



As the International Staff Band began its new season, Staff Bandmaster Stephen Cobb chatted to Claire Anderson about recent highlights and ministry opportunities

# Amazing opportunities together

IT'S a new season for the International Staff Band – but it's far from being 'same old, same old' says Staff Bandmaster Stephen Cobb. 'Every season something amazing happens!' Last year the ISB was particularly busy with Universal Music for the launch of the band's *Together* CD in November – which grabbed itself a Classical Brit Award nomination. Planning also commenced for the band's Easter 2010 tour to the USA Western Territory, while the band packed in engagements the length and breadth of the UKT.

## New additions for the ISB

THIS season the band farewells Gordon Camsey (bass trombone) after 27 years' service and welcomes Richard Woodrow (flugelhorn, Norwich Citadel), Brad Turnbull (bass trombone, Leicester South) and new Executive Officer Lieut-Colonel David Hinton (THQ).

Stephen says of Gordon: 'If you could choose the qualities you'd want in a bandsman, Gordon's got them all! He's a good player, good man, good Salvationist, with a great character. He's the guy to go to if you need a testimony, Bible reading or comment, who has an opinion but is a team player, or, if morale's sagging, he's the guy who's going to lift it.'

'We were really sorry to lose Robert [Foster] last year and Gordon this year but our ministry goes on and we've got some high calibre replacements in Richard and Brad!'

'We have an interesting season lined up,' the staff bandmaster confirms. 'After this interview goes to press the band will be taking part in Regent Hall's fringe event prior to the National Brass Band Championships on Saturday 10 October. Peter Graham will give an exposition and analysis on the contest piece – "The Torchbearer", a tribute to Eric Ball – for which nearly all the musical references are from Salvation Army works; the ISB will be on hand to provide excerpts.'

However, Stephen is quick to reinforce that this will not be, as some might suggest, 'just another bando bash'. He is much more excited about the greater opportunities it will provide in reaching out into the brass band community and to raise the Salvation Army's visibility in that community. He adds: 'It is likely to reach many former Salvationists, Salvationists on the fringe and active Salvationists – what an opportunity!'

Other annual events to look forward to are the Congress – this year to be held in Bristol – as well as the Territorial Carol Concert at the Royal Albert Hall. Of the Congress, Stephen says: 'The staff sections are always used effectively at Congress. It provides a great opportunity for us to be engaged in worship and ministry, as well as discipling and encouraging the Army community.'

The band also looks forward to its Christmas campaign. Stephen comments: 'It's a golden period for us as we visit the House of Commons and attend a reception in the Speaker's chambers; we're The Salvation Army at the heart of our constitutional process. It's a great opportunity to proclaim the message at a time of year when most people want to hear it.'

A heavy recording schedule will yield three new CDs for the band this year: one for its Easter tour, one featuring Army music from the Forties and another – a double CD – featuring the works of Peter Graham (Black Dyke Band will feature on one CD and the ISB will play Graham's Army works on the other).

Looking back over the past year, Stephen says there have been many highlights for the band. 'The biggest impact on us was the recent visit to Cornwall,' Stephen admits. 'That isn't to take anything away from all our other visits, but we came away feeling we had fulfilled our calling and function as an Army band. There were 800 people there on the Saturday evening, and with only 170 soldiers in Cornwall that meant probably 80 per cent of the audience were not Salvationists!'

'On Sunday morning we formed two bands and went to St Austell and Redruth. At one corps three people were there who had been prayed for by the corps – they were so influenced by that meeting they said they're planning on returning!'

'As a weekend package, every event we took part in was slightly different but as we travelled back we had a feeling, not of self-congratulation, but that we had accomplished some good work; our visit had been really worthwhile.'

Also worthwhile was the band's *Together* recording. This advantageous opportunity resulted in sales in the region of 250,000 as well as bringing the Classical Brit nomination.

However, Stephen is quick to point out the greater success of the venture – raising the profile of the Army. 'In total, the band carried out 73 media interviews. As a result, I even had someone stop me at a train station and say: "I saw you on TV!" He was a former Salvationist and the coverage we received brought about a conversation that caused him to think about returning to the Army.'



The Brit nomination brought an opportunity for Stephen, accompanied by Staff Bandsman Gordon Camsey, to attend the awards ceremony. 'Universal told us we had to do the red carpet, which we did – feeling very, very conspicuous in our uniforms!' Stephen jokes. 'As we spotted the paparazzi I laughed and said to Gordon that it'll be slightly embarrassing when we go straight through. But, as it turned out, we ended up having a very long photo shoot and were interviewed by various media including Classic FM.'

'At no point were we made to feel uncomfortable or was our uniform a barrier. Most people didn't know us from Adam but

we were treated with great respect because we were The Salvation Army.'

'We had about 20 conversations with people that night who didn't know about The Salvation Army. It was an amazing opportunity for us and we were humbled by it.'

For Stephen, the impact of the band's experiences with Universal Music, the Classical Brit Awards and its visit to Cornwall has highlighted the importance of relational Christianity/Salvationism. 'This is very real to me at the moment,' Stephen concludes. 'I'm very upbeat about what we accomplished in Cornwall; now it's about doing it, as staff bandmen, in our own contexts too!'

## Satisfying and rewarding visit

### CORNWALL

THE FIRST WEEKEND of a new season is always special for the ISB but its visit to Cornwall was greatly anticipated with high expectations all round!

Heyl Town Band hosted the Saturday festival at Truro's Hall for Cornwall – the hosts having worked hard to generate the 800-strong audience as well as underwriting the cost of the visit.

A large majority of the audience were not Salvationists, although there were many who had made considerable journeys to attend. While the band demonstrated its characteristically high standards of playing it ensured the message of the gospel was clearly in evidence.

Taking a departure from its usual format on the Sunday and as a consequence of Heyl Band's funding, the ISB focused on some of the smaller nearby corps. Staff

Bandsman Richard Woodrow says: 'The band led worship at St Austell, with Deputy Bandmaster Derick Kane, and at Redruth, with Bandmaster Stephen Cobb, and this provided a rare opportunity to minister in a setting where an ISB visit wouldn't usually be feasible. We were warmly greeted by our hosts at St Austell, and with everyone seated and the hall full well before the meeting, an impromptu singalong of favourite hymns seemed the obvious thing to do.'

'Worship was relaxed yet focused and called listeners to not clutter themselves with "religious gadgetry" but to concentrate on the basics – a message underlined by Carl Nielsen's cornet solo "In The Love Of Jesus".'

'We felt the congregation enjoyed our visit and we experienced the value of ministering in small corps settings. It was clear a similar experience was shared at Redruth, where another congregation far in excess of the usual number met to share in worship led by the executive

officer. The meeting was a source of blessing, inspiration and encouragement.'

'Camborne Corps provided lunch before the band's afternoon programme at Centenary Chapel attended by 300 people. Nathan Cole (Bristol Easton) testified and Damian Wileman (Sheffield Citadel) sang a solo.'

'As the weekend progressed, we were thrilled to learn that so many Salvationists had taken the visit as an opportunity to ask friends and neighbours to come to the Army for the first time. It became clear that many former Salvationists had responded to the band's presence in the area to share in worship.'

'The journey home was long but conversations between members of the band testified to the sense of value we placed on the weekend. One-to-one conversations with listeners at various venues affirmed the validity of the band's presence in that rather isolated area of the territory and we were left in no doubt as to the spiritual impact our ministry had brought to many people's lives.' – K. A.