [Royal] Albert Hall “no I’ll have him because I know that what he writes will appeal to that audience. You’ve got to get the horses for courses. So no I don’t think Alan is correct there. I know what he means, he means Holst didn’t write, Holst’s Moorside Suite isn’t like the Planets or Elgar’s Severn Suite isn’t like Symphony Number 2 because they wrote, similar to us actually, this is a huge circular argument. But similar to us actually they probably had no great idea of what brass bands are about and they are thinking “amateur musicians, right” they’ll just write down a bit. You don’t have to do that, I mean Holst doesn’t write down to be honest but Elgar certainly did but Herbert Howells didn’t. That’s why Pageantry is such a fantastic piece, because what he gave for brass bands is exactly the same as what he writes for orchestras. There is no difference in his style.

CO: Coming back actually to one last thing that Alan [Fernie] said, “there is a difference in a composer saying to a musician ‘what do you want?’ or a musician saying to a composer ‘I would like this’ and musical interpretation.

PH: What do you mean?
CO: Writing a piece of music, that is quite often done with bands, especially with own choice test pieces they write for a band, do you think that is detrimental because it makes the work of interpreting a piece so much more difficult if it is written for a specific band?

PH: It could do.

CO: Is this why you said some of these own choice test pieces are less...

PH: It’s just that they end up rather unbalanced pieces, and yes you’re right actually it means that they can’t, their shelf life or their life is going to be restricted. For example Philip Sparke wrote a piece called *A Tale As Yet Untold* for Cory with this enormous euphonium solo in the middle movement. Well there aren’t many bands who’ve got David Childs sitting in them so that piece will not have a great, it has been played. I can’t see it ever being set as a test piece, set in a competition for every band to play. I wouldn’t do it if I were choosing pieces because you’re going to embarrass half of the euphonium soloists. I think that’s probably what Alan is talking about. These pieces are specific and maybe don’t travel whereas commissioning something for general use is very different, or for an artistic project is very different. Because music has a function doesn’t it, you know? And it’s a very specific thing writing these brass band test pieces.

0:27:34

CO: If we look at the test pieces which have been most frequently used in the National series and the Open series. What I’ve done in my research is basically taken the test pieces that were chosen and joined the two series together.
PH: Right, do tell me.

CO: One we’ve already mentioned, *Pageantry* is the most frequently used.

PH: Yes, I’m not surprised.

CO: having been used 8 times in the last hundred years and Eric Ball is the most frequently used composer.

PH: Why do you think that is? Says he asking you a question.

CO: Partly because he is a prolific writer who has managed to write for every section. There are quotes of certain composers saying “if I was asked to write for a lower section I would not know what to do.”

PH: Well basically it’s Alan’s thing again, the brass band is his orchestra. If you can look up some of the things he said about himself. I think there is something about him in a chapter I wrote for, have you come across Trevor Herbert’s book? You must have. The chapter I wrote in that, there was a quote from Eric Ball that I used in that where he said about him generally being conservative minded. I mean he is very old fashioned and that’s why people like it because the melodies, it’s like popular music. It’s intelligible, understandable and you don’t have to think a lot. You’ve just got to let it wash over you. It is very well written but it is terribly old fashioned. I love it mind you, I absolutely adore Eric Ball’s music but the health warning is “this is probably one hundred years out of date and it’s totally derivative of other composers, Elgar, Richard Strauss, Tchaikovsky and Ivor Novello in the main” but that’s why it’s popular. It’s the Classic FM syndrome. People know it and know what they like and they like that. So yes Eric Ball, and he just knew what to do for lower
section bands. There are a few other composers who are very good at it, Philip Sparke is very good at that too. *Evolution* is a terrific piece, coming up for the Regionals this year, absolutely superb. Peter Graham, not bad at doing that but whereas Wilf Heaton, a composer I’ve done a lot on, *Contest Music* probably appears on your list, does it?

CO: Yes, it’s been used five times.

PH: Yes *Contest Music* along with *Cloudcatcher [Fells]*, that must be on your list?

CO: It’s not actually because this only a list of pieces which have been used four or more times.

PH: Oh right well it hasn’t been in use that long, but for me *Pageantry, Cloudcatcher [Fells]* and *Contest Music* and *Harmony Music* are my four top test pieces.

CO: Why?

PH: Because they are very well written. I’m writing a lot on Wilfred Heaton at the moment and I’ve edited a lot of his music, if you want to get any of it to play with any of your bands you can buy it from me. But that piece, *Contest Music* is so, so well written, there’s hardly a note out of place and for a piece where everyone is resting for half the time to be so popular because its such quality writing and he wrote it in the [19]50’s and then worked it again in the [19]70s and it didn’t get used until the [19]80s so that shows you how that had a long, long journey, wonderful. Anyway, sorry I’m digressing here.

CO: I was just wondering if you would like to have a look at the actual list.
PH: Oh yes I would like having a look.

CO: That’s in alphabetical order by piece title.

PH: What do you want me to do? Comment upon this, or?

CO: Yes just any thoughts on it. Obviously the more modern composers haven’t made it yet simply because their pieces aren’t old enough to have been used multiple times.

PH: Right let’s have a look. *Comedy [Overture]* is, oh that’s the other piece, they make my top four. *Comedy [Overture], Pageantry, Contest Music, Cloudcather Fells* are my top four pieces. *Comedy [Overture]* is a fantastically well written piece and gives the lie to what Alan said because having written that he [John Ireland] rescored it as an orchestral piece called *London Overture*, same music. He titivated it up and I don’t think he improved it by doing so actually, it was better as it was in my view. *A Holiday Suite* lower section, nice. Brahms *Academic Festival Overture*, yeah it’s a bit of a dull arrangement. *An Epic Symphony* is a fantastically good piece I can see why... *Ballet for Band* ditto, marvellous work, beautifully elegant, elegantly written. *Call of the Sea*, I selected that for the Second Section or Third Section a few years ago or something I remember, yes 2003 when I was choosing test pieces. *Carnival* I don’t know that, I ought to know that but I don’t. She [Helen Perkin] was his [John Ireland] pupil.
PH: *Journey Into Freedom* yes. Interesting that I would have thought *Journey Into Freedom* might have been higher than that.

CO: Well this list is just in alphabetical order. *Journey Into Freedom* has been used four times.

PH: *Pageantry* eight yes.

CO: There’s only a couple of sixes, mostly fives and fours.

PH: Oh it’s interesting, it’s an interesting list and what I would expect to see and it shows you there’s not one single Philip Wilby piece in there.

CO: And why do you think that is? Is it simply because frankly he is still alive?

PH: Well it could be that. I mean they’re quite elderly those. It could be that but mind you John McCabe, you know he died last week John McCabe? He doesn’t feature either I suppose if you did this in ten years’ time they might. No that’s probably the reason, that their longevity, it’s not long enough away. But having said that...

CO: And similarly for Peter Graham and Philip Sparke?

PH: Yes exactly, but having said that the Heaton piece actually only emerged the same year as *Cloudcather Fells*, the year before.

CO: That’s interesting
PH: I know it was written a long time previously so that’s a very interesting fact that that, is that the latest piece on here? It is. It is the most advanced... the piece which is the newest but it’s still turned up five times. Which actually say how good...

CO: How good a piece it is?

PH: How good a piece it is and how much people admire it.

0:34:30

CO: Now in the sort of research I’m doing, the sort of research that these results give you, you are always going to get a view that is out of date with the current brass band repertoire.

PH: Yes.

CO: How does this compare to what you see as current contest repertoire.

PH: Nowhere near, nowhere near it. Simply because in the last, and this is where I was thinking about this prior to meeting you. Since I first started working with brass bands, I’m talking about elite, I think I better restrict myself to elite bands because although I’ve done a lot of work with youth bands it’s a different thing. In the elite sector I don’t think bands play any more musically or intelligently than they did. I go back to those old recordings I did in the [19]90s often just to check and my favourite recording, of brass band recordings is actually Black Dyke in 1985 on Chandos, *Cloudcather [Fells]*. That is probably, I don’t think there is a better brass band CD. However if you listen to the standard of the playing, you’re not talking about the intelligence or the conducting because frankly a lot of this is to do with how good the
conductors are and at the moment we aren’t in a good place in that at the moment there aren’t the numbers of good conductors there that used to be, there are still some brilliant ones we know, they’re all at the very top. I think that in those twenty five years technically things have got far better, bands play louder, they don’t necessarily play as subtly, they’re not prepared to play as quietly because it’s harder, because they want to impress and because they play so much better through the advent, largely because at the elite level the teaching system has changed. You know you no longer join a firm, a factory firm and are taught by the person sitting next to you, you now go to a college at the elite level, you become essentially professional standard or you know what professional standards are and you teach. So all of these top bands are now full of players who are technically incredibly able but are they necessarily, are their musical instincts necessarily any better? Well of course they’re not.

CO: So the modern education is teaching technicality at the expense…

PH: No I wouldn’t say that, I don’t think you can say that. I think there is a lot more… the players are more rounded a lot of them, they know a lot more about what is going on in music wider than the brass band circle and this talking about the actual instinct, the musical instinct that you can’t teach.

CO: So it’s not the fault of the education system?

PH: Oh no. No, no, no I just think it’s a result of training at colleges means that bands now sound and play very differently, they can play technically so much better therefore composers write for it so much better and it’s like an ever… you can’t call
it progress but it’s like a big circular expansion and because they’ve got to win
competitions they’ve got to out play the next one. Especially own choice level at the
Europeans, pieces in the last ten years have got harder and harder and harder and
harder. They’re not necessarily any better, they’re just harder to play and therefore
they’re harder to make convincing music out of. Its tails wagging dogs, we’re getting
back to where we were before talking about the composers function. And my feeling
is that lots and lots of notes and lots and lots of fast music and impressive music
doesn’t necessarily make a better piece as witnessed this. Contest Music, that’s got a
third of the notes in that some of these modern test pieces have got, and who says
Pageantry and Contest Music, like some of Eric Ball’s music, it’s like playing Mozart,
you have to play every note absolutely right or it sounds bad. Whereas some of
these bigger pieces, and Philip Wilby is partly responsible for this, you know, loads of
these keep everybody busy, keep everybody happy, play, play, play. It doesn’t
always produce for me the strongest results, the most musically rewarding results.

There’s an interesting thing, something’s just occurred to me. You mentioned a little
while ago that Peter Graham mentioned to you about Paganini having an air of
familiarity about it because of the tune it’s based upon. That’s part of Philip Wilby’s
agenda. I’ve talked to him about this and its sort of started a... and Peter’s now done
this to some extent and Thomas Doss and a lot of other composers, and its taking
something familiar and composing with it on their terms. So you end up with this
procession of test pieces that Philip Wilby has written based on Verdi, Mozart,
Vivaldi - poor piece and the best one of all Purcell because as he says, he calls it “a
consensual approach”. He is meeting his audience halfway and it’s produced a sort
of sub-genre of work really, when you think of... do you know the Thomas Doss one

_Spiriti_?

CO: No.

PH: He’s an Austrian composer in his forties and again for the European he has
written a series of test pieces based on very famous music. The piece called _Spiriti_ is
based on Bruckner and Bach and he wrote a piece for the same band in Switzerland
that Peter [Meechan] wrote his piece for and it’s called _REM-Scapes_ and its based on
the _Moonlight Sonata_. A lot of composers are doing... a piece I published called
_Titan’s Progress_, a similar thing using Mahler. Now I don’t think these are
necessarily... I mean you can make a judgement about how successful you think it is
and whether you think it’s right for someone to make a sort of make a quasi, a sort
of hybrid of an arrangement and an original composition but it fulfils a function as a
test piece and it’s a way of meeting your audience. But those pieces aren’t used so
much at the moment, interesting these pieces of Philip Wilby seem to have died,
they aren’t being played. Anyway that was a diversion.

CO: Well just on, we actually, our wind band commissioned him [Peter Graham] to
write a piece based on Jack Hylton’s music.

PH: I think he’ll do that very well.

CO: He did do it very well. The first movement was an original Latin dance, the
second was a trombone trio based on _Teddy Bear’s Picnic_ and the third was based on
_Joshua Fit The Battle Of Jericho_ and some of the band do sort of joke that Peter
Graham has never written an original melody in his life.
PH: No he hasn’t

CO: What do you think that does musically...?

PH: He’s a technician, he’s an incredibly... I like Peter a lot I think some of his music is amazingly good but, and if you want a critique of his music which I can give you as a professional, as a critic, you know a trained critic, I sometimes feel he applies, he almost out thinks himself and he applies his knowledge and his experience without always, I don’t think it always comes from the heart although its emotional music. It’s a very odd thing, you know his melody, he frames it out of Eric Ball. He wouldn’t write his brass band music as it does... you know Wilfred Heaton turns up time and time again, I hear little bits, Harrisons’ Dream has got bits of the Heaton in it, it’s got lots of Eric Ball in it and at the same time he wrote it in 4:4 and then thought “oh wait no it’s a test piece” so he moved it all back a beat, but why? Why instead of going [sings and conducts phrase] go [sings and conducts phrase], what’s the point of it? Just to be hard, the same with the piece he is writing for... The Torchbearer. He’s written it in B major and E major because it’s hard to go on back valves for bands. What’s the point? Why just put traps in for the sake of it? I said that in my article in British Bandsman this week because it’s interesting. It’s an interesting way he has... again its amazingly clever but in the end you have to think is he being true to himself? But then maybe he doesn’t need to be because he is a commercial composer and he’s not interested in that. He is interested in writing music like Alan Fernie does, writing for publication, earning a living, it’s a commercial... it’s a very different mind-set and his craft is amazing, he is so clever. He could turn himself, turn into imagining Jack Hylton or reimagining Eric Ball or what else has he done?
CO: If we look at the pieces that were most popular last weekend at the UniBrass competition, this is among young...

PH: PLC [Paul Lovatt-Cooper] wasn’t it?

CO: And Peter Graham. Between the two of them there was hardly a band that didn’t play either.

PH: I can understand why Peter’s music is used, because he is good at it. I mean he really does know his, he knows his market. I’m talking in a very different way now, I wouldn’t talk this about Eddie Gregson or John Pickard, I might talk about it to some extent with Philip. That’s the thing with Peter, he is writing to a market, he is being a commercial composer. He has got enormous resources of technique, he can turn his hand to crafting, you know something for a lovely arrangement, so subtle some of them are really good and he is very good at writing quasi big band style. Right from very early on that was one of his tricks, you think of Essence of Time [sings phrase] he was very good at doing that and there are these little ways of writing that turn up a lot, that in particular is one of them. [sings phrase] all that sort of stuff. So he has these technical resources and he is very good, so skilled doing it. I think slightly different with Paul in that he is such a clone of Hollywood, [James] Horner and, you can call him Horner Williams if you want, they’re his big things aren’t they really. And if it wasn’t on a brass band and it was on midi, I think it would, it sounds really impressive. His problem is he can’t score. He doesn’t understand the medium properly in my view. So while its superficially very impressive like Where Eagles Sing and all that, its kitsch, its rubbish. It’s just lovely exciting and if I were doing a
community band now I’d be playing some of it, I wouldn’t like it but it just touches… you know.

0:46:04

CO: So the fact that these are so popular with some of the upcoming, the banders of the future...

PH: Because it’s pop music, its where... I’m not being disparaging, please I’m not being judgemental here but it’s fun, it follows a… its where peoples’ music is at and these writers know that and there is nothing wrong with that. They’re aware and they like doing it, Paul loves that style so he’ll write like it and he knows that they’ll like it so he has a touch, it’s not a common touch, it’s a knowledge, a canny knowledge of knowing your audience, knowing your audience and an artistic composer, this is where I’m saying there is a difference in my mind. Some composers don’t want to know their audience, they just want to write for themselves, that’s fine too, they won’t earn a living from it but they’ll be able to be commissioned and their agenda is an artistic one like Lucy [Pankhurst] at the [Royal] Northern College [of Music], Lucy Pankhurst, a fantastic creative but being creative in that way isn’t necessarily the same as being “ahh I’ll just do this” having the resources, the technical ability because they couldn’t do that, turn their hand to what those guys do knowing just how to flick the switch.

CO: So what does that say about the future of the brass band repertoire?

PH: I think the future will be as it always has been, it’s never changed, in essence it hasn’t changed. If you go right back to a hundred years, the essential ingredients and
the way it responds the need I don’t think has changed at all and you have these
circular arguments and it comes in waves. So for example the bedrock of the
repertoire is concert music which is marches and light numbers, light numbers aren’t
even played that much because its arrangements, and what are the arrangements?
The arrangements are a response to what players and their audiences know and
because we are not talking about classical music here it was dance music to start
with at the beginning of the twentieth century, Edwardian dance music, popular
music. It then became what was popular on the radio and what was popular in the
opera way back. Now its film and television so that bedrock of concert repertoire has
remained the same and occasionally you get these spikes of creativity because there
is a sort of circular... and it all depends, I was talking to Nick Childs about this the
other day, have you spoken to him yet?

CO: Not yet no, he is on my list.

PH: Do speak to him. Very interesting that he and I both agree that that top very thin
top soil of repertoire, the artistic repertoire, if there weren’t people like myself, Elgar
Howarth, Harry Mortimer, Nick as well. I mean we aren’t talking about bodies
[organisations] although some bands do, some enlightened bands, none of this
repertoire would be there. It’s not, it doesn’t come from within, it doesn’t well up
from within the band community it’s actually peoples’ enthusiasms and knowledge
that have created it. It’s very, very different I think, a very different approach to for
example Mozart or Beethoven or Chopin wrote for himself but Mozart wrote all that
fantastic music but it was for dances but there was no distinction made between
writing for dances and concerts you know? Beethoven did but there was always a,
I’m probably going to lose myself a bit now in the complexity here, I don’t mean to be. It is all really down to function but what we are talking about here, that test piece agenda whether you get composers to write creatively or you get them to fill a tick box, if you look at your historical chart and where this all comes, it comes in waves so the [19]50s for example not so interesting, largely because people were recovering from the war but the [19]70s there was a response at the top level to modernism to a certain extent and a lot of adventure going on in the repertoire, a lot of people, a lot of resistance to it but you think of *Energy* or *Images*, a lot of resistance to that. It’s the shock of the new and you have to, this is a fascinating subject you know, because you have to think that if you are doing, if you are rehearsing a test piece people are going to live with it for so long, it’s not a reason why modern music, because people have got to understand it, it’s not just like listening to it once you’ve got to live with it for six weeks maybe seven weeks and so that’s another reason why they have to have a certain familiarity, written in a certain way. I remember in 2003 was it? Or 2002 or 2004 even I selected for the Regionals Championships a piece by Judith Bingham called *Prague*, do you know that piece?

CO: no.

PH: No, it created a storm, it’s not really very modern I don’t think but for general band use it was thought to be rather modern and unfulfilling which is another reason that that sort of hits one of you questions there to a certain extent. So yes this sort of feeling comes in waves and I think at the minute we are hitting a downslope in that sense, musicians aren’t selecting pieces at the moment in this country. It’s not being selected necessarily, the [British] Open is not being selected by musicians its
being selected by a promoter, the Nationals is being conditioned by what is going to fill seats and that therefore affects not necessarily the quality of what’s written but the sound of what’s written.

0:52:22

CO: So the commercial nature of these contests, the fact that it costs x thousand pounds

PH: Yes

CO: to hire out the Royal Albert Hall

PH: That is absolutely key I think at the moment to how these contests are sounding. That there is a decline in audience, you can tell that by what’s happening at the [British] Open Championship, it’s not full any more. Its full the following day when there is a concert on, it’s not full for the contest anymore and therefore the organisers are thinking much more in terms of audience friendly material for example they co-commissioned Edward Gregson’s *Symphony in Two Movements* along with the National Youth Brass Band of Wales and the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain and chose not to use it because they thought it was too modern.

CO: This links back to what you said at the beginning about...

PH: oh by the way so instead of doing that they put in a rather kitsch and very poor arrangement from *Scheherazade*. Absolute disgrace, but everyone loved it but it was
an absolute disgrace. It was a terrible piece because Stephen [Roberts] just thought, Stephen was on the main chance.

CO: You said at the beginning that brass banding has lost its audience from Joe public, from the wider public and that’s why it is disappearing or has disappeared from the BBC and other mainstream media so what, you said there is a reaction...

PH: Well yes what do I mean? I think I’ve got to be careful when I say what do I mean by audience. Audiences should I be perhaps saying? Rather than just, I don’t think there is just one audience and I’m actually doing a seminar on this at the European Championships, just beginning to think about it now actually which is probably why I’m wittering on like this. I think you have to talk about audiences for band, I think that’s really what you have alluded to when you think for example at the [British] Open Championship in September the Sunday concert, the afternoon concert which is ordinary traditional concert music always fills Symphony Hall to the brim, Black Dyke, Cory and Grimethorpe. The previous day it is only full if the test piece is audience friendly and it’s a very different audience. It’s the in crowd as opposed to the general public who like brass bands.

CO: So if audience friendly test pieces are only attracting the in crowd is this linked to the decline in broadcasting of brass bands because it’s a different audience?

PH: I think the decline, that’s an interesting one isn’t it, that is a really interesting question.

CO: If I phrase it a different way...

PH: Yes phrase it a different way for me.
CO: What could brass bands, the people who are choosing test pieces for contests, what could they do to appeal to the joe public audience? to get it broadcast?

PH: No, I don’t think they will because I don’t think the public is interested in contests in the same way.

CO: A piece of music that would work for a contest and would get joe public to listen to it...

PH: Get me to commission it.

CO: Is that possible?

PH: Well it’s happened before. I think it just depends how you approach the commissioning of it or whether you need to use a new piece for example. For example, well look just let me put my own experience in here, I was responsible for the commissioning of two, through the BBC, of two pieces at the [British] Open Championship. One was Paganini Variations and the other was the Maunsell Forts by John McCabe which went down like a lead balloon because it ends quietly but you can’t ask a composer like John, you don’t give John a menu. You just ask and we had enough, it was fifteen years trying to get a piece out of him until he, he needed to find, he is one of those composers who needs to have the motivation, the inspiration, he can’t just sit down and write a test piece and he visited those forts and that was great. It’s a fantastic piece but it’s not a very good test piece but whenever I’ve played it, whenever it’s been heard on the radio in a serious format its always been admired and so he had the problem of audiences you know. I think probably what I’m talking about here, more than the... is trying to find an audience
for serious artistic endeavour by brass bands which is the tough thing to do. I think
the general appeal of bands, but you see the general appeal of bands I think those
who like it like it and you’ll get an elderly audience on a Sunday afternoon at
Symphony Hall it will fill it and they’ll have a lovely time wallowing in nostalgic music
but when we asked John Suchet why Classic FM doesn’t play brass band music he
said “we get too many letters of protest”.

CO: When they do or don’t?

PH: When they do. “We get too many angry letters, ‘why are you playing brass band
music?’ so therefore we don’t do it.”

CO: Did he say anything about why people were writing angry letters?

PH: No. No he just said “whenever we put it on we get people saying ‘I don’t want to
hear that’ therefore we don’t play it.” And I think that’s part of, I wouldn’t say that’s
part of the culture but that is indicative isn’t it, that brass, other than those who
know about it and still flock to concerts or those declining numbers that like the set
piece test piece, there’s a problem. There isn’t the same problem in Europe, A
because there is not the same amount of legacy, of history, heritage and expectation
and there isn’t an audience anyway, you know they are building an audience from
scratch there and there isn’t an audience, there isn’t really an audience, they don’t
have a public to play to play to, they play to small audiences for their concerts but at
the European Championship every year, and this is something which I think contests,
and I don’t know whether you are going to touch on this, but the own choice
element, yes I’ve mentioned quite a bit about how issues that one can see
potentially with the nature of the writing but the occasions are fantastic and its always full. Not in this country but in Europe it’s astonishing really and this is something that I need to try and articulate. There seems to me more of an audience for hearing a band contest in European countries now than here. The European Championship struggles here. There is a weight of tradition about British brass bands not accepting, I think, that actually what they are doing in Europe is as good if not better in some respects and the own choice elements of these contests, all of them because you’re listening to a range of music, you’re not listening to the same piece over and over again, therefore there is variety. There is a variety of standards of playing and it’s much more enjoyable than listening to the same piece twenty times. You might hear one two or three times but by and large you’re going to have a varied diet of repertoire and the atmosphere you get on those occasions is amazing. You could double what you have at UniBrass, make it three or four times as loud, the cheering at the end.

CO: So the history of brass bands, you said that’s the problem for the Europeans here is the history, is that because brass bands have been pigeon holed into what people think brass bands play

PH: Yes

CO: or is it because of the music that they actually play?

PH: No I’m sure it’s a cultural pigeon hole in this country actually both people outside of brass banding and within the band culture, they can’t see beyond the ferry port. They still I think there is a resistance to what’s going on in Europe as being
interesting to them. They are not interested in it I don’t think. Every time the
European Championships has been held in England it has lost money, the last twice
when the Federation put it at Symphony Hall it lost money. I mean they have a very
odd deal anyway because the way it’s organised is very strange and in Perth in last
May if it hadn’t been for all the people coming from the continent of Europe the hall
would have been half empty, a third full, less than a third full. It was a very
disappointing home audience. I don’t know about Cardiff when it’s going to be there
but I just know that in Freiberg in Germany in this coming May it’s going to be
packed., it’ll be packed for Lille the year after next and Austria, when it was done in
Austria which is, you know there is no brass band culture there, there are only four
brass bands in the whole country, it was absolutely full, all weekend, huge concert
hall. Absolutely full because people were basically eager to hear the music and the
level of appreciation of what’s going on I think is higher which brings me on to
another subject I think, maybe we are not educated enough musically in this country
to appreciate what is going on.

1:02:02

CO: Who isn’t educated enough?

PH: Us, generally.

CO: The general public?

PH: Generally within music, music education is very dumbed down these days and its
financially hamstrung so there is a real limit to... there is a lack of ambition and easy
optionism going on, that’s a very odd word. I think within my experience of what’s
going on within school teaching, you know, so its enabling kids to produce, I don’t
know whether I’m right here because obviously I’m two generations out, my kids are
now 36 and 32 so it’s a long time since they were at school. But would I be right in
thinking that music education is largely pop based these days?

CO: yes.

PH: Well there you are, that’s the answer. There is no sense of, therefore there is
going to be a lack, that’s presumably why the audience is getting older and older
because there’s not the, the easy option is four or five chords on a keyboard, a
ukulele or a guitar. It’s easy it’s cheap and you can get instant results of a fairly
decent order but as soon as you put something to your lips, every kid wants to do it
but six months later they are bored stiff because they have got to practice.

CO: The comments about us, as in the public, not being musically educated to want
to listen to...

PH: There’s a lack of appreciation of what’s going on.

CO: Is very different, in fact is the exact opposite of the Classic FM listeners who
have written in letters of complaint because they have heard a brass band because
they are surely the classical audience.

PH: No they are the “I know what I like” audience because apparently they don’t put
sopranos on either because they get warbly sopranos and they don’t like warbly
sopranos, they don’t appear.

CO: So Classic FM’s audience isn’t actually the proper classical audience?
PH: It’s not necessarily, no its really complex isn’t it all this. I think the Classic FM audience is the “I know what I like” audience when the singing is there and I’m doing something else but if you are sitting in a brass band, any brass band event or any concert here [Bridgewater Hall] there’s nothing, there’s your focus and a lot of people don’t know how to do it, there’s no approach and therefore people, I mean my daughter is the same – she hears anything in more than three or four parts she gets totally confused by it and won’t listen and she’s been like that ever since, she’s mid-thirties, that’s over twenty years, “I don’t like the stuff you did” even orchestral music she finds totally, totally baffling. My son’s not quite the same because he is into drum and bass but that’s still very, very one dimensional and I think it’s that multi-dimensional feel and the amount of subtlety in listening and that does stem from how we are taught to listen doesn’t it.

CO: So if brass banding is ever to regain its former popularity it had forty or fifty…

PH: Oh it won’t do that.

CO: If we thought it could, which seems extremely unlikely, but if it was to say go back to the days of the Crystal Palace where you would get forty or fifty thousand turning up to a contest, what audiences would it want to increase? Because we have talked about all these different audiences…

PH: Well it can’t really, I think these audiences are bound by their culture and their experience, I don’t think that’s necessarily a way you can think about it actually. It’s a matter of… some things you can control and one is awareness and marketing, promotion, getting your message out, you can control that. You can’t control
peoples’ reactions to what you do but you can influence it, but the influencing has to be on a much wider scale from, and it is a general cultural thing, education. People have got to experience it young enough in order to, or be jolted into listening to it, you get that sudden “ahh isn’t that wonderful” like Philip Wilby when these composers come in to it and suddenly being taken by it, because they are opportunists as well mind you. They know that brass bands... orchestral music, there are only a dozen of those in the whole country, brass bands will play your music but that’s another issue. So it is a matter of... I don’t think you can control how people approach your music. You can influence the level of engagement and I don’t think brass bands do that enough. I don’t think they promote themselves enough, with enough vigour.

CO: To which audiences?

PH: Well to whatever audiences you are talking about because I don’t think you can talk about one audience actually, these days there isn’t a brass band audience anymore. There are audiences for certain things in my view, in my experience anyway. You can give opportunities for people to appreciate it, I don’t think brass bands, I think brass bands shoot themselves in the foot by being so insular, this is the downside of contesting. It creates an internal view and not an outgoing view. Would you not agree with that?

CO: Yes.
PH: Yes so they are thinking more about beating Fairey next month, Fodens, ahh no
Fodens isn’t lets be careful here. Fodens isn’t actually, I want to talk about them,
they are very...

[Interruption]

1:09:04

PH: What was I talking about?

CO: Audiences and how you interact with them.

PH: Yes I don’t think you can speak of one audience for brass bands anymore. There
is a core audience which likes it’s popular, and that’s never, one wouldn’t want to
change it to be honest. The working man’s audience, it’s not the working man
anymore, that’s another part of the problem. The working man’s orchestra doesn’t
exist anymore because there aren’t any working people playing brass instruments
but that core is still there and you’ve got to manage it and you’ve got to keep it loyal.
But then there are other audiences you can break out into which is where this top
level composer comes into, the level where I’ve been involved for a number of years
which is the top level there. And I think you can influence that in terms of, that’s a
level of appreciation in areas where it can help build... If for example I’ve been down
to parliament to talk to in this way to MPs and the knowledge of, at that sort of
cultural level and that knowledge is very important when it comes to bands finding
avenues of funding because the Arts Council need to know there is going to be an
artistic agenda, they’re not interested in these bloody contests, not in the slightest.

CO: UniBrass tried to get arts council funding its second time and it didn’t.
PH: Of course it won’t, you won’t have it, you won’t get it and I don’t think it should because you’re not, and this is where I disagree with the Arts Council on so many things, especially their PC area, their diversity programme which for brass bands is irrelevant. Its hampering it because it’s a white middle and working class pastime and that is a no-no in terms of funding these days because there’s no cultural diversity in it however I think that’s changing because they are now seeing what is being done, luckily and through Brass Bands England they are getting a lot more opportunities for money. But all those are driven...

[Interruption]

1:14:48

PH: Yes I think there isn’t one audience there are audiences that I think you have to approach and its quite clear to me that the avenues for wider funding opportunities, bands are always talking about “why can’t we get on radio?“ [in Yorkshire accent] – give them something they want, “why can’t we get any funding” – do something that ticks the right boxes, and I think they are now beginning to do that, the number of composers in residence which I think is terrific, arrangers in residence, the number of cross cultural artistic projects, your UniBrass. It’s interesting isn’t it there is no way, because of what you are doing, and it’s to do with youth development – is there not a way you can put a youth development spin on that funding? [UniBrass]

CO: Well we are, the interesting thing was, did you come along this year?

PH: No John was there.

CO: The interesting thing this year was on the Sunday we had workshops.
PH: You had Cory didn’t you? Cory were doing the Besson workshops.

CO: Yes Besson paid for all of the educational workshops for the general public but they only put a little bit of funding towards the workshops for university students the next day. So the university students pay a few pounds each to go whereas the general public educational workshops Besson sponsored the running and it’s as an education programme that UniBrass attracts its funding.

PH: Yes that is the only way you are going to do it. And that’s where I’m talking about being visible in ways that are appropriate. So in order to maximise state and lottery funding you have to be visible not just, I mean contesting just isn’t going to cut it because there is no audience benefit. It’s beneficial, as you know, it’s beneficial for everybody because we know the playing standards improve but that’s why I think these education projects, commissioning, co-commissioning, cross-commissioning, workshops you were saying but also getting out there in a concert life and bands promoting. I think they’ve got to take the agenda into their own hands to be honest. Part of the issue and I think it’s a legacy of where bands in the community and industry were, they had masters. Now bands are their own masters and I think that’s the only way it will regenerate if bands take control of what they are doing much, much more than they are and don’t expect “why can’t we get on the radio” well go out and get it.

CO: And what, to get it, to get that slot on whatever radio for a general radio audience, what do they do?

PH: They’ve got to be good enough.
CO: If [Black] Dyke came along to the BBC or a production company, whoever, and said “we’ve got this idea”, what is that idea that would...

PH: They would then be up against the market for anything else and I think the more they do...

CO: But what sort of idea would they have to have to get that slot? Because we’ve talked about the history and the cultural pigeon holing...

PH: If you look at the way choral music has been marketed on BBC 2 and [BBC] 4 and Gareth Malone has been fronting it. Now Gareth Malone has a lot of good qualities but he’s rubbish as a choral trainer. I’m wrong there, he’s not rubbish but I know there are choral conductors who have far, far about them and are able to get far, far more out of singers than he can. But what he has is the glint in his eye and the right look.

CO: That he is a TV presenter as well?

PH: And he’s got a lovely manner, you know he is someone I could easily have worked with, I’d have booked him at the BBC because he has all the right credentials and without someone like him, what’s happened there has been largely responsible for the regeneration of choral music in this country. And it’s not his ability, good though it is, it has spawned other people’s activity. The amount of choral work that is going on now, and it’s as hospice choirs and the Bridgewater Singers were here today – a pensioners choir. That activity has become almost like the community elements that brass band was seventy five years ago, it has the same function.

CO: So brass banding doesn’t have a function?
PH: So brass bands have got to find a voice in that way. It’s got to change its image, the days of these old fashioned circus uniforms must finish because it just puts people off. Its old fashioned in the wrong way, its retro in the wrong way, it sends out the image that its quasi-military or its part of circus and its Sousa and its wrong in my view because you see bands coming on who look… I’m not talking about putting on another uniform necessarily but finding something... because a Dickie bow and a dinner suit is another uniform, it’s another badge like the one the Halle do and it’s just as old fashioned, these orchestras in tails, why? I only wear a tie here [when introducing the Manchester Lunchtime Concerts] because one of my old ladies on the committee doesn’t like me not wearing a tie, by now normally I’d have it off. So I think that sense of, that old fashioned sense... so there is an image problem and that image problem is exaggerated when they get on the telly. It looks old fashioned, whereas with the right voice... and then there are expectations you see, but because the story that bands tell, they have not changed the story because they haven’t told it. So as far as the general public is concerned the story is the same as it was fifty years ago so when they make programmes about brass bands they’re patronising or they’re comic...

CO: Sue Perkins?

PH: That was an absolutely dreadful programme, it did more damage, *Brassed Off* did more damage because its emphasised what used to be... my wife is the same, she only... I’ve been in bands now for, well I’m sixty three so over fifty years involved in bands and it’s totally different now but as far as many people are concerned it’s
the same old story and until they are engaged with it in some way they don’t realise that.

1:21:00

CO: So is the problem with brass banding more the communication and the story than the notes.

PH Yes. In my view it’s a communication issue. It’s always quality as well, don’t get me wrong but there seems to be a problem a line up in terms of communication and the message that’s being told. I think it is changing, I mean there are groups that... the National Youth Brass Band [of Great Britain] for example, and all the other ones. They are a very different message, a very different story and I think the arts council is aware that there is a very different message but whether that is getting through more widely I don’t know because there is a definitely an image problem but can you imagine but can you imagine Fodens or Black Dyke not turning up in their gold and red? I can’t and Faireys, well they aren’t quite so bad actually but you just can’t imagine them not, you go “oh there’s Faireys” so it’s like Manchester United’s kit isn’t it.

CO: There’s just a couple of questions that we haven’t really touched on. Is brass banding still an amateur movement?

PH: No. Yes. Predominately yes, at the top no and this is all linked in I think with the fact that tertiary education, top bands are now full of basically teachers and students and professionals so the very top of banding all through Europe is now not amateur in the... It depends on what you mean by amateur and professional. There has
always been right back to when bands were part of industry you were given a job to play your instrument so you were a professional, really, because you did nothing, you didn’t go down the pit, you didn’t at Grimethorpe, you pushed a pen and played in the band but you were there to play in the band and GUS Footwear in Kettering, they pinched players from all over the country and they gave them a job, some menial task, in order to play in the band. So are you saying they were professionals or amateurs? They’re amateurs I suppose in the sense that they were being paid for something else but actually they were a sort of musical professional and these days, I mean bands have got, bands aren’t hugely wealthy apart from Black Dyke who have got a lot of money because they are very, very well run and their principle players, the principle players, all get paid a decent amount of money. I won’t tell you how much, you can find that out. Nick [Childs], won’t tell you, but you can probably find out but. The principle players get paid an appropriate level and their conductor gets paid an appropriate level, every player I think gets expenses but then the demands made on them are incredible. Twice a week, nearly every weekend two concerts, well one or two concerts. That’s an incredibly onerous... so you’d expect them because they are well funded and well managed and well organised, terrifically well organised, fantastic band, you’d expect them to be run like a professional group and while only a few of them, I mean Katrina [Marzella, solo baritone] for example is a lawyer these days so you couldn’t say she is a professional musician but she gets paid for playing in Black Dyke so it depends where. If you mean can they earn their livelihood entirely from it? No, they need to do other things but it’s a substantial amount for Richard [Marshall, principle cornet] or for Gary Curtin [principle euphonium], people like that. Fodens is different, they get paid expenses I think but
they have really embedded themselves, that’s what I was going to say to you, they
have embedded themselves in their community, they have an identity in Cheshire, I
don’t know if you know what they do? Love Music Trust and John Barber being
president of the band and head of music at the school and chairman of the Love
Music Trust so they’ve really embedded themselves in the education infrastructure
of the whole of East Cheshire and doing a fantastic job. Like Black Dyke they organise
and promote a lot of their own concerts so they make work for themselves and more
bands ought to do that, not just expect to hire in, put a concert on, hire a hall,
market it properly and they do that, Fodens and Black Dyke are the two that are
really, really pushing that.

CO: If the brass band movement...

PH: Now are you going to call it “movement”? I was going to pull you up on this, not
pull you up, I was going to enquire about that because is this going to be the right
terminology for, do you see it as... it depends on what you mean by movement. Is it
progressive?

CO: By movement I mean...

PH: Do you mean cultural phenomenon or it’s progressive?

CO: I mean cultural phenomenon, it’s basically a network of people who are
engaging with each other through their activity and the direction in which they are
going is united.

PH: Yes, we’ve stopped calling it movement in British Bandsman because the editor
doesn’t think it’s moving anywhere, at the moment. He thinks there is a lot of
stagnation about. Now it depends where you go and what you see and how you view it. I think there are signs of progression but it is generally progression within a declining market isn’t it. Basically you are talking about stopping decline aren’t you rather than opening up, that’s my view. And there are signs but unless kids start learning instruments and unless we stop this stupid every child only has six months on an instrument, so you get six months on a cornet and that’s it. What use is that? Absolutely ridiculous, anyway. So I’m not sure about whether movement is... I think in your terms that’s probably right, you’ve justified it but I was thinking movement in the sense of a welling up of progressive activity and expansion I’m not sure it is. Anyway sorry carry on.

CO: I was just wondering if it is an amateur movement apart from the top is there a link between the professionalism of the top of the movement and the commissioning of the artistic...

PH: I would like to think there is and I would like to think that a lot of those, they don’t all, those two I put up as models Black Dyke and Fodens both give a lot back in terms of their time. I mean their workshops, they are on the road giving workshops they’ve set their own youth bands up not in conflict with other youth bands but as a way of opening up opportunities with other bands to get together and to play more advanced music, whatever. So I think they are fulfilling a fantastic function in terms of progressing the movement, both bands and that example, a lot of people carp about it don’t they, but why? They are models of how to run yourself and I hope that people will look at that and say “well if they...”, I think that’s key a lot of bands are
being, thinking a bit more out of the box, I mean both of those organisations commission a lot of music, particularly Black Dyke.

CO: And it’s from the artistic not the commercial...?

PH: No it’s from “what do we need?” I wouldn’t say they do what I do which is say “who would I like to write? What do I...” The thing is I approach it from an independent point of view and I know that there are sources of funding that I can get for a particular agenda, a particular... the starting place is different. Their starting place is they want a piece for this or that, a piece for the youth band, a solo for so and so and they know that they are going to play it there, so they need that composer instead of that composer. I mean very canny, I admire Nicholas Childs a lot in that he knows his market very well. I wouldn’t necessarily say that he... I think there are times that you can risk, he perhaps doesn’t take enough of a risk for me sometimes, don’t tell him I said so or he won’t speak to me again. But he knows his market, he knows his audience and he knows what fits where and I think that that’s admirable and more people ought to follow him. But there are you know, composers in residence are all over the place, even little bands have them and that’s a wonderful way of getting young composers working, you know. And what Black Dyke’s doing helping Jonny Bates, he’s principle horn, mentoring him, they really are working closely with him to make sure he does the right thing because he’s only nineteen.

CO: Is there anything else that you haven’t touched upon that you think having looked at your time in brass banding and the media, if there is anything else?
PH: I do regret that division that seems to have opened up largely, and I think it won’t improve until more people in the brass band find their way into a wider sphere, Gavin Higgins is a case in point, doing very well creatively and there are other people but not necessarily on the creative side, in the background like what I used to do because without people who know something about the background there’s no chance of influencing where you need to influence unless someone is there who knows about it and I think in terms of the radio there’s nobody working within the BBC who knows anything about brass bands, no one.

CO: How long has that been the case for?

PH: Since I left. That was only by coincidence because I happened to be appointed to a position and I knew something about it therefore I could take over from the guy who was doing it before me. So they’ve lost that contact, there’s a whole tradition of band work within the BBC as a model of broadcasting in general and there was always somebody there appointed who had knowledge and background and worked on the programming. Now there isn’t anybody, not even at Radio 2, the guy who does Listen to the Band is a jazz specialist. He knows a lot about it and he’s got advice from Frank Renton which is good but Frank’s seventy five. So you need people in the right places, if people aren’t in the right places you have to influence them and I think that’s where you’ve just got to keep knocking on doors but basically somebody, and it’s so hard, because as I say there is no knowledge outside and this is this wall that’s up and there is no knowledge, particularly within telly, of band music, not just brass, military as well. There’s just a lot of second hand knowledge and knowledge from fifty years ago so you end up with Sue Perkins type
programmes which was a complete fiasco because they think anybody can stand up in front of a band and conduct it. That’s patronising. There is still, it probably still pertains in the Radio 3 side now where it’s a cultural thing and I think there is still a feeling that it’s a Northern, and it’s not true, there are eighty bands in the London and Southern Counties next month, there’s only seventy two in Yorkshire, there’s eighty down there.

CO: How many are there in the North of England one?

PH: Forty.

CO: That’s a section that’s been dominated by a single band for years.

PH: Forty two. There’s forty two in North East, seventy five in North West, seventy two in Yorkshire, eighty in the Midlands and eighty in the London and Southern Counties and Eighty odd in the West [of England] because they’re all lower sections. It’s interesting isn’t it, there’s lots, the areas are bigger obviously but there is community activity down there we mustn’t, bands up here and the general public mustn’t forget actually that there is a lot of really good work going on down there. I mean not all of it’s of a high standard but there is a lot of intelligent work going on. Wales has suffered although the quality is always very high. I always love going down to Swansea for the Area, there’s only forty two bands but the standard is really high. I don’t know what else you want from me really but...

CO: No that’s everything.

PH: Oh good.
CO: That’s brilliant thank you very much.
0:00:03

CO: The first thing I’m just going to show you is, as I said my research is based on test pieces which have been used multiple times in competitions. I’m focusing on the British Open Series and the National Finals series. What I’ve done is basically combine those two series to get enough data points for the test pieces used and then looking at patterns in the uses of those test pieces to see whether they are used in lower sections or they are used in the same section or whether they rise up in section.

FR: yes.

CO: That’s to track changes in standards of playing.

FR: yes.

CO: I’ve got twenty nine test pieces that I’m looking at because they’ve been used four or more times in those contest series and I’d just like you to take a quick look at the list and see what you think of it. So that table there, that’s the list of the test pieces and I’ve split them into three groups. There aren’t actually any test pieces that are used in progressively higher sections.

FR: No, and nor would there be.
CO: Why? Is there an inherent reason why that would never be?

FR: Because music written for lower section bands is not of interest to higher section bands. The bands don’t quantify the musical content of the piece, they quantify the technical difficulty. If it’s not technically difficult enough to present a challenge they aren’t interested.

CO: And then the remaining pieces are split into three groups. There’s the group which stay at the same level. There is the group which fall in section use, this is the largest group, there are fourteen out of the twenty nine in that group. And then there’s the group that show not really any pattern. So for example I’ll show you the groups. Are there any test pieces there that you think are particularly notable in the brass band movement as being?

FR: oh yes it’s quite interesting. The list of pieces which have had multiple uses are the pieces which are quite interesting and, Pageantry by Herbert Howells.

CO: That’s by far the most frequently used one.

FR: But equally Festival Music by Eric Ball which was written for the bi-centenary of Mozart, it was written in 1956, the first time I played at the National Championships I played with Black Dyke and it was Festival Music and it remains absolutely core repertoire. Its just wonderful music, I think the best thing that Eric Ball ever wrote. And remains as difficult today as it was then.

00:03:10
CO: why do you think that piece does? Because others, like *Resurgam* has fallen significantly in section use.

FR: Well *Resurgam*, for me, is over emotional pastiche and I don’t really like *Resurgam*, I don’t think it’s a well written work. I think his two best works are *Journey Into Freedom* and *Festival Music*, by Eric Ball, because they are both beautifully written, they both have an absolute musical narrative that is nothing to do with religion or anything like that. For me *Resurgam* does, it’s too resonant of his salvationist feelings whereas the other two are just music. Beautifully written, and the simplicity of *Festival Music* is what makes it difficult and bands still can’t play it.

CO: No?

FR: They think they can but they don’t get anywhere near.

CO: Why do you think Eric Ball’s music in particular has remained in use so much more than others? He’s by far the most featured composer in this list, there’s only a couple of composers who actually feature multiple times, Eric Ball is top.

FR: Because everything Eric Ball wrote worked on every level. It worked on a basic technical level in so much as bands could... it was a challenge without it being stupid, it didn’t make too many intellectual demands on the conductor. If the conductor is halfway intelligent he could find his way through it whereas with some of the others it’s not the case and bands enjoy playing it. It’s kind of tuneful. You know you look at *Journey Into Freedom* and there’s a narrative right the way from the beginning to the end. There’s some nice technical things, you’ve got to make your mind up whether you single tongue the triplets, if you get it the right speed you can single tongue
them, if you play it too fast you can’t, and in the middle there is a lovely cornet solo. You know, what’s not to like about it.

00:05:14

CO: Eric Ball is an example of a composer who is one of the brass band movement and most of the test pieces that are used today and throughout the second half of the twentieth century have come from within the brass band movement. What do you think the relationship between brass bands and other sorts of music? What do you think of the state of that and how that’s changed?

FR: It never has been very close. Essentially the brass band is amateur music making and amateur music making is not so much a technical term as a mindset, it’s how you think about what you’re doing. It’s interesting that you talk about the “golden period” of things and you look at Pageantry and the Frank Wright arrangements. You look at the fact that Henry Isles was commissioning Elgar, Holst, Vaughan Williams to write pieces for banding and we see them now as the core repertoire. They were written by mainstream composers. Hardly any mainstream composers write for brass bands. Eddy Gregson could perhaps be considered a mainstream composer but if you ask the director of Radio Three, he wouldn’t consider him a mainstream composer. There have been a couple written by James MacMillan. Nowadays the brass band has essentially turned into itself. It expects people who “know”, and the “know” is in inverted commas, what the brass band is about to write it, to write the music. It uses those pieces for competitions. Fifty or sixty years ago...
So we were talking about the fact that it’s turned in upon itself, it uses the same composers all the time and it uses the same people to mark the competitions all the time, who are essentially brass band people. So if you think it’s amateur music making, with all the faults of amateur music making, like quite often the intonation isn’t perfect, they’ve little regard to ensemble and for me one of the greatest crimes is they ignore written articulation and just slur about the place and do things how they like. So nobody’s bringing a professional rigour to say “those things are bad” because they play, the adjudicators play and conduct brass bands so it’s what they’re doing so they think it’s the norm. So slowly but surely the brass band is becoming more and more insular and less and less good.

0:08:29

CO: So by shutting itself off from other forms of amateur and professional music making, that’s having a direct effect on the quality of the music making?

FR: I believe so, yes. When I was a young player and when I was first conducting we went to competitions and we were adjudicated by professors from the major colleges, conductors like David Wilcocks, composers, the occasional senior director of music from one of the armed services, people who operated in a professional environment so they brought professional standards to their listening. So, I mean, I can remember judging with Philip Jones, a great professional trumpet player, his complete dismissive attitude to people who couldn’t play in tune. As far as he was concerned if you don’t play in tune then it doesn’t count as music, but he could tell.
CO: So is that creating a shift in style of playing as well?

FR: Yes. Playing is more careless. It’s interesting, I’m married to a professional violinist and I know from my own work with orchestras, I know that you’ve got anything between ten and twenty first violinists playing the same part. They go to great pains to make sure that they all articulate the same way. That they all tie notes over together or articulate notes together with their way of bowing. They go to great lengths to try and articulate what the composer has put in the music, only changing if the conductor for a particular personal reason feels that the articulation should be changed. Whereas in brass bands they articulate to make it the easiest way they can. If a composer has written a high note to be tonged and it’s easier to slur up to it they slur up to it which makes nonsense of the phrase. So the playing has become I disciplined and lazy.

CO: So is this true throughout the brass band movement from the very bottom to the very top?

FR: No. It’s true of all places where the conductor can’t be bothered. So if you get a conductor who understands these things and works hard at them and thinks it’s important you get a spot where they do these things. The unfortunate thing is the conductor who does that will go into a competition thinking that he had done something that was authentic and remarkable and play well and be placed behind the band that he would think were roughshod and given a performance that wasn’t akin to what was written. And they can’t understand that so eventually they stop
conducting bands and slowly but surely all these influences are being taken away from bands and they’re being conducted by conductors who just get through it any old how and present a big vibrant performance and the adjudicators love it.

CO: And it lies solely or primarily with the choice of the adjudicator?

FR: I am really out of step here. I believe that it is the adjudicators that set the standards. If the adjudicators were to really chastise bands for lazy bad music making then conductors would have to take more care. I adjudicated a competition not long ago where I was completely out of step with the other two adjudicators, completely out. What I liked they hated, what I hated they liked. Completely out of step.

CO: You’ve mentioned the fact that adjudicators, some of them used to come from higher education colleges, universities, that sort of thing. What impact do you think higher education and the infiltration of the brass band into higher education had on brass banding?

FR: I think it’s given us a generation of really good players, properly taught players. But it has denuded the community brass band of its very lifeblood. The centres of excellence now suck out the blood from bands all over the place where somebody who wanted to be a professional player but wasn’t good enough would probably have gone off to university and done a degree in something else and then gone back into a community working and would have played in a brass band. Now they get the opportunity, if they’re not good enough, they get the opportunity to go to university
or to one of the higher colleges, the Royal Northern College of music, and study on
the brass band course and they are then centred in the North West or the North
East, the North of England and hey ho Grimethorpe and Black Dyke and Foden’s and
Fairies can pick up all the students that they want to play in their bands but if you’ve
got a band down in the west country everybody that you would have wanted to play,
these bands have been denuded of the players that they would have hoped to keep.
So on one side it’s a good thing because there is a better stock of players but has it
made the music making any better? It’s made the technical side of music making
cleaner but has it made the musical side of music making any better? I don’t think so.

0:15:10

CO: And hasn’t had an expanding influence in terms of broadening these players’
horizons in terms of other styles of music making either then? Because they’re all on
brass band courses?

FR: No quite the opposite.

I think there is going to be a big change there is going to be less music in primary and
secondary education so the community is going to have to pick up the slack because
parents want their children to be in a safe and happy place and they see making
music as a safe and happy place. It isn’t always but it generally is. So they like their
children to go to band practices twice a week and to have something other than
their PC to occupy their time, i.e. they’ve got to practice. And they see their children
going off and doing interesting things with their bands so it has a broadening aspect on their children’s lives. Parents like that and I think it’s possible that the community is going to have to pick up the slack where education where education is going to have less money to spend on it so we’re going to get back to the situation where we were fifty or sixty years ago where the community bands are at the centre of the brass band movement not the educational bands.

0:16:26

CO: So will that give us a change in style of music, harking back to what we had in the fifties and sixties?

FR: No.

CO: Why not?

FR: One other reason why the... There used to be, let’s go back. There used to be lots of people who were professional musicians conducting in competitions, Bram Tovey, Frank Renton, Howard Snell, Gary Howarth. None of them do now and one of the reasons is if they were preparing a band and their work was going to be marked i.e. adjudicated by other professional people then it was a worthwhile exercise. If their work is going to be marked by amateur people there’s no point. So what you have now is a brass band movement where there are few, if any, really professional conductors i.e. conductors who have earned a living in the professional work place
and are bringing that professionalism into the band room because there is no point because their work is going to be marked by amateurs and it has been proven that amateurs really don’t care for the finesse that these people bring. So they stopped being involved.

CO: And the only way to bring that back is going back to the point you said earlier about having professionals adjudicating?

FR: To look outwards, yes, I think.

CO: We were talking a little earlier about the pieces commissioned in the twenties and thirties by Vaughan Williams, Host, professional composers Why do you think that sort of composer isn’t being engaged by the brass band movement now? Is it a stylistic or a financial or a connection gap?

FR: I think the people who run that major competitions are frightened. I was alarmed when one person responsible for test pieces at a major competition told me “We don’t have to commission pieces, publishers send us the music.” So you’re never going to be in a situation where they go to mainstream composers because they’re doing it on the cheap all the time.

CO: Is that because they have to do it on the cheap?

FR: No it’s because they want to. It’s because they want to, nobody has to do
anything in this world. What you have to do is decide why you’re doing it. It’s worth remembering both our major competitions are owned by private individuals and run for profit.

CO: So is the financial side doing the talking because it’s cheaper and safer to go with a well-known popular test piece, do you think? Or is there a musical rejection?

FR: There is kind of, in the 1980s and early 1990s there was a kind of movement that said we don’t need to go outside the brass band movement. We’ve got enough people in the movement who can write music, we don’t need to go outside the brass band movement for adjudicators, we’ve got enough good people inside the movement who can do this and so it’s become more and more incestuous and dare I say it lacklustre. It needs outside influences.

CO: Has this growing insular nature of the brass band had an effect on its public image and media representation?

FR: Oh yes. There is no media representation

CO: And is it because of the growing insular...

FR: It’s interesting several things, we used to have the National Brass Band Championship of Great Britain were held in London in October when every section descended on London and yes there were scurrilous headlines like “whippets and
flat caps come to west London” but the fact was there was publicity, they got mainstream newspapers writing about them, there was publicity on the radio. Now it’s only my little programme on Radio Two that does anything about it.

CO: If brass banding was to try and forge links with professional music again, do you think that’s possible, for a start?

FR: It would have to take a real look at itself, I think the word is holistic isn’t it. It would have to say right from the beginning that if we want to improve our standards then we’ve got to go out and we’ve got to include more mainstream But then nobody’s really interested because all of the people involved at the highest level, and there are different levels. There is the level where there is money sloshing about the place, for instance one band has just signed a deal with the Arts Council that’s going to give them one hundred and fifty thousand quid over a period of three years, that’s enough to run the band on. Why do they want to disturb the status quo when they’ve got that? And there’s only, there are one hundred bands up and down the country that are really interested in vying in competitions and prestige and whatever all the rest of them people pay in the bands for fun and they enter a contest once or twice a year and it’s a bit of fun and if they win they win and if they don’t they don’t. But they play in the bands for fun, that’s the great dichotomy of the brass band.
CO: The money you said is sloshing around at the top end of banding, what influence has that had? In terms of playing standards among top bands and drawing players?

FR: It can have a fantastic influence. For instance with the Grimethorpe Colliery Band when they were able to offer jobs at Grimethorpe pit to thirty people to be in the band they were able to recruit vast numbers of people. When the Cory Band were given one hundred thousand a year to run the band from a sponsor they bought up all the best talent in Wales. They denuded all the other bands in Wales because they all went there because they could pay the players. To some extent the players are still able to be paid a certain amount but it’s not as much as it used to be but money enables you to buy quality players.

CO: But it doesn’t enable you to buy quality conductors?

FR: Yes it does.

CO: But if the professional conductors are not doing brass banding...

FR: If what you want to do is to buy a professional conductor well then it gives you the money to do so. The fact that they don’t is indicative of... it’s not worth doing.

CO: So it’s not a lack of money that’s stopping them?
FR: No.

CO: So these bands which have this money and are concentrating the best payers, they’re only interested in maintaining the status quo because it suits them and not experimenting musically?

FR: Not entirely so but generally speaking yes. It’s a bit of a generalisation but generally speaking yes.

CO: And that lack of willingness to experiment, does that trickle down through the rest of the movement? Does it have a dulling effect?

FR: Yes. A man in Switzerland once said to me “if Black Dyke turned up on Sunday and did a concert all playing black instruments I’d sell a hundred sets of black instruments by Monday lunchtime”. The top bands do the things that other bands want to aspire to. Why not? That’s how it is in everything, Shrewsbury Town football team want to be as good as Manchester United. There are several reasons why they won’t be, and the relationship between competitive elements of soccer and brass bands is not that farfetched you know.

CO: Many fewer zeros on the pay cheques but...

FR: What’s interesting is there have been, there is a great deal experimentation in popular music, but when it comes to brass bands and playing this music at
competitions, rather than playing what’s written and taking the challenge of the experimentation they get somebody who knows what they are doing into Sibelius and print it out in an easier form to play and it sounds more or less the same but it isn’t the same because they’ve changed the structure to make it rhythmically more simple. So whereas in a symphony orchestra what Schoenberg writes they play, they don’t change it because it’s easier. The stories of the famous conductor who took the Sacre du Printemps [Rite of Spring by Stravinsky] and brought it to one of the London Orchestras and he’d rewritten it in four four because it was easier and he conducted it in four four and the orchestra played off the original parts because they found it not too difficult to play, it was only the conductor who couldn’t handle it and the same happens in, quite often bands never see the original music that’s been written for them. What they see is a bastardised arrangement that has been brought to them by the conductor can handle.

0:28:51

CO: Is this a particular problem in brass bands because so many of the test pieces in the first half of the twentieth century were transcriptions of orchestral stuff and we still have significant influences of other styles in the writing of some test pieces? So are brass band composers doing that themselves or is it done at the next stage down the line?

FR: They’re bastardising things to make them simpler. You don’t need to make Beethoven or Brahms or Lalo or any of the people that they play arrangements of...
you don’t need to make them any simpler. They are generally speaking written in a simple written form. The difficulties are creating the phrases, creating the lines and often technical difficulties are just the speed of the music. But mainstream composers seldom write intensely complicated rhythmic things because there is never any rehearsal time. Rehearsal costs money so if you write a symphony and it’s going to take three days of rehearsal nobody is ever going to play it. So mainstream music is by and large written in simple metre and if they want to put, if they want a specific rhythm they will write that rhythm within four four shall we say with accents, whereas in brass bands if they want a particular rhythm you might get a six eighteen bar followed by a ten eighteen bar and conductors just ignore it. They put it back through Sibelius and it comes out in four four.

CO: It’s interesting that Carnival Romain is one of the more frequently used test pieces and when Berlioz first premiered that there were vicious complaints from the, there’s the story of vicious complaints from his woodwind section that they couldn’t actually play it. And he said just keep it simple, follow the stick and you’ll be fine. That is a test piece that’s being used at First Section standards now which is far below what our professional modern day players can handle. So what does that say about the standards of playing among brass bands, are brass bands getting to a point where First Section bands are able to play music that professionals were able to play one hundred years ago? Or is it all because of this arranging or bastardisation of music?

FR: How many brass bands, how many First Section brass bands have you heard play
Carnival Romain.

CO: A contests worth. Twenty.

FR: How many First Section brass bands have you heard play Carnival Romain well? The answer is none.

CO: One I think?

FR: Right well you’re a very lucky man. I’ve heard very few Championship Section bands play Carnival Romain well. And there’s a fact.

CO: So the answer is no?

FR: I can remember adjudicating a competition where it was, Carnival Romain was the test piece and I came out and I said I have given the first prize to the least bad performance. They hadn’t a clue. They could all play the technique but nobody had a clue how to play the Carnival Romain Overture as a piece of music.

CO: Why was that?

FR: They breathed in all the wrong places, they ignored the phrasing and the articulation, they just got through it any way they could and yes they got through it to great cheers from the audience but I’ve got the score and I know the Overture de
**Carnival Romain** and it was a fairly loose relationship.

CO: Is that because of a deficit of musical knowledge, the ability to interpret, to read the score and produce what was written or is it because of a lack of research into that style of music?

FR: It’s two things. More than two things. It is less conductors who don’t know, so, and don’t think these things that I’m talking about are that important. They think getting through it is important, they don’t how you get through it is important. It is very difficult, the *Carnival Romain Overture* is difficult for a symphony orchestra to play, it’s really difficult for a brass band to play, really difficult. You’ve got to have a great euphonium player, you’ve got to have a very aware players all around the stand. You’ve got to have a band that can play light articulations without using heavy accents. And bands can’t do it. They’re used to going “bang, band, bang”, that’s what they do. So it comes down to two things. It comes down to conductors who don’t really know how it should sound so can’t make their bands do it properly and the fact that if they played it like that they probably wouldn’t win the competition because too many adjudicators would just give it to the band that played biggest and sounded like a good brass band and gave them a sense of excitement rather than finesse.

CO: Have conductors become a weak point?

FR: Oh yes.
CO: And when do you think that has grown from? Have conductors always been weak during your time in brass banding? Or has the education of players outstripped the education of conductors?

FR: I believe so. It used to be... I played for Black Dyke and we had a string of very good band masters and we won nothing. And then they decided that it didn’t work and they needed to do what other bands did and with the same personnel they brought in George Wilcocks, a professional conductor, and we won everything. And the fact is that the weakness of the brass band is that too often there is a collection of players how can really play anything any way you want but they have conductors who don’t know how to extricate that from them. And the first way you extricate something from them is by understanding what the music needs in all different things and going into the rehearsal knowing this is what you want. “I’d like less tongue there, I’d like shorter or longer...” They don’t do that, I don’t think. So you get messy performances. I listen to CDs where, and concerts, where bands play a Sousa march and a Mozart overture and a little French piece and everything sounds the same because that’s how they play.

CO: It’s them playing music not them...

FR: Yes I heard a band play the overture to the *Marriage of Figaro* which is one of the lightest, gentlest overtures imaginable and it sounded like a Sousa march. And they thought it was fantastic. So I really do think that the players have got better
and better and better due to education but there is less intellectual leadership.

CO: I think you’re in for a really interesting experience at UniBrass [adjudicating the 2016 contest] then because I think universities have fantastic players, even if they’re not taught music at university, through the county system, but the conductors are largely untaught.

FR: Well what do you teach a conductor?

CO: How do you teach a conductor?

FR: What do you teach a conductor? I was taught by sir John Barbirolli in Manchester. Do you know who he was?

CO: Know of but don’t know a great deal about.

FR: For me one of the greatest interpreters of any kind of music. The first lesson we had he just made me beat time. The second lesson that I had he made me beat time with my right hand and in those days we all smoked so with my left hand I had to get my cigarettes out of my pocket and get one cigarette out and light it so that I could teach my left hand different. After the second lesson and he said “right there’s not really much else I can teach you. You can beat time in all the forms, you can separate your right hand from your left hand. What you will become you will become. Go out and conduct music. And if you’ve got anything in you it will come out but technically
am I to teach you that here you slow down? The composer has written *ritard* so you
know you need to slow down. Do I need to teach you how to do that with your
hands? No you know how to do that. How you slow down and how much you sow
down is now what you have inside you and I can’t tell you what that is.” So are we in
a situation where conductors are perhaps over taught? So the conductors all become
cones of one another visa vie Ed Gardner and Mark Elder [Gardner was Eldar’s
assistant conductor at the Halle Orchestra for three years]. Or are we perhaps in a
situation where in the brass band because much of the adjudication is intellectual
and critical they never learn? I wrote a crib the other day in a competition “this is
totally abhorrent music making. You are putting accents where there are no accents,
you are playing everything too loud but basically you are destroying what the
composer has written because of the way you are articulating the music.” End. No he
either ignores what I said or he learns from it. If he reads what I said and the next
time he plays this piece of music he says “hey we’ve got to stop using accents here
because we are destroying it”, it’s what I call making vertical music rather than
horizontal music. If he learns from that well then he has learnt something about
being a conductor. If he doesn’t then he is never going to be a conductor. He is just
going to be somebody who stands in front of a band and keeps time and gets them
from the top left hand corner to the bottom right hand corner unscathed. And that’s
basically what it’s about. Everybody raves about the interpretations of David King for
no other reason than David King does something different. He does slow down, too
much, he does change tempos, too much. I don’t believe he is a conductor at all.
What he is doing is not doing it because he has any deeply felt emotional felt reason
for doing this. He’s doing it because he’s trying to create a performance to attract
adjudicator’s.

CO: He’s a showman more than a conductor?

FR: He’s not a conductor at all. He’s a showman. He’s a band showman, a bad one but because... and he desperately doesn’t want... I don’t know if you remember twice David got bad results at competitions and it was each time because there were three adjudicators. Two brass band adjudicators and a professional musician and the two brass band adjudicators gave him first or second prize and the professional adjudicator gave him seventh or eighth or ninth. Once it was ninth and once it was seventeenth. It was Geoffrey Brand once and he said “Isn’t that terrible.” And I said “What makes you think anything that David King does is going to be attractive to Geoffrey Brand?” Geoffrey Brand is a professional musician, for me one of the greatest adjudicators we ever had. Very clear thinking but became quite maligned because he didn’t do it the same way as David Read. Why would he? David Read knows nothing and Geoffrey Brand knows a great deal.

CO: I remember watching David King conducting Brighouse I think it was at doing Paganini Variations at the areas two years ago and seeing him walking around the stage with no score and thinking there is a man who is putting on a show but the man in the box, regardless of who they are isn’t going to see that.

FR: Ok one it was an awful performance, and I know because I originated Paganini. I gave the first performance of Paganini and it was quite interesting I was with Philip
Wilby in Switzerland a month ago and he said “Looking back” he said “everybody else treated Paganini as a little scherzo, you were the only one who treated it like a real piece of music.” He said “you put a great deal of thought into what you did and how you did it, you were the only one who approached it the way I’d written it, like it’s a proper set of variations that is soundly thought out and has got intellectual work. Everybody else just treated it as a throw away piece of music.” Now that’s thirty years after the fact.

CO: That’s thirty years of not getting better, getting worse?

FR: The bands can’t play it. It’s now a First Section test piece and bands still can’t play it and the reason they can’t play it is because bands play it badly and get away with it. [hymns part of the opening melody]. That’s written for the whole cornet section in unison. When I came into Grimethorpe and I looked at it and I said to Alan Morrison “I’m going to leave it to you. I want this played exactly as written, I want the whole cornet section playing this, I don’t want anybody backing out. Third cornets have got to be playing top Cs like everybody else, it’s got to be done. It’s the sound that’s important and he had two rehearsals and he came back and they could to it and the sound was absolutely incredible. Other bands had just three cornet players playing it because “oh you can’t play that” or they shared it out the way they do, rewrote it. We played what was written. There is a, at the end of the Flugelhorn solo, there is a clear breath mark and then at the beginning of the fugelhorn solo, he’s played his little cadenza there’s clear breath mark and then a whole phrase and
I insisted that Mark breath there so it’s breath [breaths in then sings melody] and right through the phrase in one breath. And he did. Virtually everybody else breathed there, which for made a complete mockery of the phrase.

CO: Because there is a clear instruction to breathe once.

FR: Yes because that’s how the line is written and it sounded, when Mark did it, it sounded sensational.

0:46:47

CO: We’ve talked a lot about conductors, interpretation, player technique and about musicality not being as strong as it used to be but technique being stronger. Do you think, where do you think these trends started?

FR: I think from the 1980s and 1990s when the brass band decided that it could look after itself, that it didn’t need outside influences, that it didn’t need professional input in terms of... and what we have now is a situation where the bands are not interested in playing Severn Suite or anything like that. They are only interested in the most contemporary, technically challenging pieces. The fact that to make them less technically challenging, the conductors rewrite them is both dishonest and intellectually it makes the whole exercise invalid. The fact that when you’re adjudicating these competitions the notes are going past you like lamp posts down a motorway it’s just like... and unless you really know the score well you can’t
Chris Osborn  Appendix 6 transcript of Frank Renton interview  2018

adjudicate. It’s impossible.

CO: I remember seeing a score for *The Legend of King Arthur* by Peter Meechan and its notes, time signatures everywhere.

FR: Utter nonsense, from beginning to end. Absolute nonsense, it’s not music its quasi music. I remember Philip Sparke saying a long time ago “I am not a composer, I write music.” The same applies to most of the people who are writing for brass bands now. They are not composers. Composers take a germ and develop that germ in a cogent intellectual fashion that makes demands on the intellect of the player and the interpreter. Music writers just pile sensation upon sensation upon sensation without any sense of development or intellect.

CO: You mention Philip Sparke there. Now with composers like Philip Sparke, Peter Graham, brass bands still have significant links with wind band music.

FR: No they don’t. It’s people like Philip Sparke and Peter Meechan et al et al have discovered that if they regurgitate what they have written for brass band for wind band they can sell it in America and make a lot of money.

CO: Because there are loads of bands over there and it’s all twice the price?

FR: There are no intellectual links, they are only financial.
CO: So if we look at brass banding in relation to choirs, community big bands that sort of thing and other community music making, where does that sit within British music? Is it part of a unified culture of music or is everything pocketed away into its own little things with no links to each other or to professional music?

FR: I think there are no links to each other, everybody does what they do. Last night I played second trumpet in a local big band. A pickup big band, the second trumpet player was ill so they gave me a telephone call and said “can you play second trumpet” so I went down and played second trumpet. My wife who is a professional violinist was also in the trumpet section, doing it for fun. We had a really nice night out together but my wife is a professional fiddle player. She wouldn’t play in an amateur orchestra.

CO: Why?

FR: Because she’s a professional.

CO: And she wants that separation between...

FR: Yes when she gets her fiddle out of the box it’s because that’s how she makes her living and she wants to work with other professional people in a professional environment. She is quite prepared to go and play in an amateur big band or an amateur wind band, didn’t really want to play in brass bands.
CO: Why is that?

FR: Because she’s got great range and great tone and so on and when she goes in she gets put on second or third [cornet] and she says most of the conductors are not worth playing for.

CO: Yet the wind bands and big bands have retained a skill of conducting level that...

FR: Well you don’t have a conductor in a big band, there’s just someone who goes “one, two, a one two three four” and you’re in and it’s great, great fun, its tremendous fun.

0:53:03

Brass bands, at the highest level, I don’t know how much fun they have. They get a great deal of fun out of winning. The challenge of some of the music making is tremendous. Why would you want to go win a competition when you are playing an adulterated test piece that has been made easier to suite the conductor? I don’t know that I’d want to do that.

CO: Is one of the problems with brass band competitions that unlike sport where the result is everything? With music the journey, the performance of the piece, regardless of the actual result...
FR: No the result is everything, it’s just the same.

CO: Sorry, the journey should have value.

FR: The journey should have value and I think in the lower sections it does. But it only has value if it’s done honestly. I go to bands and I do a rehearsal and I find so much of the music making is dishonest, they’re not doing it to make music, they are doing it to see how they can win a contest. Now yes the winning is important but we should be doing it to make music but as long as the adjudicator doesn’t know the difference what’s the point? We are back to the same business. At the end of the day it’s about whether your efforts are going to be examined correctly.

CO: With these different sorts of amateur music making there has been lots of influence, especially through the BBC and the media through things like choirs, do you think that is pushing out other forms of amateur music making?

FR: No. Amateur music making is alive, it’s what people want to do. Some people like to go and play in their Sunday football team, I like to go and play with my local big band. If you want me to conduct you’ve got to pay me because that’s what I do for a living, if you want me to present your concert you’ve got to pay me as that’s what I do for a living. But if you want me to come and play I’ll get my trumpet out and go and play. Bill Geldard lives in the next village to me, we do all sorts of things together and I’ll do it for fun because that is fun. I think playing in brass bands is boring. It’s boring. The conductor said to me “I want you to play that shorter.” Hang on last
week you told us to play it longer, I’ve written a mark on the top, “oh yes I’ve 
changed my mind.” SO no I don’t think, I think people play make amateur music 
basically for fun. So as it’s fun they will continue doing it and I know lots of people 
who conduct bands where it’s fun. There is a young guy who conducts the Friary 
Guildford Band, Chris King. He was in the army. His rehearsals are terrific, he’s 
caring, he’s a clever musician, he’s a good conductor, he knows how to get it right. 
Keeps coming last in major competitions but he’s worth enormous amounts to his 
bands because they love making music with him, it’s fun. And I guess at that level it’s 
fantastic. I don’t know how much fun there is in the Grimethorpe band room.

CO: This goes back to what you were saying about Alan Fernie being a fantastic 
musician, being fantastic with community bands.

FR: Yes but he’s rubbish with adults. Can’t communicate with adults. He’s great with 
young people, Alan, but he couldn’t conduct someone like Grimethorpe. It’s 
interesting, I know a great cornet player and conduct came in and he said... [to chris] 
what do you play? Do you play?

CO: Yes I play the tuba.

FR: Right and his top A was out of tune and the conductor said “you can play it on 
third if you want” and Roger looked up and said “Are you telling me that I can play it 
on third? Do you think that I don’t know that?! We try every way we can to play it in 
tune, don’t make statements like that.” And that’s an amateur conductor. A
professional conductor would say “Your top A is out of tune.” End. It’s your job now to fix it.

CO: That’s something I find in university bands actually. I conduct the wind band and big band at university and I find that, I don’t know how to play the flute so I’ll say to them “I’d like this articulation” or whatever, but I’m not going to say “you need to triple tongue that” or you need to... and is that something that amateur conductors...

FR: The one piece of advice that John Barbirolli did give me was never tell the string players what to do.

CO: Why?

FR: Because they all know you are a trumpet player and you just put a lump of metal on your lips and blow through it. They have got this delicate thing and he said, and he’s absolutely right. So all I’ve ever done is shaken hands with the leader and sometimes turned to the leader and said “I’d like that phrase longer, is there a way of doing that?” And he’d say “yes of course.” If I said “I want you to take all of that in one bow” they’d look at me and say “what?!?”

CO: Brass banding has suffered a significant loss of audiences, be they for concerts or be they for contests. Do you think brass banding could regain some of its former popularity?
FR: oh yes.

CO: How?

FR: First it comes down to the conductor. Conductors have got to stop playing the same programme week in, week out because it’s easy and they don’t have waste any time in rehearsals. Conductors have got to think clearly about programming and they don’t just put on pieces they like or pieces they know. They’ve got to make programmes better. They’ve got to stop playing crap arrangements of big band material badly. If they are going to play big band material then they have to get it arranged well and they’ve got to learn how to play it. They’ve got to stop putting their cornet players up and them playing the same air-vari. How many times have you heard Richard Marshall play *Miss Blue Bonnet*? The answer is too many times. They’ve got to start presenting their concerts properly so they are entertaining. They’ve got to start putting their band on stage in an entertaining manner. Nobody wants to sit through a two hour concert looking at the side of the solo cornet’s face, they want to see what he looks like. That’s the first thing and that’s all down to conductors. And the fact is most of them are amateur conductors so they are lazy. When I played at Black Dyke we changed the programme every week. When I was conducting a military band in the army, not a great military band one of the regimental bands of the line, we would go out and we did fourteen programmes in a week and every one, fourteen overtures, fourteen everything because you were doing two programmes a day. Bands do, I could go back to Grimethorpe now and there is the same stuff on the programme as there was when I left twenty years ago.
CO: But that’s very different from the stuff you did the week before you left because you changed the programme.

FR: I changed the programmes all the time, I insisted on it. It’s what keeps the band interested. I’m going to Butlins on Saturday. I’m presenting the stuff all day Sunday. On Sunday night I’ve got a rehearsal with the Grimethorpe Memorial band which are all old boys from Grimethorpe. We’ve got one rehearsal, I half know what programme is going to be and we’ll do it on Sunday night and it’ll be fine because they’re all quick on their feet. They all trust me and the thing that amateur conductors don’t understand is that I trust them. Why do you think a brass band sits like that? [makes horse shoe band formation shape with hands]

CO: So they are all around the conductor?

FR: Because the conductor thinks that if he does that [makes 2 lines big band formation with his hands] he won’t be able to hear what the solo cornets are playing instead of trusting the solo cornets to rehearse properly and then to do it properly so he has it like that so that the only person who can hear it properly is him. How archaic is that.

CO: Because he’s effectively the one person who doesn’t need to hear it.

FR: Look at the photographs Men O’ Brass, they are facing forwards. Harry Mortimer
knew what it was about. He wasn’t a great musician but he was a great entertainer.

CO: Is that missing from the brass band?

FR: Oh yes they’ve got no idea. They haven’t got a clue. It’s what I do for a living. I’ve done it all my life, presenting army bands. I did the same in the army, they all sit like that and I went to my band and I said “I don’t like that.” Opened it all out and have everybody facing forwards, the band loved it because I trusted them to pay instead of being right on top of them all the time. I was absolutely novice and my solo clarinet player was a brilliant player, very experienced, and he said “why do you keep asking us to play down?” I said “because you’re too loud.” He said “no, we’re sitting closest to you. We’re not too loud out there.”

CO: Because it doesn’t matter what the conductor hears because he’s not paying to go to the concert.

FR: And I said “say that again.” And he told me and i said “you’re absolutely right.” My flute player, I said to him “you’re playing out of tune.” He said to me “how can I tell what I’m play? I’ve got the cornets sat right behind me I can’t hear anything I’m playing”. And I said “You’re absolutely right” so I sat down and thought how I’m going to do it so I sat all my brass like a symphony, at the back orchestra and I had all my wind in a big semi-circle a way from me, all the percussion in the middle at the back. Revolutionised it. Looked completely different, sounded completely different, band loved it.
CO: So to regain an audience it’s not just the musicality and the programming of the music, it’s the presentation...

FR: It’s everything, the whole business. It’s become very amateurish and it needs to get back. It was often said in the old days that brass bands were the pinnacle of amateur music making and I think they probably still are, but...

CO: What do you mean by pinnacle?

FR: The best, the highest standard of performance of amateur music making. But if you listen to some of the choirs, amateur choirs, now, they are sensational. Really caring and playing to vast numbers of people. Amateur orchestras are still what they are, it’s impossible to get forty good amateur fiddle players in one town and I could probably get into most amateur orchestras as a trumpet player and I’m crap. So you know it’s… You mustn’t publicise this but one of the reasons why *Listen To The Band* went to half an hour was that it was decreed by the powers that be that there were insufficient brass bands in the country to sustain a forty five minute recording sessions and the reason we only have now about, out of the fifty two weeks ten live sessions is that there are only about five bands that can actually do a session for us. The others don’t know how to prepare, they don’t know how to programme, they don’t know...

CO: Where do you think the brass band is going?
FR: Down.

CO: Irreversibly down?

FR: No, no. I think it needs to discover, it needs to discover what it’s about and in too many areas, this is very contentious, in too many areas it’s about making money. Competition owners are about making money not about creating new repertoire. Too many bands exist to pay one or two people large amounts of money in fees, and you can work that out for yourself. They don’t exist any longer for creating perfection. So there needs to be a change. I mean this is very contentious, if you think the most famous brass band in the world is Black Dyke and for twelve years now Black Dyke has reflected entirely the intellectual aspirations of one man. And that’s why we are where we are.

CO: Is there any... for the development of the brass band do you think it is, you said it was going down, do think it is realistically going to keep going down or it is going to...

FR: Unless it makes a real positive move to arrest its development it will become less and less important. It will remain as a wonderful way of making music for vast numbers of people and it is and it always has been. Not always, a hundred and fifty years. But as an intellectual force in the country it will cease to have any significance and it has little now.
CO: IS there anything else you think we haven’t covered.

FR: No. When I wrote to you I said that I believe, I don’t believe that ever increasingly difficult test pieces has made bands any better because conductors just rewrite it so that it’s within the scope of brass bands and because adjudication is false and because the adjudicators quite often can’t differentiate between what they hear and what they see nobody... When I write “I am not hearing what I see written here” and I’m going to chastise you for that and I sit with another conductor and he says “you can’t say that Frank” and I say “yes I can. I’m not hearing that shape and I want to hear that shape so they’re getting it wrong.” For one way or another, it may because be they can’t play it or it may be because they’ve rewritten it. I haven’t said they’ve rewritten it because I don’t know unless I’ve seen the part but I’m not hearing what I see. And I want to hear what I see. So I think that we’re going down a path, and I’m sure Paul Hindmarsh agrees with me, that we are going down a path that is going to lead to the destruction, which is ever more complicated technical music that nobody wants to listen to.

CO: And is this only true in the contesting arena rather than the concerts?

FR: Yes in the concerts they’re still playing Music by John Miles. You know, Star Wars here we come. They’re still playing the same old crap. It’s quite interesting, the three bands that can guarantee and audience are Black Dyke, Brighouse and Grimethorpe. Because they always have. They’ve never changed their name and people go
because they have got a following. But the Cory band will play them off the stage but nobody goes to listen, because who’s ever heard of Cory.

CO: SO it’s as much the marketing of those bands as the music?

FR: Yes, the Cory band, I almost, what Philip Harper is doing with the Cory band is sensational, at best. At worst it’s raucous. But at best it’s absolutely sensational and he’s got some players in that band who I know and, Steve Stewart [soprano cornet] for example who I’ve known for more years than I care to remember, who thinks it’s just sensational music making, he’s loving it.

CO: And Philip’s a showman.

FR: Philip’s a showman and he’s a very clever musician. A very, very clever musician, a very able musician. And yet he hasn’t learnt how to trust the players. When he does he will add that professional lever. He’s one, whatever the technical demands placed by a composer he can work it out. A lot of the others can’t.

CO: I actually had a conducting workshop by him at Unibrass last year and he actually did the opposite of what you said your first lesson was, stick waving. He actually said that’s last.

FR: No that’s first, get it out of the way then forget it. It’s like harmony. The first thing I did was learn everything in Kitson books one two and three [Elementary
Harmony - In Three Parts by C.H. Kitson] then the professor said “right now you’ve learnt it all you can forget it.” Now you learn how to write music but you have to have the tools first.

CO: That’s very interesting. I think that’s about everything.

FR: Anything that is delving into the band movement and why it’s not as popular now as it used to be, is good. How you’re going to arrest it’s continual downward spiral I don’t know. I’m just doing a thing about children in play. If you think about it, sixty years ago I got up in the morning and went out to play. That’s all I did. They don’t do that anymore. They get up in the morning and they go on their PCs. Or they go somewhere where they are guarded. Life is changing and the change in life is irrevocable, it’s going to happen. You either keep up with the change or it engulfs you and I’m afraid the brass band is not keeping up with the changes. Does that make sense?

CO: Yes. The changes in lifestyle and leisure time are having a huge effect on the brass band movement, as much as any musical changes?

FR: I go up to Yeadon once a year to do a charity concert at the Aireborough Rotary Club because my dad’s oldest mate was their secretary. They decided they were going to have a brass band concert, I feixed them for not a lot of money Yorkshire Building Society Band and David King. They sold out Yeadon town hall and he rang me the next day and he said “Frank, I don’t know what to do.” “Why not?” I said.
Everybody’s up in arms, the band was fantastic but it was the most awful concert anybody’s ever been to. They played all this Salvation Army music and they talked to us as though we were primary school. So I said “ok I’ll come up and do it for you next year” and I’ve been doing it every year since. They sell out. I do it with the Hepworth Band who are crap, I have one rehearsal, we sell out year in year out. And it’s fun. And we use, there’s a young singer called Iben Maersk, Danish girl. Her brother is Stig Maersk [former Hepworth conductor]. And Iben is on the pop music course at the Royal Norther College [of Music]. Sensational. I’ve done three concerts with her now and she sings six songs and we put show business stuff around her, sells out.

CO: What sort of stuff do you play?

FR: The first one she sang three songs, she was playing double bass in the band and she stepped out of the band and sang and she was sensational. Then I put together a programme called the Great American Songbook and we did all things that were written from, you know what the great American songbook is.

CO: Yes.

FR: Then last year the band put the programme together with Iben. She picked six songs and they called it A Musical Meeting. And we did things from musicals about meeting. And it was brilliant and the audience loved it. Not a brass band piece, not a cornet solo in sight, not an air-vari in sight. Just mainstream music played by a brass
band. That’s the difference, that’s what, when people say to me, and I had the argument in Switzerland when they said “you’ve got to get more mainstream musicians as your adjudicators” and they said “they won’t have it, the bands insist we have people who know about brass bands” and I said “its only music, it’s just the same. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a symphony orchestra, a string quartet, a barbershop quartet, whatever. Its music and the same parameters apply. It doesn’t matter whether you sing it or blow it or stroke it or whatever you do. Its music and the same parameters apply. Intonation and ensemble and phrasing and line all apply.”

CO: it’s turning notes on a page into a sound that people want to listen to.

FR: That’s all it is yet they’ve got this thing about the brass band being different. And it isn’t it’s just the same and as long as they’ve got that attitude in the marking it will turn in on itself more and more and more. John McCabe. When I said to John McCabe “are you happy about them using your music for a competition?” He said “It’s only a piece of music Frank. It’s not as though it’s important.” How good is that hey?

CO: That’s brilliant.

FR: The great John McCabe.

CO: It sums it up doesn’t it.
FR: Yes. And they don’t, they’ve got this thing about it being a cult, a movement. It’s Garbage, it’s just making music. And the sooner they get back to that the better.
0:00:00

CO: So if you could just start please by explaining your identity within the brass band movement.

PH: I conduct the Cory Brass Band, I’m also the music editor of Wright and Round music publishers. I’m a composer, arranger, I have in the past edited Brass Band World magazine as well. And yes that’s about me for the moment.

CO: Thank you. So do you believe there has been a change in the standard of test piece used for brass band competitions, both in terms of difficulty and in terms of what might be called ‘good’ music.

PH: I think there has definitely been a change in the difficulty level of the test pieces and my own view is that is absolutely to the detriment of the music of the piece. I don’t really see where it is going to end, personally. Composers, unfortunately, are too often given the message that top brass bands can play anything, at all, and therefore they, a style of composition has unfortunately developed where composers don’t seem to be thinking about the practicalities of their music. The technique gets ever more difficult, the dynamic levels get more and more extreme, the percussion section department expands and expands and expands and I just don’t think it is sustainable and I think that is, that can be charted over the last
thirty, fifty years. So yes I definitely think the difficulty level of the pieces has changed.

CO: What do you think is driving that? Is it the composers, is it the bands, the contest organisers, the people commissioning the pieces?

PH: Probably just, on a philosophical level it is probably just human nature that is driving that because we always want to better ourselves don’t we. We always want to... you know, The Olympic ideal springs to mind: ‘Higher, Faster, Stronger’. You know, you can look at, let’s look at the Olympics for example. All of the world records will not stand forever will they. There will always be someone faster and faster or jumping higher or, you know, what have you. And I think it is that spirit of human endeavour that has enabled this situation we currently have where a lot of the new music we have is technical first and foremost and unfortunately musicality plays second fiddle to it really. Having said that, over the course of history, all of music history like hundreds and hundreds of years, not just our movement, there has always been examples of composers writing things that have at the time been considered impossible to play and then in hindsight it pushes the best players into a situation where they want to find a way they can play what has judged to be impossible and one way or the other they do find away and that increases technique generally all around so it is one thing leads to another really. But I think what needs to happen is there needs to be a check and a kind of a bit more introspection in music we are creating.
CO: So do you think it is a temporary imbalance? You say that musicality is playing second fiddle, do you think that is a temporary imbalance that will change or is that the direction that the brass band repertoire is going in?

PH: Well I mean I, as a musician, I think music has a power to transform lives, definitely has a power to connect emotionally. It is a temporal art, so it’s not like a painting where you can look at it and you can see the big picture. Music has this time element to it. So I think that even over the course of a pretty short time length for a piece of music, fifteen minutes for a test piece, there is the possibility to take the listener on an emotional journey. However that, in composers, that needs much more artistry to create that kind of journey than it does for someone who can just chuck a load of demi-semi quavers on a page. So my other bug bear is, that it is a fantastic thing the rise of technology. Everyone has computer software now, Sibelius or Finale or whatever they use and that’s a good thing and has definitely transformed the way I compose things. I can remember a time when before Sibelius when I would complete a composition and have to write off the next three or four months of my life scribbling out parts by hand before I’d ever hear it. These days I can finish a composition at three o’clock on a Monday afternoon and I can be hearing it in band at half past seven in the evening. So it is a fantastic thing. However it does mean that almost any Tom, Dick or Harry can sit in their bedroom and produce what might look on the surface to be a professional musical composition, let’s say publishable quality, because of what the software does for them. But it is absolutely no assurance at all that the music they are churning out is of any quality, and certainly in terms of artistic quality, which is where we are talking about
technique versus musicality for want of a better expression, so I think that is the issue there. Even though we have got a massive, massive, quantity of new music, I don’t see a massive quality.

0:06:10

CO: So the, you say the technicality, technical ability, has risen in the brass band and this has been reflected in the repertoire. What do you think has caused this rise in technical ability? And does education, the way players learn, change in your time in movement?

PH: Yes. The rise of the music college has been a phenomenon we have seen in the last couple of decades and, I mean when I started learning there were no professors of, tenor horn was my instrument, or even professors of euphonium. There was nothing like that it was just the guy who had been taught by his dad who had been taught by his dad was now kind of passing on his knowledge to you. Education amongst players has definitely been formalised which has resulted in a much higher quality teaching across the board I’m pretty certain and there is a framework now where brass band instruments are recognised at music conservatoires and music colleges. So yes I’m pretty certain the standard of teaching has increased which would imply the standard of performance amongst the students has increased as well so yes I think that is a definite factor. But also the technological improvements in the instruments as well, in terms of manufacturing developments has helped also. And the manufacturers are coming up with different things all the time. For example when I was a player thirty years ago there was no such thing as a main tuning slide trigger so when you had, when you were attempting to play low Ds, low C sharps you
just had to take it on the chin that they were probably going to be out of tune and things like that. And valve technology enables increased technique so it has changed and those are a few factors why.

CO: And the formalisation of education, you said it has improved technique, had effect has it had on musicality and musical interpretation?

PH: Well in theory it should have had the same technique really, improving musicality as well. One of the issues there is, I found in my case I didn’t go to music college, I went to university and did an academic music degree. So as a brass band player on my course no one had really ever heard of a tenor horn. Everybody else was playing violins and flutes and cellos and trumpets, French horns, all of that. But I did feel that after I had done three years as an undergraduate and two years as a postgraduate composer that I had an overall music education that understood the basics of all areas of music in terms of a general music history, an exposure to all kinds of music from the past, not just brass band music of course, but musics from all periods of history right back to medieval music the renaissance, of course the great baroque masters. I had an appreciation of keyboard harmony, we studied figured bass, music analysis, various types of different formalised analysis, the history of analysis, all of that kind of thing. Really in terms of musicality I think the answer for effective development of musicality is to be exposed to all this kind of wide breadth of different musical experience which I definitely got at university. I’m not sure that such a wide experience is available is at music conservatoire which by its nature concentrates on performance. Performance is the big thing and so that’s one issue that I put on the table in terms of developing musicality. I think anyone can develop
musicality at any time just go into a music shop and buy a CD, or get yourself a
Spotify account and just listen to a lot of different music. So my experience of people
coming through the college system at the moment is perhaps they haven’t got as
wide experience of different types of music which will improve their musicality as
maybe another cross section of people who go to university, but it’s always a
balancing act because people who go to university probably by definition don’t come
out with as developed a playing skill as those who go to conservatoires. Those are
just a few random thoughts really.

0:11:21

CO: When do you think the emphasis on technique over musicality start? When did
you first notice it?

PH: Well I think the development of the brass band repertoire has been interesting
and is as you know just over one hundred years old now and the first pieces that
came along in 1913 were similar to the pieces that bands had been playing before in
such as that they were very operatic, they were based on melody, they were based
on key players in the band having big solos and they were quite episodic in nature
really. And then as brass band composition as a thing embedded itself, over the
course of the next, well over the course of the lasts hundred years really, there has
always been landmark pieces which come along which redefine the direction of
where we want to go.

CO: What pieces? What are the most influential ones in your opinion?
PH: The arrival of Eric Ball was always a big one because he was a great master of the genre of composing for brass band. So you can pick any number of Eric Ball pieces. Then moving forwards beyond Eric Ball into the fifties and sixties we had Gilbert Vinter, who was of course a shot in the arm for bands because of the kind of left field approach he brought to things in terms of colouration, use of unusual harmonies, use of percussion certainly and obviously Spectrum was his final work and the one which defined him really, 1969 I think. And then we move into the seventies and we have the arrival of someone like Edward Gregson who again I think is a seminal composer for band really. Connotations was 1977 and again I saw a big turning point in the music of that particular piece and we had Philip Sparke coming on in the 1980s but in terms of moving towards an answer to your question, the big one for me was Philip Wilby in the 1990s. So I remember playing the first piece he ever composed, The New Jerusalem. I was in the National Youth Brass Band when that was premiered and I can remember Roy Newsome was conducting at the time. I can remember as soon as he brought the baton down after the, there was a cornet off stage bit at the beginning, as soon as he brought the baton down for the band to come in my ears were filled with sounds that I’d never heard before in a brass band context. Philip Wilby was, I think he really has defined a lot of where we are now in a very, very good way. He introduced to us ideas, imagination, creative sounds which we had never imagined before. But also he was, as a composer, he was as good at it or he is as good at it as Eric Ball was in terms of creating that through journey for the listener, creating a work of art if you like rather than just an episodic, a fifteen minute piece that has five three minute episodes stapled together. Philip Wilby was a great master at that but he also introduced us to what I often call the ‘musical
effect’. So I don’t really recall these moments in pieces prior to Philip Wilby, where there was with such regularity ‘musical effects’. So it wasn’t so much a melody or a harmony or a way of scoring or a sound or a colour which of course if the composer writes any of those you have to deliver it with accuracy. If the composer writes a C major dominant seventh you can’t play a C minor dominant seventh. You’ve got to play what they wrote. But in terms of what I’m calling this ‘musical effect’ the composer will write say a series of very fast and rapid notes and simultaneously a series of very fast and rapid notes in another instrument at a different pitch and in my experience these ‘musical effects’ you can divert from what the composer has written, you don’t have to be very prescriptive about exactly what notes you are playing as long as you get the most effective ‘effect’ then that seems to me as a conductor, as a musician, that seems to be what the composer is asking for there and I don’t remember that happening regularly prior to Philip Wilby. And it happens all the time in Philip Wilby’s pieces. There are very, very kind of weird and wonderful and wild and wacky and delicate and aggressive and all sorts of things. All sorts of ‘musical effects’ where you don’t have to play exactly what is written. And I think some lesser skilled composers than Philip Wilby have taken that technique and developed into a monster that is completely out of control. So that is the long-winded answer to your question of where did this development of technique come from. In my view that’s where I see it. To give anecdotal evidence of that, every new test piece, or most of the new test pieces we get at Cory I will do my analysis of the score before I take it to the band. I will give the music out on a Monday and say practice this and on Thursday we will run it through for the first time and I will basically take the band through the piece and I will say ‘right these bars here
between B and C, that’s worth you practicing more I need that to be clean and accurate. However this passage here between E and F as long as you are getting the right kind of shapes I don’t really mind what notes you play as long as you get the effect, so don’t spend too long practicing that. Concentrate on these areas.’ So that’s what I mean about the difference between proper music and ‘musical effects’.

0:18:10

CO: So are you saying a lot of the newer test pieces have this, are there any in particular that you have played recently that have come to mind and were particularly full of effects?

PH: Well I’m talking about this as a negative thing really so I wouldn’t want to name names too much but let’s put it this way, I don’t know if you’ve any experience of the European Championships but on the Saturday of the European Championships the bands play their own choice piece and for a lot of bands it’s fashionable to bring your latest commission to the competition and play that. And there are so many pieces I’ve heard on that particular day which to me are just an endless sequence of special effects with no kind of central core, emotion or music and so I’ve seen all sorts of things on that day. If you do your research this will lead you back to the pieces if you want names, but I’ve seen brass players into the back of tam-tams, I’ve seen seven different sized tam-tams being dipped in buckets of water, I’ve seen people with vacuum cleaner hoses whirling them around, blowing into conch shells you know. I’ve seen it all and I don’t know what it’s got to do with brass bands personally.
CO: Gavin Higgins did a series for 4barsrest where he looked at most, what he viewed as the most important test pieces of the twentieth century and he said that the, when ‘the brass band movement may have believed it was embracing new compositional spheres of influence - the rest of the musical world was already three steps ahead.’ Do you agree with that?

PH: Absolutely. No one can disagree with that. Our movement has just been inherently conservative since day one. I mean you look at the way the movement started, it is a movement of manual labourers provide our musicians, I’m talking about a hundred and sixty years ago obviously, and there hasn’t ever really been a kind of core of innovative creative thinkers. There just hasn’t been and so maybe it is no surprise that everything in our movement that we do is, has a this conservative flavour to it, the music being no different.

CO: Do you think this is true of concert repertoire as much as test pieces? Or is that a different sphere?

PH: No, I mean in my view one of the beauties of brass bands is that brass bands can be very chameleon like, we can do all kinds of different things and we can be different things to different people, so much so that if you go to a bass band concert then you may one minute be listening to something from the world of opera, then you’re listening to a piece of jazz, then you’re listening to a piece that’s in the chart at the moment, pop music, then you’re listening to folk music, we can do it all. Fantastic. But to my mind there are two general modes a brass band can be in: either entertainment mode, which is essentially concert work, or artistic mode and some contest pieces think that they push us towards that mode and some in fact do, not
all of them do. And at Cory we have the odd concert that is an artistic endeavour as well. In other words we are playing ‘art music’ innovative music, music at the cutting edge, that sort of thing. But ninety five percent of the concerts we do are not for artistic purposes, they are for entertainment purposes so we’re playing, our target market is the typical man in the street who wants to come along and hear good quality music, of some good melodies, maybe some tunes that he or she knows, presented in an innovative way. So I think probably most bands’ concert offerings are going to be even more conservative than what they do at competitions by their very nature really. If they don’t appeal to Mr and Mrs Joe Public then Mr and Mrs Joe Public aren’t going to buy a ticket for the next concert and that’s the way it works.

0:23:05

CO: What effect do you think entertainment contests have had?

PH: Well I think they have provided a good focus for creative types like myself. You know, musical directors, conductors, to think more carefully about their concert performances basically. My particular bug bear about entertainment contests, and particularly the Bras In Concert competition which we do, I know that’s the top level entertainment contest and there are dozens of others, but what I don’t really encourage is conductors that think of a fantastic all singing and all dancing entertainment programme which they’ll play once for the contest and then they’ll never come back to that music again. I think entertainment contests are at their most useful when they encourage conductors to come up with concepts and new music and programmes which the bands can use throughout the year.
CO: So for instance you played for Brass In Concert programme, you did it at the UniBrass concert you did, you did some of it at the [London] Palladium as well didn’t you?

PH: Yes we did, we’ve done it ad nauseum and its time we changed! But no, and this is just my feeling but I feel we actually, I think we actually had a very strong Brass In Concert programme last year and it doesn’t, it is more successful when you combine all the pieces together so we’ve actually done all those five pieces in pretty much every concert for the last ten months. But my own personal feeling is probably six months is enough really, for my band anyway, they need things renewed after six months and that’s what we try and do. So Brass In Concert is November and we’ll try and use all that stuff until probably the next spring time and then we’ll change it.

CO: So do you think they’ve had a positive influence on concert repertoire then, or is this as you say not so because bands are playing it once and then chucking it?

PH: No, no I think they have had a positive influence on concert repertoire because what happens with the best pieces which people come up with for entertainment contests is they get published by a good publisher and they are made available for other bands to use and that can only be a good thing.

CO: So entertainment contests are helping develop the repertoire for concert music but is this still within the conservative vein that it has to appeal to Joe Public audiences or do you feel there is any more artistic developments?

PH: Well I mean I think that entertainment is entertainment, that’s what it is. That will always be the case and in actual fact I read a lot of comments about how other
bands are approaching entertainment contests these days, I can’t really comment myself because I haven’t had that much experience of listening to other bands but some commentators are saying that bands are trying to be too clever in their entertainment presentations and in some ways trying to educate their audiences or trying to be over ambitious or over artistic which is why I said earlier in my mind bands are either in two modes. Either in entertainment mode or artistic mode, there is a cross over because you can do clever things in an entertaining way but if you move too, if you blur the line too much that’s where you get into trouble really.

CO: Do you believe that set test contests represent the true standard of playing in brass bands that people will go and see them perform?

PH: What do you mean by that?

CO: If you go and see a band performing at the [British] Open or in the Regionals or wherever, does that represent the true standard at which that band can play and if you go and see one of their concerts or you go see them in another competition they will be reliably at that standard? Or do you think there is any?

PH: That’s an interesting question. At Cory yes, the standard you get at the competition is the standard you get at the next rehearsal because we’re fortunate at Cory, and I know it is completely unrepresentative of all the hundreds of other bands but we have a settled band and we have people who are there one hundred percent of the time and because I’m there all the time as well there is that continuity of musical leadership as well so you know we have that consistency so I can demand as much in the next rehearsal as we’ve just had at the British Open on Saturday. That’s
no problem. But that is not the case for all the bands, even to get themselves to a contest, because they haven’t quite got a full complement of players, they are going to have to borrow in certain players and when you’re borrowing in certain players of course you want to borrow in the best you can get. So you tend to borrow… the players that are the better players on stage are the ones that you’ve borrowed. Plus there’s the issue of practice of course as well because the band is only as good as as much practice as you put in. So perhaps bands that aren’t quite at Cory’s level the individuals don’t have the same practice regime as the players at Cory. And so there is bound to be that fluctuation in level. So I would say that the band contest performance is going to be the best you’ll hear it but then to link back to the music side of things I have played, unfortunately, in my time at Cory too many test pieces which are so poorly written that even though I have a fantastic band at my disposal playing that piece that the composer has written and playing what the composers write unfortunately doesn’t show off my band in the best light. So that’s another complaint of mine, that poor quality music actually makes the best bands sound average. Fantastic quality music makes the best bands sound fantastic but poor quality music makes the best bands sound at best average. So in answer to your question it depends what that set test piece actually is.

0:29:52

CO: And do you think that, you’ve mentioned some of these average test pieces, so how many of these test pieces that you’ve played for the [British] Open, the Nationals can you then put into your concert repertoire?
PH: Whichever ones I think an audience is going to enjoy because don’t forget I’ve got this divide between entertainment and art so ninety five percent of the concerts we do are for entertainment purposes. So if I think an audience is going to be entertained by a test piece that we are either rehearsing for a contest coming up or one we’ve just done then I’ll put it in. You have to be careful about that because if you’re playing so called ‘artistic’ music at an event which is otherwise for entertainment purposes then it’s all about how you present that piece. So I usually spend quite a long time investing my preamble to any test pieces we might be playing in the concert making sure we give the audience some expectations to what they are going to hear basically how long the piece is going to be, if we’re playing three minute pieces all concert and suddenly we’re going to play a fifteen minute piece you have to warn people about beforehand. I usually try to give them a roadmap of what to listen for in the piece and what the composer is trying to convey in the piece. Just basically give them a synopsis or something they are going to hang on to. Sometimes I even play tiny little bits of the piece beforehand and say listen out for when this happens or we’ll get one of our soloists to stand up and say ‘this is a motive that happens a lot in the piece so listen out for this and the development of the motive’ so basically kind of give the audience some guide as to what they are going to be listening to. I think you have to be careful if you’re going to do that but there are some test pieces that are such poor quality that I would never ever use them in a concert. Ever. But other test pieces yes we’ve used it. We played *Fraternity* in a concert a couple of weeks before the [British] Open, at our next concert we’ll be playing a little bit of *Gallery* which is the National Finals test piece, we’ll also be playing *Connotations* at our next concert because I just think it’s a great piece and
yes. So I do it but I think it’s all about how you present it to the audience because the audience are there really to hear some jolly tunes and to hear them played well so you just have to present it right.

CO: So the key to making artistic music entertaining is the framing and the accessibility?

PH: Yes I think that is absolutely right.

0:32:47

CO: How has your experience of contesting influenced your view of brass band music?

PH: What do you mean by your experience of contests? Doing them?

CO: Yes, of rehearsing, the method of rehearsing a contest test piece for a particular contest then moving on to the next one. How has that influenced your view of music? You say that you’re seeing these test pieces that are very technically difficult and there are some that are very artistic and its very different to your concert music. If you were, if the brass band movement didn’t compete in contests in the same way what would the differences be do you think?

PH: Well I don’t think the brass band movement would exists if there weren’t competitions really. So I think that’s too hypothetical a question really. However I think obviously I have already stated my views on... the thing about contests is that at Cory we do five contests every year and every single one of them is a very intense affair and every band that does a contest will have the same kind of experience,
maybe to a greater or lesser extent than we have at Cory. We spend probably three weeks of great intensity working on whatever test piece has been selected for us, and I as the conductor will spend longer than that because I’ll need to do my analysis and study of the piece way before then. So some bands maybe at the lower section may spend much longer than that on a piece, they might spend six months on a piece of music for example. But we do it in short bursts of very high intensity and of course the effect that has on me when a piece is chosen that I don’t really has much worth in it, to have to spend so much time analysing or looking for stuff that just isn’t there and trying to make it sound good which is a challenge you know. Not in terms of getting the band to play well but in terms of the actual notes the composer has given us you know are not conducive to it sounding good. And that can be demoralising. And we are obliged to do it. At Cory we are the number one band so everybody expects us to win every competition we go to so we have to do it but it can be demoralising and so I guess that’s why my strong views about the quality of the repertoire have developed over the last five or six years. Having said that, when you get a good piece like we’ve just had for the British Open it can be an absolute joy and a band like Cory, you know every... A band like Cory let’s not forget is full of thirty individuals, it’s not just one entity. It is thirty human beings and if it’s a great piece of music, they are all great musicians, the will respond in kind. So you’ve got thirty [points at himself], thirty one, responses to great music and that can be a joyful and fantastic thing but the opposite can also be true. So that, kind of informs my opinion on the direction of brass band repertoire really, the proportion of good to bad pieces that we get.
CO: Can you just name the five contests that you do a year please? Just so they are on the interview transcript.

PH: We do the British Open, the National Finals, Brass In Concert, the Regional Contests and we have done the European Contests if qualified, I mean yeah we have qualified for the last few years and we’ve qualified again next year so those are the five. In the past the band has been invited to do the World Music Competition in Kirkrade but we did that once and I just felt a sixth contest was one too many, we were just asking too many demands of the players so we definitely do five contests a year.

0:36:56

CO: Is the brass band movement still an amateur movement.

PH: Yes.

CO: Why do you say that? Because you make your living out of music.

PH: Yes, yes I do yeah and at the top level there are a handful of conductors who will make their living out of music but I don’t make my entire living out of what I do with Cory band. I’m a freelance musician and I’m lucky enough to have regular work with Cory Band but out of the Cory Band I’m the only person who is professional there in terms of getting remunerated for the work I do with the band. So every other person in the band has to have a day job to pay their bills and to have money to live. But I think it is true to say that everyone in Cory band certainly their passion is not necessarily with that day job, it’s with the band. So they’ll make all sorts of sacrifices both in terms of professional career in whatever they are doing, as a teacher,
working in an office or driving a van. Whatever people do they tend to have to make
sacrifice because the band needs them to be available evenings and weekends and
that’s non-negotiable in Cory band and of course as you go further down the scale of
course it becomes even less professional, if you want to call it that. But that is in
terms of professional meaning getting paid for doing it. So is band an amateur
movement? Absolutely. I don’t think there is anyone at all in the world of brass
bands who plays in a band and earns their full wage playing in a brass band, and I
certainly don’t. I have to do other things. Now if you take a different definition of
‘professional’ which means the highest possible standards then I think at the top
level, then yes in my experience actually the top brass bands are beyond
professional standard. The standard, the quality of music making is higher than you
would get in a professional setting. In my opinion. But strangely enough that is
because the players in the band do it for passion’s sake, not for money’s sake. So the
comparison I make is if you’ve got an orchestra, a professional orchestra, they will
rehearse their repertoire until half past nine because that’s when they are paid to.
So half past nine comes, instruments are in the box, they’re on their way out.
Whereas a brass band will rehearse whatever they’re rehearsing until it’s right. So if
half past nine comes and goes and it gets to twenty to ten and the conductor is still
not happy they are still rehearsing because they passionately want it to be the best it
can be. And so at the very top level of brass bands, in my experience, the quality of
music can be higher than a professional group. So if you take that definition of
professional then yes at the top level brass bands are it. But I think most people’s
understanding of the word professional is ‘have it as their profession’ and there is no
band in the world where people have it as their profession.
CO: So you’re saying bands are financially amateur but artistically professional? The very top bands.

PH: Not financially because the top bands, you know it takes a lot of money to run a top band. I mean we, Cory band turns over two hundred grand a year and that’s not a small amount of money in anyone’s book. Financially we have to have the same funding streams as a professional orchestra would have in terms of commercial sponsorship or partnerships, in terms of funding from arts bodies and grant awarding bodies, in terms of individual support frameworks like friends’ societies and patron schemes so we have to have all of that financially. So we are operating in a similar way to the way the orchestras or professional groups operate. So it’s not financially that we’re not professional but it’s kind of... how would you put it?

CO: On an individual level?

PH: Yes it’s an individual level isn’t it. Functionally if you like. It’s a different model of operation really. I guess in the professional world of music any organisation’s biggest item on its budget would be player’s wages and that isn’t there for the brass bands so that’s slightly different.

CO: You said that the very top bands are ‘better than professional level’. Roughly how many bands are you talking about there? Five, ten, twenty?

PH: No, five at most.

CO: Five at most? Ok and why do you think those five or so bands have entered almost a super league of their own?
PH: Because they’ve got the best players. There’s no... I mean the bands there that you’d expect to produce quality performances are, well I hope Cory would be in that bracket, Black Dyke, Brighouse, Grimethorpe and Foden’s. Maybe Fairies as well? So those six bands there are the bands with history and heritage behind them so maybe they have just got up more a head of steam behind them over their existance, one hundred and thirty, one hundred and fifty years, of success, because a lot of bands are very old, it’s not just about being old, it’s about having success over a period of time. So heritage and tradition is very important and maybe that’s the key importance in attracting the best players because there is no secret to it: the best bands are the best bands because they’ve got the best players. It is as simple as that.

CO: And because there is no financial reward in it for the players it is the esteem of playing with those bands that is one of the big factors?

PH: Yes, no I think it is true to say that the top bands will be able to attract the top players by giving them small financial incentives of you know, a few hundred pounds here and a few hundred pounds there. And certainly, obviously Cory band is in South Wales so we don’t have this issue, but in Yorkshire where the bands are kind of packed in you know, shoulder to shoulder, for some players it might be more attractive to be getting three hundred pounds from this band rather than two hundred pounds from that band, whether it be Brighouse or Dyke or whoever, that may be a factor. But I don’t think it is particularly a major factor. So I guess all of those bands can financially incentivise players to go there and that is maybe why they can attract the best players as well but it’s not as simple as that.
CO: We’ve talked an awful lot about players but how influential are conductors and has education of conductors been for the brass band movement?

PH: Well yes I mean conductors that actually know what they are doing are few and far between. Traditionally the model has been at the top level, of especially at the top level, to have one guy or girl who kind of does week to week bread and butter stuff, as a resident conductor, who is then superseded when it comes to a big occasion by the ‘professional conductor’. This is a completely separate person who comes in and just spends a week or two with the band and I don’t know, brings a bit more prestige or has a more famous name or something like that. Some bands still operate like that at the very top level. Foden’s does that, Grimethorpe does that and Brighouse and Rastrick does that but Cory doesn’t do that anymore and Black Dyke haven’t done that for a while. They prefer the model where you just have one guy overseeing things from week to week. So either model can work but just like I just said about players, the secret of having good musical leadership is getting someone who knows what they are doing and that for me is an issue, not necessarily at the top level because the best conductors will always go to the top, but at the grass roots level you tend to have bands that which are conducted by players who are themselves self-taught in an instrument and haven’t gone to music college and haven’t got a musical education and when the previous conductor left they looked round the band and this was the person who didn’t get their hand down in enough time and suddenly they are conducting the band and that is no preparation at all to be providing musical leadership for a group and I’m talking about the grass roots level now. So it is vitally important that we get that injection of musical leadership at
all levels of the band and that’s another thing I’m passionate about, is kind of using
my experience and things that have happened to me and I’ve kind of thought about
and developed over time, to percolate down into the movement. I do loads of
conducting workshops and I’m just developing a video series at the moment as well
which is aiming to address that issue because I think it is an issue at the lower levels
most certainly that bands don’t have the right musical leadership.

CO: And how do you think that has influenced performances? Does it have any
bearing on the technical – musicality divide.

PH: It does because in my view, in the lower section performances I’ve heard some
conductors seem to be focusing on the wrong things. So conductors will, for example
conductors will go to the British Open and listen to Black Dyke or Foden’s or
Grimethorpe or whoever and come away thinking ‘wow what a fantastic sound that
was’ and then they’ll turn up to their third section band the next rehearsal thinking
and they’ll say ‘well I heard Grimethorpe at the weekend, what a great sound. I need
you all to play louder, you’ve got to play louder.’ And that for me is just totally
barking up the wrong tree and completely missing the point, whereas a more
enlightened musical leader would listen to Grimethorpe or Brighouse or Cory or
whoever and think ‘that is as splendid sound, why is it splendid? Oh maybe because
it’s perfect balance because all the instruments are balanced with each other so you
don’t hear any kind of particular section sticking out.’ And then they’ll go back to
their band on a Wednesday night or whenever and say ‘I was at a contest and wow
what a great balance that band has got. Lets place this hymn tune and lets see if we
can work on the balance.’ And you know that would be a good and constructive
response but I don’t think it is maybe the natural response from some conductors who, because no one’s told them or they haven’t listened to enough things or they haven’t had enough experience or they aren’t well educated enough they’ll tend to start barking up the wrong tree. So does that answer the question?

CO: Yes thank you.

0:49:27

CO: The brass band always had a position in British culture and media representation as a lower class art form. Do you think that is still true?

PH: Yes.

CO: And how has it changed? How have you seen it change during your time?

PH: It hasn’t. Despite many people’s best efforts, it hasn’t. You can pick any person in this coffee shop and go to them and say the words ‘brass band’ and they will have a stereotypical image that is about a hundred years out of date that will come into their mind. And this has been perpetuated by films like *Brassed Off*, which was only twenty years ago but nevertheless played right into that stereotype of people going to the rehearsal on a bike, carrying their trombone without a case on its back, wearing their full uniform to rehearsal, turning up to the National Finals and playing the *Floral Dance* as the test piece and you know, all of those things are, it is still a major, major challenge we face in terms of the public image of what a brass band is.
CO: So do you think events like the live screening of *Brassed Off* at the [Royal] Albert Hall where they had the live band playing it, that doesn’t help the brass band movement?

PH: No, no I think anything of high profile can potentially help the brass band movement and you know and I think that was a high class event with a great band in Grimethorpe and it achieved a lot of media attention, likewise what Cory did on [Tonight At] The London Palladium earlier this year. Again we’ve never played to three and a half million people before and in the end the programmes producers what music we were going to play. I gave them a list to choose from but still it wasn’t my first choice of repertoire to play shall we say. The producers had an image in their heads of what they thought a brass band should appear like and they went, well to be fair they were open to discussion so they didn’t go solely with their stereotypical image, they did listen to what I had to say, but in the end we had a sort of watered down half way house. But you know, what is a brass band to ninety-nine-point nine percent of the population? They will come back with the answer ‘oh it’s what miners do’ and ‘its marching up and down the streets ‘ and you know, ‘it happens in Yorkshire’.

CO: How can the brass band movement change that image?

PH: Well we need to be much less insular in terms of everything really. I mean, our contests at the high level should be a fantastic shop window to a wider musical world. So people think we’re weird playing the same piece twenty times in a row, and that definitely is weird. However it is fascinating as well. But we don’t get out there and say ‘hey guys do you want to come and hear twenty versions of a brilliant
piece of music but all slightly different?’ and king of sell its virtues really. You know I’ve never heard anyone go on mainstream media and sell, well I could end the sentence there. I’ve never heard anyone go on mainstream media and push one of our contests because I haven’t because contests are setup for the bands or in the best-case scenario for people who already know about the world of brass bands. They are not setup to entice new people in so we had the same conundrum when we launched our new website at Cory Band earlier this year. Brass band websites, communication, connection with the media, call it whatever you want, tends to be very inward-looking affairs. So actually we took a completely different view with our website and our website is now aimed on the homepage level at people who have never heard a brass band before, have never heard a brass band and they want to know what a brass band is and what Cory Band is and that’s at the top level of our website. And I always think for example, the Regional Contests are a massive lost opportunity for brass bands to get out there and advertise what we do. I mean what fantastic, its such a vibrant, it could be such a vibrant festival of music making which is UK wide, nationwide that happens in February and March every year. I think with a bit of joined up marketing we could get out there and we could, you know, in terms of we have eight Regional events. None of them have really joined up with each other, there’s no kind of cross collaboration. A lot of them all bunch up on the same date. So if you wanted to support, lets say I live in Gloucester here and I want to support the Midlands which is within an hour’s drive, I want to support the Welsh which is within an hour’s drive and I want to support the West of England which is within two hour’s drive but I can’t if they’re all on the same day so what a lost opportunity that is. And so many bands at Regional level to play to, you know, big
concert halls which are filled with ten people so I just think that’s another example of the failure of brass bands to kind of get out there and promote a twenty-first-century image of what we are and what we do. So you know, it’s something we are looking at, at Cory, all the time and hopefully as the world’s best brass band people will kind of look at us and take their lead from us. But I said earlier it is such a conservative movement that the idea of looking outside the movement is too new an idea it seems. It is very difficult to make that idea catch on.

0:55:59

CO: Now you’re a composer and arranger as well as a conductor and a player so when you’re composing do you consciously compose a test piece? Or do you compose a piece of music which you hope at some point will get used for a competition?

PH: Well it depends whether I’ve been commissioned or not, and luckily for me in the last, you know decade or so, I’ve only written to commission so yeah, usually I know what I’m writing for and if it’s for a competition then yes it’s a test piece whatever level its at, top section or Fourth Section or anything in between. Then my experience tells me the parameters I need to work within so yes im generally composing to order.

CO: And you’ve mentioned the different levels there, some composers have said they wouldn’t know what to do to write for a lower section band. How do you, do you have a different approach for different levels?
PH: Well it’s much more difficult to write for a lower section band because you’re much more limited in what you can do, even on a technical level so you know, if you’ve got a great melody and you score it out for the band and you realise that to get this melody just how you want it and its absolutely perfect you have the cornets going up to a top C well then you can’t use it in a lower section test piece. So in that respect its more limiting, you have to be more kind of limited in the material that you can use. But therefore I think you need to be more creative and more imaginative in other ways because even though the players in lower section band might be more technically limited it doesn’t mean to say as human beings they are more limited human beings than the human beings in top level bands so going back to what I was saying earlier about that kind of human experience which music can give you, that unlocking of emotions, you still have to try and achieve that with a lower section test piece if you want it to be roundly appreciated or enjoyed, which is always an aim of mine. And so yes I can understand why people say it is more difficult to write for lower sections because it is because you need to be more skilful, you need to be more resourceful, you need to learn more about economy of means which some of the weaker composers don’t understand economy of means, they think you can just keep adding stuff and adding stuff and adding stuff and adding stuff but the history of composition has shown us that those aren’t the compositions that stand the test of time, the ones that have got a billion different ideas that aren’t developed. The good ones are the ones that are two or three good ideas and the composer wrings as much musical juice out of those ideas as possible. So yes it’s definitely more limiting writing for lower section bands but as I said it just requires more skill.
CO: And you also arrange a significant of music for concert repertoire, are they done to commission where someone says ‘arrange this piece’? or do you more often choose what piece you are going to arrange?

PH: For concerts?

CO: Yes

PH: Well yes, I mean a pattern for me has developed over the last five years when I’ve been with Cory around the Brass In Concert thing because that’s really when I tend to regenerate our repertoire so I will arrange five or or six, well three, four, five or six new pieces for that competition based around whatever programme idea I’ve chosen so yes I will select the music on that level but of course I will select music which I think is going to work for an audience but also obviously as well as my artistic or my entertainment hat on I’ve got my commercial hat on as well because I want to arrange music which I can get published and lots of other bands are going to want to play as well because I do all that arranging in my so say ‘free time’ and so I like to think I can have a bit of a pay back for that somewhere down the line. So I’d be lying if I said that wasn’t a consideration but there’s all sorts of considerations that goes in. So yes that is maybe led by my artistic kind of sensibilities and my imagination and my creativity but also my sense of balance between the entertainment, the commerce and the kind of craft of composing and arranging, that sort of thing. But I don’t consciously think of that, I just do it.
CO: Talking of selecting piece for competitions, what is the most important single consideration?

PH: For an entertainment competition?

CO: Well either an entertainment competition or an own choice test piece?

PH: Well they are completely different considerations. I mean for an entertainment contest the consideration is really you have to have everything in an entertainment contest. So I generally start with a slow piece, which is a piece which most people kind of, it’s the first one they forsake in preference to the big show numbers and the glitzy razzmatazz type of things but I absolutely guarantee we have a slow piece in the programme which can demonstrate nice quiet lyrical type playing, maybe some solo work. Then generally you have to have an opener with some impact, maybe some choreography. You have to have a solo item, a standalone solo item. You probably have to have something which demonstrates more of a, that you can play in a different style to usual, maybe jazz or world music or you know something like that. And generally you have to have a big blockbusting finale which rouses people to a great ovation and will generally show off the bands splendid sound or technique or what have you. So you have to have all of those things in. Now for choosing an own choice test piece for a competition that is slightly different, again it needs to show everything that the band can do, it needs to show all of that. But it also needs to be a piece of music which has more kind of depth to it but is instantly appealing on the surface. That’s quite a difficult thing to get actually, a piece of music which has depth, in other words once you’ve heard it once you, one of the feelings you get is ‘oh that was interesting I’d like to hear that again’ but for an own choice test piece
it also has to have that total immediate impact where you can get it straight away. Because no one wants as an own choice test piece a piece of music where you listen to it once and you’re not convinced and you think I want to listen to it again, and you listen to it again and you’re still not convinced, and you listen to it again and only when you’ve heard it five or six times do you ‘yes now I can appreciate that.’ That is completely the opposite of what you want as an own choice test piece. So yes there is slightly different needs for those two selections.

CO: When selecting an own choice test piece are there any that you’ve had particular, are there any favourites that you’ve used and thought this is exactly what we need?

PH: Well without wishing to be too immodest the piece that we played this year that I ended up composing myself, that was one way of me getting into a piece everything that I knew we needed. So that worked out pretty well. Other than that you just have to be very judicious in the choice of composer you use because every person is going to have slightly different artistic vision so you have to go with someone that you know you can trust, I mean Philip Sparke is a good example, we’ve used his music a lot, Cory has used his music a lot in the past, and he always knows where he is going artistically. And in the commissioning process of pieces with him I’ve brought my own ideas to the table and sometimes he says ‘no, no that’s a terrible idea’ and I’ve been thinking ‘well no I don’t think it’s a terrible idea’ but you have to trust the composers in that case, which we always have done. So I think it’s basically down to working with a composer you know and trust and that is very, very
difficult to get right, unless you choose yourself to compose the music! But I mean not everyone is in that position so...

1:05:10

CO: Where do you think the brass band movement is headed?

PH: Well in some respects headed for disaster and that’s because of the levels of, you know the high levels of apathy we have certainly in the UK. And then I just think unless we kind of wake ourselves from our slumbers really, anecdotally audiences are falling, clearly the demographic of a brass band audience being on the more mature side shall we say that stands to reason that the audiences are falling, so we need to be bringing in new audiences all the time and I don’t see enough people doing that to give me confidence for the future. But having said that, it is incumbent on people like me who are kind of artistic leaders of our movement I guess, not to take that negative view and to say ‘look well while I’ve got the power to influence this then I will do all I can to influence it in a much more positive direction’ which is obviously what I do on a daily basis and I think whilst there people like minded to me and in positions of musical power, if you like, then we have a much more positive outlook. And in actual fact the debate that I kind of brought to the table after last years Europeans, about the quality of test pieces, I do see evidence around that people have engaged with that debate and certainly the pieces that I see coming through now are certainly moving, slowly nevertheless, but moving in my view in the right direction. But as everything in brass bands, and maybe to answer your question in another way, ‘where is the brass band headed now?’ I don’t really know but wherever it is headed it is headed very, very slowly because that’s how things
happen in our movement. It’s so very conservative, everyone is afraid of change, no one will come out, I mean people might come up with a great visionary idea but you won’t get the movement adopting it with such energy and gusto that it could ever move with any great dynamism or speed and that’s how it is unfortunately. And that’s not how I want it to be but it’s how it is and I will do all I can to precipitate a faster change but maybe it will take another generation of people like me and others jumping on board before that can be seen, I don’t know.

CO: Are there any examples of anything you’ve seen and thought ‘that is where we need to be going, that is the direction that we need to be taking’?

PH: Well the comparison that a lot of people make is with cricket which obviously is another very traditional British institution that has all of its ancient, Victorian practices and ways of doing things whereas in recent years the professional kind of body has looked at what the world of cricket does and seen the falling audiences and all the things that we’ve just been talking about, the massive conservatism and you know the fear of change, and some bod somewhere long the line has said ‘look lets do things differently’ so something like twenty20 cricket has been invented where people can just kind of go in and dip their toe into cricket for an evening rather than have to sit through five days of a test match you know, what the cricketers wear has changed and becoming more kind of appealing to perhaps a younger generation and the names of some of the sides, and I’m not a great expert in cricket by any stretch of the imagination but I can see that someone in that institution has had some ideas and is implementing them, working towards the same objectives that we should be working towards, so that’s an example.
CO: The grass roots side of the movement we discussed a little earlier is now much more community focussed rather than work focussed or profession focused. What influence has that had on the brass band movement in terms of where we sit within our communities?

PH: I think it’s caused, it’s certainly caused me a lot of thought because I think you’re absolutely right that brass band is much more based in the community than it ever was on the workplace or industry and you see that in the make-up of people who are in grass roots banding who aren’t just people who work in a factory or are connected to a particular business but they are people of all walks of life typical to what you might get on any street or town in the UK. It is a very, very mixed demography but at the top level as well in terms of the funding that the bands get, obviously when I first came into banding, which was forty, thirty five years ago, there were a number of top bands who were very well supported by big business, building societies for instance. There were probably five or six, maybe more, sort of major building societies that put their names to brass bands and supported the brass bands financially with very, very big sponsorship deals. There is nothing like that now. There is absolutely nothing, there is no point anymore, I don’t think, for the top bands to be chasing big sponsorship deals because they just don’t exist, and that’s another example of where the bands then have to go back to the communities. I mean this is my sixth year with Cory now, when I first went there they had such a big, they had one of these big, massive sponsorship deals. It was worth probably six
figures every year which is not to be sniffed at. There is nothing like that anymore so we are totally self-dependent on...

CO: Why do you think that funding has dried up?

PH: Because of the way of the world. People are tightening their belts, everything has to be accounted for, we’ve had the credit crunch, we’ve got austerity, it’s all happening there and of course companies’ commercial concerns are looking at their budgets. The accountants are saying ‘we’re spending too much money, we’ve got to cut back’ and then get down to say ‘what is this item here, “sponsorship of a brass band”? well we don’t need that’ so it’s the first thing to go. That’s the reason for it, it’s just the reality of today’s life really, unfortunately. So we, a band like Cory has to look back to its core community, in other words what’s happening around where the band is. And we’ve had to focus so much more on that aspect in the last six years than the band had to do in the fifteen years before then when they had a huge commercial sponsor. They weren’t interested in the people in its local community, they weren’t interested in the local schools they weren’t interested in doing concerts at local venues. They just weren’t interested because they had all this money coming in from big business and they didn’t really have to do concerts at all to earn money, so they just went and picked and chose on the big prestigious concerts and weren’t focusing on their local community. Well we definitely are now, we absolutely definitely are now. We did a tour of Wales last year focussing just on the Welsh venues because it’s an odd thing, but the further Cory goes from its home base, the bigger the audience we get. If we put a concert on just round the corner from the band room like we did a couple of years ago we had fifty people turn up for that
concert, whereas if we go to America as we did again a couple of years ago, we have
two thousand people turn up. It’s a strange one isn’t it, so the only way we can
continue to survive really is to reconnect with our local community and that’s what is
happening at our level but as I said on the grassroots level it’s the make-up of the
people in the bands that reflects this move away from industry and towards
community.

CO: Two things have come to mind out of that. How does the focus on community fit
with the contesting life of bands? Is the community interested in the contesting?

PH: Probably not as much as they could be or should be. I mean we do open
rehearsals no in our community where we open up and show people, local people,
what we are doing and what we’re preparing for and then obviously we will tell the
local media after the contest what has happened at the contest and so people will be
aware of it. But probably not as much as they could or should be, no.

CO: And you were saying about being representative of your community. Do you
think any brass bands are representative, demographically, of their community? And
if not will they be?

PH: Yes, I would have thought the vast majority would be because if you’ve got I
don’t know, slugthorpe brass band which operates in the village of slugthorpe, then
most of your players are going to come from the village of slugthorpe and to be a
brass player you don’t need to be a manual worker or a miner or machine operator
or anything now, you can be a doctor or a dentist or an academic or a student or
what have you. So I think it is kind of geography that will dictate the make-up of the
bands. Again the higher you are up the scale the further people, the further you generally have to bring people in to get who you want in your band. But no I think the community, the lower section or the grass roots bands, those that don’t even contest, will have a make-up reflective of their community.
CO: Just to start with can you please explain your identity within the brass band movement?

PM: Well I’m Phillip McCann, cornet player, educator, conductor, adjudicator, all things brass band. How well known I am obviously that can be touching on arrogant side of things, I think I’m reasonably well known. I’ve also been involved with one of the few, if not the only one, where the cornet as a soloist has been used as the voice for a very popular TV and film music, so that’s basically my background in the sense of banding.

CO: Moving on to test pieces and competitions. Do you believe there has been any change in the standard of test piece used for brass band contests? Now this is both in terms of the difficulty of the music and also the stylistic changes, what some people in the brass band movement might call ‘good music’ or ‘poor music’.

PM: I never quite understand that definition, I agree I hear it so many times, people will talk about ‘oh that’s a good piece’ or ‘that’s not a good piece’. How do you define what is good music? Because music is inherently, it is sounds and feelings so how that projects to other people... that’s the nice thing about music, I mean somebody might like this and somebody might not. I tend to approach the music and
try to go into it and find what the music is about and usually with time most music is
good we also have what people call ‘older music’ and ‘new music’. New music, we
can have a new piece, I mean a good example from fairly recent times is Edward
Gregson’s *Of Distant Memories*. Now that was a new piece, just literally three or four
years ago, which I had the pleasure of conducting in the [Royal] Albert Hall with
Carlton Main [Frickley Colliery Band], we did quite well on that. That was a brand
new piece but stylistically it was harking back to what people might, or some people
might, consider the good days of the Eric Ball era where there was nice melodies
etcetera for people to play and be expressive and for people to listen and enjoy but
Mr Gregson combined that with technical challenges so it’s a grey area. Stylistically
you could have a new piece in a slightly older style and you can have a new piece
that doesn’t really challenge or test, because I think some people compose a piece
and it’s as if they’re nearly doing certain things to make it a test piece, as opposed to
just thinking about the compositional skill and format of it. They may throw in loads
of time signatures for example, just because, just to make it a test piece, to make it a
bit more difficult and sometimes you can just combine three or four bars and make it
a four four bar for example, so why put three sixteen and eight sixteen, so
sometimes it’s for the sake rather than for genuine feeling of the musical
accomplishments.

CO: And do you feel that these things that are put in to make a difficult and to make
a test piece are burying the music?

PM: Sometimes, sometimes, more or less what I’ve just said that its like just two
weeks ago with the British Open test piece that was I think 2016 European set test
piece. And the composer had this idea in his head to try and paint pictures, a bit like a symphonic tone poem in the piece in a way because he is, for him, telling the story musically of a very tragic and sad event. From the morning of the day to the end of the day going through all the emotions in that day and combing that with the emotional music he also threw in then the technical demands and challenges at the highest level and achieved the goal so that to me is the nearly the perfect goal. And then at the end of the piece what on paper might have looked easy, technically, was the final section that was called The Prayer, I believe and that was some of the biggest challenges because after all the hard work and the intensity of it then he is asking you to just play very quietly in a hymn like style at the end and that found a few bands wanting. But yes, going back to the question, that piece proves that you can put all of the formats that you want, because you’re satisfying players who want to be challenged, and it doesn’t really matter whether it’s the top section or the bottom section, players want to be challenged. They want to enjoy playing it but also you want the audience to enjoy listening to it and then also as a composer you’re wanting the piece to be played again and again, and for customers to buy it. So there is all of that which has to go into the recipe and tick all the boxes but sometimes the musical goal is lost, like I said earlier, I mean sometimes there are pieces where there are rhythmical challenges or technical challenges and it’s as if they’ve just been put in without too much thought just to make it a little bit more difficult, or the perception of it being more difficult.

0:06:50

CO: Do you think there has been a change in the standard of difficulty of test pieces?
PM: That’s a good question. I would say yes, I’m not sidestepping, I guess I would say yes and no because like I said with the British Open test piece and the European test piece last year, what is difficult? I mean I find I can hear more quality and listen to the quality by playing a few notes slowly. In fact sometimes when it’s fast and loud you can disguise a lot, a hell of a lot, so its laid bare sometimes when you play what people might say is the simple or more simple music. So yes and no, I mean there are some pieces that are written today, superb pieces they do tick all the boxes in the the technical challenges but they also show up the true quality of the musicianship of the players and of the conductor and it doesn’t have to be a brand new piece to do that. I think earlier this year we had a piece by Herbert Howells, *Pageantry*, and a lot of people struggled with that because it was very transparent. Like I said, you don’t need a million to tell if someone is very good or not, it’s usually when they just play a simple line and phrase.

0:08:30

CO: So you said yes and no, would you split it into technicality and musicality, for want of a better phrase?

PM: In today’s age?

CO: Yes so the difficulties of the test piece, you’re saying some of the bits in a test piece where it is more exposed, where there are less notes and its all about the tone and the musicality of the playing, versus the sections where it’s the louder, higher, faster technically difficult. Would you say that technical challenges have had different changes to musicality?
PM: Yes I think technically in today’s test pieces, in some of the test pieces technically they are very demanding yes. And I don’t know whether its society or not, but I think people are more intent on the technical aspect of playing than the musical aspect of playing and being expressive, obviously it’s nice to do both. And some pieces, like I said Fraternity, Distant Memories by Edward Gregson, they tend to tick the boxes I would personally consider ticking. Where you challenge people technically but you also on the other side of the coin let them and encourage them to express themselves musically and emotionally.

CO: What effect has higher education had on the standards of playing and the styles of music that are composed for brass bands?

PM: That’s a good question as well. I think from the education point of view, the system would suggest that we should have more players and more players of higher quality, but I’m not sure that that is how it is. Because quantity doesn’t always convert to quality. I think perhaps one of the downsides is maybe the concentration is directed more to technical playing as well perhaps, at the expense of the more lyrical style of playing, the more musical style of playing. With brass bands I think players used to start playing with a brass band, mostly in years gone by probably, because of a passion, because of a family and they want to do it. Now it’s in the education system now, which has happened in my lifetime and yet we seem to lose the existence of brass bands because of not enough players and many of the English bands seem to struggle to find players to fill the seats. So there is something not working somewhere because the system, i.e. the fact that it is in education would suggest that there should be more players yet the reality is there is not. I can’t
honestly say why that is the case. Whether it is just the society we are now in with social media events etcetera, the technology and the world we live in now and people are more interested in doing other things than going two or three times a week to play with a brass band I don’t know. But it mystifies me because the system suggests we should have more players and better players and we have some wonderful technical players but we don’t seem to have the numbers otherwise brass bands would have full seats. And some bands have actually disappeared and folder. I mean just in the Huddersfield area alone there’s three or four bands a few years ago of decent levels don’t exist now.

0:13:01

CO: There are several options in higher education for people, for brass players who want to continue their education. They could go to a conservatoire, they could go to university and do a brass band specific or brass band focussed music degree, or they could go to university and do a general music degree. What effect do you think these options have on the players who take them?

PM: I think the intention obviously with any of them is the same: to make someone be the best they can be, that’s the goal. I mean if I’m teaching someone, I don’t compare student A to student B, and that’s the downside in brass bands, I hate the contesting aspect of it because it becomes nearly like a sport rather than music. So for me my mentality is always just trying to help if I can, and for myself, to be the best that I can be and to help them be the best that they can be. With those sort of categories I guess the conservatoire, you’re probably directing students who are perhaps more talented on the performance side of things, so they are going to
envelop themselves in playing mostly. And some universities may have a very strong course that is totally brass band orientated and then places such as Huddersfield where there is no brass band course, it is a music course, but we do allow brass band students or instrumentations obviously and accept them and try to form a brass band or a wind band so, but it’s not an out and out brass band course. I just remember saying to me when I was younger to listen to as much and as varied music as possible. Now my only concern is if you’re in a total brass band environment you become blinkered and there is a bigger world outside, the brass band world in the scheme of things musically in the world is a very tiny drop in the ocean and I think it is more important for people to experience a broader musical environment and it is the same with the performance. And I understand it, the system we live in, we need... there is a danger of being cocooned so it’s always nice if you’re in an environment where there are string players and vocalists and woodwind players and you can be involved, even if it’s just the listening aspect, but involved in other forms of music making.

0:16:06

CO: I interviewed Philip Harper recently and he said that he did a general music degree at university and he said that it gave him a much greater musicality and sense of musicality than you would get from a conservatoire because of being alongside the players you have just mentioned. So do you think the conservatoires accepting brass band players has driven the drive for technique at the expense of musicality?

PM: perhaps a little bit, I couldn’t honestly say totally yes. I agree with what you’ve just said, I mean I’ve more or less just said the same as what Philip [Harper] said,
unbeknown to me obviously, so we’re on the same theme for sure there. Perhaps yes because it nearly becomes this competitive element, wanting to be better than someone else. I’m not sure the train of thought, and this is where brass banding is for me, I’ve done it all my life so it sounds a bit alien to say it but contesting is something I’ve never enjoyed even though I’ve had so many successes playing with Black Dyke and conducting and all this it is still for me not a great thing. We have this thing now where it is like a win at all costs mentality, I think that can tend to happen perhaps in some ways at conservatoires because again nearly like an internal contest “oh I got seventy in my exam”, “oh I only got sixty”, who cares? At the end of the day people should just be the best that they can be and that is the bit that concerns me and the environment also as I see it, in some instances nearly feeds, encourages what people might call a professional attitude. So you have young players who in days of old, I mean if someone like myself would be asked “oh could you help Brighouse [and Rastrick Band] out at the weekend? Could you play?” You’d help them out. Now I think we have young players who say “oh yes I can do it but how much?” so that’s come into the thing now and brass bands are not a professional thing, it’s something we should be doing mainly because of passion. In a way it is only a hobby but we’ve taken it beyond that and perhaps some of that more recent times conservatoire situations have perhaps encouraged that.

CO: Do you think the brass band movement can still be described as an amateur movement?

PM: On paper yes, in reality for some no. I mean it’s the iceberg, the tip of the iceberg, some of these bands are taking a lot of money and then giving a lot of
money then to players, then you’ve got the majority of brass bands, the iceberg
below the water, they’re the type of bands I grew up in and started in and love.
They’re the bands who do it for the right reasons and sometimes have no money and
they’re trying to organise all sorts of things to raise money to buy mutes or
instruments or uniforms, that, that is the true brass band movement in my mind. The
handful of bands above the water on the iceberg, they’re charging thousands of
pounds for concerts and then sometimes there are certain bands where people pay
money to go to listen to them and I know for a fact, I won’t name names, but half
the band may be borrowed players for the concert. That is to me fraudulent. In my
time, and it’s probably the same with Black Dyke still, but if you bought a ticket to
listen to Black Dyke everybody in that band was there for every concert. Now you’ve
got certain soloists and it doesn’t matter if the band they supposedly are in has a
concert, they’ll take another opportunity to go and do a solo gig somewhere in
Norway or Switzerland so they’re all about themselves. The commitment should be
totally to the band and the band first, in my opinion.

CO: So these famous bands at the top of the movement who are demanding huge
fees for concerts, does that give a distorted public opinion of the brass band
movement?

PM: Yes, probably, yes and I think one of the worst films ever made in my mind, I
know people will rant on about it, is Brassed Off. Just from the point of view of that
to me is a perfect picture of what Joe Public thinks the brass bands are, you know in
the cloth cap, all the messing around, the drinking and all that. And some people still
continue to this day to go out of their way to this seemingly to project that image,
and that’s the area I don’t understand. You don’t have to be professional of standards and behaviour and be paid, you can do that without being paid to do it. And that’s what I certainly try to encourage with anything I’m involved with. And its this projection of the image to people that are not necessarily in the brass band movement, and people in the brass band movement and individually. If I’m fairly well known in the band movement I like to think nobody will ever see me acting like an idiot, it’s important because how can you preach one thing to students and behave the opposite yourself and there is a little bit of a snowball effect in recent years, again maybe it’s the culture thing, there seems to be more of that image developing. As I said with the previous, the commitment, it’s not everybody obviously, but some people it doesn’t concern them if they’re not there.

CO: You said that you’d never enjoyed the contesting aspect of the brass band movement? Do you think it’s an inherent problem with the brass banding? Could brass bands exist without contest?

PM: Well obviously there will be a lot of people who will say no they couldn’t exist, I would like to think they could. I’d much rather be doing concerts. For a start, that audience at a concert is there specifically to see and hear you. At a contest they’re not specifically to see, I mean they buy a ticket and in the British, again, mentality, which is different from the continent, you could see one moment Black Dyke are on the stage and the hall is full, the next moment a band like, just for argument’s sake Carlton Main or Whitburn or bands like that could be on after them and the hall is half empty but then those same people will be complaining about the result or saying the result, and they only pick and choose and go to listen with their eyes. So
that part of it, and yet in Switzerland and places, and I’ve been there adjudicating
and involved, audiences will support, more or less not totally but more or less, ninety
percent will be there for every band. So that aspect of contesting I certainly don’t
like. And now, more so in today’s age, what is it proving if a certain band brings in
two or three players from Switzerland to play with them at the contest and the
bands with less money are trying to get there with their own players, what is the
contesting proving anyway? Because the week, the next rehearsal after the contest
that band with the stars flowing in from other countries has empty seats, so what did
the contest prove?

CO: So does contesting provide a false image of the standards of playing of brass
bands then?

PM: Well it’s not, I can’t say totally, but in some ways it has to be because as I say,
even at the British Open I’m listening and I’m looking and there’s a band playing and
the principle cornet player is not even from this country, he’s from another country,
and another band in that country. So I struggle to see what we are achieving in some
ways and in a way it is becoming a lot like football. I mean we talk a lot about how
wonderful the English football is but probably seventy percent of it is foreign players
and managers and then the end result is the national team is struggling and quite
poor. And even more so from my home country Scotland, I mean because of that we
don’t seem to, ok it may take longer, but work and develop our own players. Then I
could understand it, but bands, some bands and conductors don’t seem to want to
maybe go to that contest and give a lesser player the chance to develop, it’s this win
at all costs mentality. So in some ways the playing standards are quite astounding,
but how do you know what it’s like next week if some of those players aren’t in that band? I mean this year alone I’ve seen a player from Norway play in the Yorkshire Regionals in a lower section, the same player playing in the British Open with a Championship band and also the same player playing with a Third Section or Second Section band at the National Finals at Cheltenham. So in one year alone I know one player who has played in three national events with three different bands, from another country. So how are we developing our own talent?

0:26:54

CO: Do you think concert music is related to test pieces? Is there a relationship between them or are they completely different worlds?

PM: For me the different worlds, having said that it would depend on the standard and quality of the band, you could incorporate a test piece into a concert programme if it was the type of test piece that ticks boxes for an audience. Because at the end of the day, like anything in life you want that audience to come again if you’re there playing again. So you’ve got to give them what they want, and at the same time maybe introduce a little bit of new music to show the band’s development, whether it be in new arrangements or a new composition that’s concert material. And I think that’s been working quite well in recent years and developing quite well, and of course comparatively in the history of banding obviously the biggest innovation for brass bands in colours and sounds is percussion. So probably in the last thirty years or so the way that has been developed, and it makes a big difference obviously with the concert material you’re playing, and test pieces as well.
CO: So what effect do you think entertainment contesting has had on the brass band movement?

PM: Probably good and bad. I’ve failed to, they’re obviously very popular with Joe Public but then I think sometimes I listen to some bands and listen to the programmes they put over and thinking “you’re not doing that sort of material every week at concerts” so it’s not your normal type of concert programme. I mean some bands go and in my opinion well over the top, with the silliness of childishly dressing up and acting like fools on the stage and all that sort of thing, and they probably don’t do it any other time other than at the entertainment contest but on the other hand the events also have been responsible for the growth and the development of new arrangements for band so there has been a plus, and sometimes there has been a bit of a minus with the unreal presentation and what people might consider entertainment. But it has certainly helped with repertoire. I mean in the last twenty, thirty years, there has been no end of really, really good arrangements and some I’ve been involved with myself, that’s now firmly in brass band repertoire for concert type material so there’s been a lot of good in that sense for sure. And it’s made bands probably consider their presentation skills for their normal concerts, I mean even the way they take to the stage or they dress etcetera, etcetera so it’s made bands thoughtful about that in a general sense. So there are a lot of pros, yes.

0:35:35

CO: How has your experience of contesting influenced your views on brass band music in terms of what you think of a test piece? You mentioned that they have to be good to rehearse, they have to be something the players are going to want to
play. Do you dread the moment a test piece is going to be announced in case it is
going to be a terrible one or do you get excited at the prospect of...

PM: I don’t get either. Because at the end of the day, it’s like I’ve said to some bands
going to a contest you have no control of anything, you can’t control the choice of
the piece, you’ve no control of the draw, you’ve no control of the result. There’s only
one thing you control and that’s how well you play on the stage and that’s the only
goal. So I’ve never thought or had any wonderful anticipation, like I see some people
on social media “oh have you heard what the test piece is for the Regional?” or
“have you heard what...” I mean to me I don’t really care because at the end of the
day it will be what it is. It is obviously a nicer feeling when it is announced if it is a
really good composition obviously you’re going to feel better and look forwards to
working on what you might consider is going to be a really good piece. And the same
with the players and conductors, we’re both in the same boat, but I always
remember Major [Peter] Parks in my time at [Black] Dyke he approached every piece
the same, new old or whatever and he never consider it to be a good piece or a bad
piece because his philosophy was it was up to us to make people believe this is the
best piece ever written. It is as simple as that, but I’ve never had a desire to phone
round “have you heard what the piece is”, it is what it is and we have just got to
present it the best we can and take people on the journey of that piece musically.

CO: Can the selection of test pieces have positive or negative effects on the brass
band movement?

PM: Oh yes, for sure. You hear, of I’ve heard of players in certain situations where
because they feel the repertoire is quite poor they give up playing in banding
because they’ve just been demoralised by the type of music they’ve been asked to play. Obviously I’m talking about all sections of banding now. I mean the other thing that sometimes doesn’t seem to be considered is the financial implications of choosing certain pieces. You could say in particular the lower sections but it’s also the top sections. It’s not every top section band that has money to buy all the equipment necessary that a particular piece might require or demand and you could say even more so in the lower sections. I mean some pieces are chosen and you wouldn’t expect for example a Fourth Section band to have three or four percussionists and to have all the percussion like marimbas or timps or xylophones etcetera, etcetera, so sometimes, not always but sometimes, you do wonder well do these people know what banding is about, do they know what the sort of banding is that they are choosing these pieces for? And that can have obviously a big impact both on the bands and sometimes with individual players who just think ah this is just going in the wrong direction, and they stop playing because they’re not enjoying the music. But there are all sorts of implications for sure, yes. So it is a big responsibility to pitch the pieces for all sections to keep everybody, if it is ever possible, to keep everybody happy. But as I say percussion can be a big thing, and also in the top section because it is a big expense, I mean there was one piece, I think it was the Europeans just two years ago and the piece was two complete sets of percussion, left and right, antiphonal. Well how many bands, even for a band like a Black Dyke who are financially hopefully secure, that’s a big challenge. So how do you do that with more ordinary type bands financially based. And then the practicalities?
CO: Where are you going to rehearse?

PM: How can you rehearse a piece with two sets of percussion. So you wonder if this is a composer that has been commissioned and is writing for the first, then you think, my question would be well who is advising him? Surely there are certain advisers, I mean you don’t want to tell a composer “you must do this, you must do that” but surely there are some common sense...

CO: Some limits in place for practicality’s sake?

PM: Yes, there are serious implications in many ways.

0:36:23

CO: Now I’ve got a list here of the twenty-nine test pieces that have been most frequently used between the British Open series and the National Finals series. I’ve split them into three groups based on whether they have stayed in the same section they were originally played in, whether there is no pattern of what section they are chosen for or whether they fall from use in a higher section to a lower section. I’m just wondering if you’ve got any comments on why those particular pieces, you think, have the longevity that they do. You mentioned Pageantry earlier on and that is the most frequently used test piece out of the whole set.

PM: Interesting list. Yes interesting list, surprising. I mean it’s not something from my point of view I would sit down and think about but then when you see it on paper obviously it is a factual list so obviously I accept what you have prepared. I think sometimes, it is like anything in life, a piece can be written in the nineteen thirties and then some people they may consider it to be too easy but on the other hand
maybe it is not as easy as these people think when they look at it. And then there are some pieces that start off in a top section and they end up being used in the Second Section or whatever and I think sometimes I’ve looked at some lists, like the Regionals sometimes and you think how can you expect a Second Section band to play that piece? And that goes back to the previous comments because then players give up because they think I can’t play this. And they get demoralised and they give up playing so it’s a difficult one to be hard and fast with and at the end of the day it is a common sense thing but you’ve got to rely on people having had the experience in knowing about playing to say “perhaps today this Championship piece might be ok in the First Section or Second Section”, whichever. But they’ve also then, like I said with the practicalities, like percussion. When you drop the sections in particular, are they going to be able to cope with that? Because then how do you judge someone playing the same piece, who might play it well, but they don’t have three of four percussionists so there are some percussion sounds missing. So there is that little bit of snowball effect again. But it is certainly an extremely interesting list, some names from the past there. So when it says no pattern?

CO: That means basically there is no discernible pattern of sections it is used for. It might be used in the Championship Section or the British Open and then it might be used later on for Second Section and then it might go back up to First Section, something like that.

PM: And no change they are always top?

CO: They’re always, yes...
PM: More or less in the top section?

CO: Yes.

PM: And more accessible can be.

CO: Pieces like *Resurgam* which has gone down Open to Second Section, something like that.

PM: You see I’m looking at some of those like *Le Roi d’Ys* and I’m thinking you’d have a job on to play a piece like that if you’re not in the Championship Section and that falls into the, that seems mad. *Journey Into Freedom*, but this is all a perspective of what panels or individuals choose when they choose the piece. Sometimes you wonder well, to be honest what planet are they on?

CO: Do you think that happens often? That pieces are selected for the wrong section?

PM: I’ve seen it more often that I should? In my opinion yes. In Regional test pieces I mean you sometimes, I’ve looked at a piece in the Second Section and thought it well that could have been in the Championship that test piece and then sometimes you’ll for sure in my opinion, I think I know about playing, you’ll see a test piece in the Second Section and to me it’s more difficult than the one they have given to the First Section. And yet to me when you get Regional contests, bearing in mind they are a relegation – promotion scenario, one of the most important selections of those five sections is the First [Section]. And to me that should always be slightly, if anything, on the too difficult side because that band, if it wins, has to go then into the Championship Section so it’s no good pitching too low, and for silliness, a very
straight forward piece and then the next year they are in the Championship Section and they have to play Contest Music etcetera, that’s not... sometimes you’ve got to be cruel to be kind in other words and the First Section is in particular perhaps a big one because as I say the following year they could be in the Championship Section and then may be musically crucified because suddenly it’s like wow how can we play this?

CO: Is that because there is a bigger range of standards of playing within the Championship Section than within any other section? So a piece that is suitable for the top end of the Championship Section actually might not be suitable for the bottom end in some regions?

PM: Yes because then you’re, and it’s not meant with any intent of disrespect but you could be in certain regions and the standard is really, really high but then you go to some other regions and bands that are, the system is how it is so it’s not the bands fault, but you could see bands in other regions who wouldn’t figure at all in some stronger regions so there is a diversity of standards A within the section itself and B from region to region. I mean you could go to any region and you might hear three or four bands that played really, really well, but three of four bands down they are really struggling with the test piece. I mean I’ve got every sympathy because when you choose a test piece, by the nature of the beast, it has got to be difficult enough because if you end up not pitching it right, and that’s why I said you’ve got to be cruel to be kind I mean a test piece is a challenge and some bands should fail, that’s the reality of it. Because if you have a piece where more or less everybody can play it you’re just levelling down.
CO: How are you going to separate out the top ones?

PM: Yes and then with some situations with certain adjudicators you can have a lottery of a result as well.

0:44:24

CO: Where do you think the brass band movement is going?

PM: In what way? Any way?

CO: In terms of its position within British musical culture and the musical direction?

PM: You see there are so many wonderful things that we do, and certain bands more than others because of the prestige of the name, whether it be a Cory or a Black Dyke, and they’re obviously going to be involved with things that people on the next rung of the ladder aren’t going to be involved, that’s human nature in all sorts of walks of life. I wonder sometimes if we have actually gone forwards in that respect. I mean in my time for example, and I don’t know why, it will probably be financial, I don’t know. But bands would always be recording broadcasts for Radio Three etcetera, I mean in my time at [Black] Dyke we would be doing at least two or three a year, now you don’t get a brass band recording at all. For example the Listen To The Band programme, it’s never a specifically recorded studio session. And those used to be an hour, now they’re half an hour. They used to be on at a good time, now they’re on at midnight so it’ll be when nobody is going to listen. But we used to always go into a hall to record, you know an hours programme for Radio Three or Radio Two or whatever, and other bands obviously, not just Black Dyke, that’s all gone. I mean I had the privilege in my time of playing in the Proms with Black Dyke
and Elgar Howarth, twice at least, those things don’t seem to have opened the door. In fact those things don’t even continue to happen. *Songs of Praise* on TV they used to use brass bands, you never see a brass band now on *Songs of Praise*. In the scheme of things you could say well does it matter? But yes it does. So I’m not sure whether, you know as I say musically and playing wise there are a lot of wonderful advances but we seem to continue just doing the same stuff, you know I mean there will be a British Open next year, there will be a European Championships next year, but there’s no opening of doors into other worlds. So that’s I said at the very beginning we are just a little drop in the ocean and we’re cocooned. So we only see our own little world and it never really gets outside that, I don’t think, unless I’m missing something.

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CO: Have you seen any examples of people doing something in the brass band movement where you think that is what we need to do to keep…

PM: No because I think we’re just doing what we’ve done. Again it’s like recordings, even recordings, they’ve all gone in the… there are CDs turned out, probably too many some would say, again doing a CD recording used to be a bit like a going to a Conservatoire in a way, it was a special thing. A band like Black Dyke to do with Chandos, Chandos won’t record a brass band now. They only recorded in my time the Black Dyke era then, and my solo CDs. But they don’t do that now.

CO: Do you know why not?
PM: Probably because it’s not prestigious enough for them, the market or whatever, I don’t know. But we had a certain relationship in that period and it ticket the boxes for them and probably otherwise maybe some lack of professionalism if they’ve experience any other banding, I mean delays in getting the programmes or music in, and they’re not being prepared properly when they arrive, because these people just want to go it’s a three hour session and then another and it finishes and starts bang.

So no I don’t really see anything that’s not already been or has been done, and consequently nothing, I mean from my point of view although it is more personal, Chandos did about five or six solo CDs with Black Dyke and various other ensembles of all the worlds, well not all, they called it The World’s Most Beautiful Melodies and that took us, those things are always appearing somewhere on ClassicFM or Radio Two just because, and I didn’t see it at the time because I can remember when I wanted to do The Carnival of Venice but they were adamant and it ticked all the boxes because all the music was the type of music people wanted to listen to, whether they were a brass band person or not just because they knew all the melodies etcetera, etcetera but you don’t see anything in general happening I don’t think happening outside our own brass band movement, other than another contest next year, or the bands individually will do another concert here and another concert there and another concert... there’s, unless I’m missing something but I don’t see anything that I would call innovative.

CO: Do you think bands are closely enough linked to their communities?

PM: I would hope, I think mostly yes, but again I’m coming down to the iceberg below the waterline. I know the band that I started with in Scotland as a kid, I mean I
go up there, I try to get back a couple of times and just literally play with them like New Year’s Day they go round the town, and if I’m in the country I will try to get up there and do that and it’s just fun. And then we have a festival day that’s gone on for over a hundred years in summer and I’ll try and go up and do that if I’m around and able to. So bands like that and hopefully predominantly the biggest part of the iceberg they probably do because that’s the only way they will probably be able to survive as well. But that was the intent of a brass band, to encompass the community and the social life. So I hope that is healthy but as I say sadly we have lost too many brass bands who have folded. I’m not sure about top section bands, some. They’ll be too busy going doing other concerts everywhere else and trying to bring money into the bank to play the players expenses and all this sort of stuff.