

Fresh Directions And Longtime Musical Friends

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With this first issue for the year, we are, in a way, wondering in what fresh directions 2018 might take the Bandstand beat.

For over a year we have been hearing about and reporting on the many sesquicentennial events in the community band world. For almost all of the bands that we heard from, their repertoire seemed to focus on works which had some connection to that 150th anniversary for the country. To top that off, there was the usual festive season offerings ranging from medieval carols to *Frosty the Snow Man* and *Rudolph*. Now that these are all in the past, what are we going to be offered now? There were hopes that we would hear from the banding community all about their plans for the coming year. Alas: no news! Perhaps all of the bands are taking a rest after a busy season. Usually, prior to each issue, we receive a good number of notices from bands about upcoming events. So far, we have received little information.

In the meanwhile, how about we take the time to look past winter altogether, into the topic of park concerts and parades, their origins and evolution?

Welcome to the Bandshell

Since arriving in the Toronto area after WWII I have witnessed quite an evolution in the band world. During the war the Canadian National Exhibition did not operate because most of the buildings were used as barracks. In 1948, for the reopening of the CNE, the main Bandshell was updated with the finest theatre-quality sound system, and the first of a series of feature bands was booked to appear. The feature band that year was the Band of His Majesty's Royal Marines, Plymouth Division under the direction of Major F. Vivian Dunn. I had the privilege of discussing the format of each concert with Major Dunn and operating the sound system for all concerts. In that and ensuing years band concerts were the prime form of entertainment at the CNE.

There were two concerts per day by the feature band and two per day by local bands on the Bandshell. There were also at least two concerts each day on the North Bandstand. That practice continued for some years. Similarly, Toronto Parks and Recreation sponsored regular band concerts during the summer months at Kew Gardens, High Park on Sundays and in Allan Gardens in downtown Toronto on weekday evenings. They seemed to be at their height during Centennial Year in 1967. These did not all end suddenly, but within the next 20 years they had all disappeared. Will the end of Canada's sesquicentennial year see a change in direction?

A Major Anniversary

As mentioned, we have not yet received any indication of significant band plans for the coming year from any band. However, on the

bright side, we did receive some wonderful information on the activities of the Concert Band of Cobourg during the past year. Not only did they stage a variety of events for Canada's 150th anniversary, but they channelled the bulk of their resources into the celebration of the band's 175th anniversary.

The Cobourg Concert Band has a long and varied history, and has had quite a range of names over the 175-year period since the first town band appeared in Cobourg in 1842. During the late 1960s the band went through a period of gradual decline. By 1970 it was in a rather sad state. That was when Roly White appeared on the scene as director of music. Before immigrating to Canada, Roly had served for 12 years in bands of the Royal Marines under the same conductor whom I mentioned above, now bearing the title Colonel Sir Vivian Dunn. With his previous Royal Marine connections, Roly managed to have the Cobourg band officially designated as "The Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines Association, Ontario." With that new designation, the band was outfitted with almost identical uniforms to those of the Royal Marines. Over the years, the band progressed in other ways to the point where they have their own building with fine space for rehearsal, storage and socializing. After many years at the helm, Roly turned the baton over to longtime band member Paul Storms 17 years ago.

As a part of the band's anniversary celebration, longtime band member, Robert Irvine, authored an extensive history of the band called *Journal of a Band*. Mr. Irvine spent over ten years researching and documenting each of the entries that went into the Journal. This detailed history of over 700 pages, looks back to band activities since 1842. That made 2017 the 175th year that a community band has been part of the daily life experience in Cobourg. With this documentation, band members believe that theirs is the oldest community band in Canada. However, they may get some challenges on that. The Newmarket Citizens Band has some documented information indicating that their band was also active during that time period.

According to the Cobourg band president, Brian Clarkson, "Irvine's book is full of rich detail concerning the band and the members of the band, all set in the context of key world events that transpired over the last 175 years. Many pictures help bring into view what life must have been like, how important music has always been in Cobourg, and how some families had members spanning several generations – right up to and including the present day. From our early roots as offshoots of the local fire brigades, through independent membership, and all the way to our current affiliation with the Royal Marines Association – Ontario, you can see the band evolve and grow in importance both locally and internationally." He tells me: "It is a great read for any musician, historian, or lover of small town Ontario." The book sells for \$35 plus any shipping charges that may apply and can be ordered from the same website as the CDs: cbcrmb@cogeco.net.

While on the subject of the Band's new CD, I would like to add a few comments about it that are not in my review of the CD elsewhere in this issue. One comment would be on the talent in the band. There are several members with music degrees, including at least two Masters degrees, from the University of

Toronto and the prestigious Berklee College of Music. How often are you liable to find such composing and arranging talent in a small town band? Another comment concerns the cover design. As part of the CD project, the band sponsored a contest at all of the local high schools for a piece of art work for the cover. The winners, Sarah McLoughlin and Annie Sawyer, produced a vibrant design depicting the band performing under the Canadian flag.

Before leaving the subject, I would like to share a story from a conversation I had with Roly White some years before he joined the Concert Band of Cobourg. He told me about an incident, at some point while he was serving as assistant under Sir Vivian Dunn. He was chastised for conducting with his left hand and told to change over to using his right hand as this was the norm. After some time away from



CNE Bandshell in the late 1950s