

Paganini lights up latest in Masters series

Master Brass Vol. 17

Rothwell Temperance Band, Foden's Richardson Band, Scottish Co-op Band
Polyphonic QPRL224D

Available from World of Brass, 4barsrest, Midland CD

One of the best CDs of entirely live performances to be released every year is the Master Brass series, which has always included the winning performance of the test-piece and highlights from the evening gala concert from the All-England Masters International Championship, which has become something of a Cambridge institution.

The CD from the 2006 contest comprises a delightful collection of the pieces played at the evening concert and also contains Rothwell Temperance Band's winning performance of Wilby's *Paganini Variations*. The concert items are all generally well played, with particular highlights being the solo spots from Alison Bonnar, Les Neish, Paul Kiernan and the inimitable Glyn



Williams – all masters of their art. Goff Richards' *Songs of the Quay* is perfect material for a concert such as this and is given an upbeat and lively performance by Foden's. The disc ends with the same band's performance of Elgar Howarth's new march, *Golden Arrow*, a piece that will surely be extremely popular with

bands in the future.

Rothwell Temperance would not have been the band on everyone's lips to take the title prior to the contest, but its performance certainly put paid to any preconceptions. There are little things to grumble at but, overall, this performance is one of beauty. The slower middle section is particularly stunning and the cornet section could not have wished to play the notorious unison fanfare passage any better. The band's playing improves throughout and builds to a triumphant ending. The CD perfectly captures the atmosphere created by this fantastic rendition of the test-piece.

Another great set of memories from the 'Masters', captured on disc by Polyphonic, which will serve as a testament to the enduring popularity of the Cambridge contest in whatever guise it may appear.

Robert Richardson

Bright Sunlit Morning

Adrian Clarke (vocals),

Lance Cpl. Rachel Smith (flute)

Lance Cpl. John Storey (euphonium)

The Regimental Band of the Coldstream Guards

Conductor: Major Graham O. Jones MBE

Polyphonic QPRM 149D

Available from World of Brass

Both in reputation and repertoire, the Regimental Band of the Coldstream Guards grows apace. This new release contains at least one composer familiar to brass band listeners, Martin Ellerby (the band's current Composer-in-Residence), as well as a fine example of that 'unsung hero' of the euphonium, John Storey. Included on this album are two pieces by Australian composer, Ralph Hultgren and two very substantial compositions by Cuban-born composer, Aldo Rafael Forte, as well as a contribution by international operatic baritone, Adrian Clarke.

Martin Ellerby's *Neapolitan Serenade* was specially commissioned for the band's superb principal flute, Lance Corporal Rachel Smith, and is one of the most beautiful and affecting works its composer has produced to date. Taking its title from the 'Neapolitan sixth' chord, the soloist soars aloft on a cushion of gentle harmony, like the ascending lark of George Meredith's poem. Like all good music, 'it enters the ear with facility and quits the memory with difficulty' (to quote Sir Thomas Beecham) and to the wind ensemble is added the glittering colour of the harp. This is a lovely piece and one certain to make its composer new friends.

Yasuhide Ito's *Fantasy Variations* was discovered in Japan and promoted in this country by the euphonium virtuoso, Steven Mead, and consists of three variations on a theme which remains hidden until the work is almost over. It is a most attractive work, which gives Lance Corporal Storey ample opportunity to demonstrate his athletic abilities.

The title track, *Bright Sunlit Morning* is by Ralph Hultgren and is a response to the terrorist atrocity, which we all have come now to know as '9-11', when two passenger aircraft were crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. However, this is not a gloomy work, but seeks to find solace in words of Scripture. These form the text of the baritone solo, which Adrian Clarke sings so movingly, his voice blending well with the sounds of the wind instruments.

Another Hultgren opus arising from a dreadful incident is *My Sister's Tears*, an elegy for his younger sister, who committed suicide. Again, this work is not mawkish or depressive in any way, but attempts to rise above the tragedy by finding comfort in the memory of the young woman, in the clothes she wore and how her smile brought joy to her family. Salvationist readers would probably classify this piece under the heading, 'Inspirational'.

On a brighter note, Aldo Rafael Forte's two works in this present collection are both showpieces for the band. *Dali* takes as its subject the surrealist paintings of Savatore Dali, beginning with *The Unicorn*, a rather melancholy piece, followed by the quirky *Don Quixote*, who



is seen tilting at windmills. *Elephant Spatial* is a bizarre scherzo whilst *The Persistence of Memory* is full of atmosphere, the ticking of clocks represented by the regular pulsation of the upper winds. The final movement, *Inferno - Dali's Ghastly Images*, evokes some of the painter's more disturbing visions, but ends with a triumphant salute from the full band to the genius of the eccentric Spanish artist.

Major Graham Jones draws both vivid and expressive playing out of his musicians and the recording, by Brian Hillson and Daniel Lock at Watford Town Hall, is clear and natural. The booklet bears the legend: *International Wind Band Music Series Vol. 1*, which is good news indeed for those who collect the best in contemporary wind music. On to Volume 2, please!

Kenneth Crookston