

Last updated: 16-Nov-2007

2007 US Open Brass Band Championships

Wingates on Tour

Malcolm Wood was on hand to report on Wingate's trip to the US Open where there was plenty to write about - although some things will have to remain tour secrets...

So Wingates went to the US Open and didn't quite take the title, but they can be exceptionally proud of their efforts both as a competing band as ambassadors for UK brass band movement.

The whole trip to the USA had been a long time in coming since the invitation was issued to the band after they'd taken the Senior Cup title in May this year.

Of course they had no hesitation in saying yes, but it meant raising the money to get there in a relatively short space of time. Being a resilient lot, they just took it in their stride and got on with it.

With leadership from Chairman, Barry Bentley, and active, hard working support of people such as Promotions Manager, Graeme Hall, Secretary, Sue MacDonald, Professional MD Andy Berryman and President David Kaye, everything was planned out in detail and the goal of getting to Arlington Heights was achieved in quite splendid fashion.

Everyone had a crucial role to play – from the music to be played, to the nightmarish logistics of getting players and supporters onto a plane with instruments and luggage without losing even a dicky-bow in the process.

In the middle of the preparation, an official invitation came from the Chairman, Barry Bentley, inviting yours truly out to the US on behalf of 4BR – to which the editor thought was a cracking idea especially as it would offer support to 4BR's Pat Herak for the live and post-contest coverage.

So after weeks of preparation, everyone was ready for the trip. The final pieces in the jigsaw was a BBC Radio 2 recording for Listen to the Band (to be aired next January) the night before flying out on Thursday 8th November in Manchester.

Everything went well and as the 40 strong party met up at 4.30am on the Thursday and headed for the airport.

Once the luggage had been checked in, it was a case of waiting to get the flight down to London Heathrow for the connecting flight to Chicago and it was here that the party suffered its first hic-cup – the flight to Chicago on Virgin Atlantic had been cancelled.

The plane everyone was supposed to be going out on never took off from Chicago hours before. Virgin didn't exactly enhance their reputation with their customer relation work. Thankfully American Airways came to the rescue and with plenty of in flight liquid entertainment we were looked after royally. Having met at Manchester Airport at 4.30am, we touched down in Chicago at around 11pm, but of course, everything goes back 6 hours.

At the airport the band was met by representatives from Prairie Brass who would made sure all throughout the trip that everything went like clockwork and eventually under Sue MacDonald's watchful eye, everyone arrived at the very aptly named, Wingate Hotel. (Now that is good customer relations)



Did they know we were coming?

The remainder of the day was up to the individual, but for most of the party after some complimentary beers in the hotel from the owner Greg (a really cracking bloke) linked up with Prairie Brass after their rehearsal in a local bar for the first bit of socialising.

This was when the focus returned to contest day and after a good night's sleep, everyone focussed on rehearsal although not before the band were asked by their MD 'if everyone was ok?' Knowing that Mr Berryman was rather tired the previous evening (aided by the consumption of the odd beer or two) this was met with the jovial repost from his caring band of 'Mores the point, how are you?'

With a successful rehearsal completed, in effect the rest of the day was the bands own but with three groups participating in the Buskers event on the Saturday, everyone went to the Buskers Preview.

Some people took advantage of the perilous state of the Dollar to pick up some bargains at the shopping malls, whilst the trombone section and your reporter, went to the Schilke trombone factory in Chicago.

Andrew Duncan, the Sales Associate (not the Scottish conductor I hasten to add) was on hand to give the party a guided tour of the factory, explaining the various processes that go to make the world famous instruments. 40 hours plus for each one was a ball park figure he used – and you could see why.

Of particular interest was the viewing of a rare four valve instrument used by Schilke himself in the 1970s.

The Buskers Preview on the Friday night was great fun with all three of the groups from Wingates participating and going down a storm in a friendly Irish Pub with plenty of good beer and food. Andrew Berryman once more led the way – both musically and socially shall we say! His Freddie Mercury tribute will live long in the memory banks.

With Wingates for the trip was Tony Berry. Tony is the lead singer with the folk group Houghton Weavers. Tony has close links with the band and he played an active role in the Buskers event as well as acting as MC in Sunday's concert. Tony's party trick of never ending extending arms had people puzzled and laughing all night long.

On contest day the audience loved the band, so did rival players and conductors, but not the three adjudicators. Peter Moore got his own fan club and his picture appeared in the Daily Herald paper the next day. The band couldn't have done anything more and they should be proud of their efforts.

They say its hard to win away from home in the States (Mancunian boxer Ricky Hatton may find that out in a few weeks time) and there was perhaps an element of a 'hometown' decision about the final result. Never mind that – Wingates enhanced their reputation to one and all.



Leave them wanting Moore!

Sunday dawned with some fragile figures floating around the hotel lobby whilst some had again taken the opportunity to go and shop and drop.

In the late afternoon the band appeared in concert at Norridge Salvation Army Citadel about 12 miles away and the band headed off around 2.30pm for a rehearsal. The concert arranged by Promotions Manager Graeme Hall was given free of charge but the collection taken during the concert raised a substantial sum of money and perhaps someone with spiritual guidance was smiling down on the band after the previous day.

Prior to this, a handful of the group visited Norridge SA for Remembrance Sunday, and boy did they travel in style – a stretch limousine no less that was used again to transport people back to Norridge later in the day and to the airport on the Monday. Wingates know how to travel in style.



Travelling in style - More room here than the usual Ford Escort

The Salvation Army Citadel was a terrific venue with loads of different rooms to accommodate various activities. They

had an after-school club, a gym, the toilets have shower facilities in them – Norridge SA is certainly appears to be a place that reaches out to anyone that needs it and their community work is an integral part of an area that does suffer with levels of social and economic problems you may not readily think exist in this part of America.

The hospitality continued with the band being fed pizza and salad before Norridge SA commenced the proceedings. Wingates certainly got Saturday of their system (playing wise) with a fine programme that included *'Ravenswood'*, *'In Perfect Peace'*, *'Labour and Love'*, *'Candide Overture'*, *'Any Dream will Do'*, featuring Tony Berry as vocalist and *'Music from The Armed Man'* by Karl Jenkins.

The bands then joined together to perform Peter Graham's arrangement of *'The Appian Way'* before playing the hymn tune *'Amazing Love'* and it was during these joint numbers that Salvationist William Himes conducted the band. To round things off, Wingates encored with *'Mambo Number 5'* to lift the spirits once more of everyone who was there.

Sunday night was a social occasion with the band getting together in a Piano Bar with Tony Berry wooing the owners who'd been really great hosts for the night.

Monday saw a tired but thoroughly happy bunch of travellers make their way back to the airport where Barry Bentley made presentations to Sue McDonald and Stuart Bateson for their sterling work.

What a trip though and what an experience though. The team spirit amongst the band was tremendous with everyone pulling for each other. They'll take the result on the chin but they'll remember their trip to Chicago and the US Open Brass Band Championships for years to come – and so will this writer come to that.

At 4BR, the invitation by Wingates to accompany the band on the trip was a terrific gesture and appreciated by both Iwan Fox and Anthony Banwell.

On a personal note, thanks to everyone for your hospitality, and to those out there who read the blog, hopefully it brought a flavour of the journey to your computer screens. There are of course loads of individual stories to tell but those are for the band to discuss amongst themselves, but not here! Tour rules apply!

Malcolm Wood

Story from 4barsrest.com:
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