**The Soundtrack of my life: September 2019**

**Dr Brett Baker**

**General Manger of The Geneva Group**

**Principal Trombone Black Dyke Band**

**Michael Rath Artist**

*Brett is a soloist, a teacher, a band trainer, adjudicator and conductor having played for the Black Dyke Band now for twenty years. For nearly a decade until recently he was the Programme Leader for Musical Arts (Band Musicianship) at the University of Salford. He is now General Manager for the Geneva Group based in the Czech Republic with its UK office in Stokesley, North Yorkshire.*

*Having produced over 40 solo CD’s he is one of the most recorded trombone players and is chair of the Awards committee of the International Trombone Association and a trustee of the National Youth Brass Band of GB.*

1. Rhapsody for Trombone by Gordon Langford played by Don Lusher 1975

This is the first trombone solo that I ever listened to on an old cassette tape, after playing trombone for about a year, my father had played trombone but was not playing when I was growing up, therefore Rhapsody was my first and best reference point to what a trombone was capable of played by the great Don Lusher given to me by a teacher. Don Lusher was a wonderfully kind and generous person that I had the pleasure of meeting years later and I have tried to adapt this philosophy in my own outlook as a player and person.

Growing up in a small village in a council house estate and playing trombone was not always easy, especially the trauma of getting an instrument case, onto a school bus. The teachers at secondary school were very supportive and I am sure this helped my confidence and hence going forward contributed to the grades that I achieved allowing me to then go to college. I attribute much of this to playing and being involved in music.

1. Tenor Trombone Rag by Roy Newsome

Whilst at Lydbrook, the second band I played in after starting in my village band of Bream, I moved up the ranks from second trombone where I learnt from sitting next to Steve Smith who previously played tenor horn in GUS band before at the age of 15 being the solo trombone player. The first solo I ever played on a recording was Roy Newsome’s Tenor Trombone Rag, still an associated board grade piece. This reminds me very much of the wonderful experiences and guidance that took place when playing in the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain. Roy Newsome was the conductor at the time and was very encouraging as was his lovely wife Muriel. This very much inspired me, though not only did Roy Newsome take the band but also Frank Renton, Richard Evans, Bramwell Tovey. I remember vividly playing on the 40 years young recording, and the highlight was being conducted by the great Harry Mortimer on ‘Life Divine’. Playing the solo ‘Tintagel’ for Roy Newsome also on this CD is another fond memory. I write this sadly after hearing that we have lost this week our administrator of the NYBBGB Philip Biggs.

1. Harmony Music by Philip Sparke 1987

I went along to listen to the National Finals at the Royal Albert Hall when I was 14, courtesy of Lydbrook Band and this had a remarkable affect on me in terms of wanting to practice and get better. Listening that day spurred me on to want to play for one of the “Top Bands”. Desford’s performance of the piece was most inspiring, though in fact I was inspired by every bands performance. I have been a fan of the music of Philip Sparke ever since then.

1. Derek Bourgeois Trombone Concerto 1989

Derek Bourgeois for many years lived in Hewelsfield the village next to mine in the Forest of Dean. My father on his early retirement helped Derek with the odd task and for some time was his gardener. I remember my father coming home one day whilst I was practising at my grans house (she had very thick walls and did not mind the noise), he thrust some music at me explaining that Derek had heard I play the trombone and wanted to know would I mind checking through this piece to see if it was too hard? Being arrogant I said it was fine and this became one of the most prolific trombone concertos ever being premiered by Christian Lindberg and the Sunlife band in 1989 in Eaton. After since performing this piece I wish I had said it was too hard. I have always loved Derek’s music whether works for wind band, brass band or solos. Being able to record his piece ‘Bone Idyll’ with Faireys and play ‘Devil and the Deep Blue Sea’ in 1993 at the Royal Albert Hall was a huge thrill for me. I was 20 by this point and enjoying my time at Salford and the Manchester brass scene.

1. Cornet Solo ‘The Southern Cross’ Dave King 1990s

Salford was a defining moment for me and although I did not study music (Business Economics was my course) I immersed myself in Salford band and bands local to Manchester. Many of my closest friends were in Salford band and I was busy playing for both Faireys and whenever possible Grimethorpe who has a vacancy for nearly a year. David King was a huge influence on my playing whilst studying as was Steve Walkley, Chris Houlding and Denis Wick.

David started me thinking about playing cornet solos and in particular a piece called the ‘Southern Cross’ by Herbert Clarke. I had an interest in wanting to go to Australia and managed to do so for the first time in 1999. That then introduced me to Mark Ford and many wonderful experiences in Australia including playing in Kew Band and Brisbane Excelsior over the next ten years, at various competitions.

1. Johan De Meji Extreme Makeover Dyke Euros 2005

I have always enjoyed participating in and listening to bands at the European Championships, in what is for me the highest form of brass playing anywhere in the world. Whether I had won a contest or not, I always enjoy meeting old friends and listening to the wonderful sounds of the Europeans on and off stage. Extreme Makeover was a favourite test piece for me to play. Having always liked Johan’s Trombone Concerto I thoroughly enjoyed playing and listening to his Extreme Makeover. This was a particularly memorable win for me have been with Black Dyke for five years and having been please to now notch up 20 years with the band where the concerts and contest performances have been highlights of my playing career.

1. Radio City by Peter Graham 2015 for my DMA

I finished my Doctorate in 2014 and this led me to teaching performance at Salford University and eventually becoming Programme Leader. Radio City encapsulates that whole era for me and is a thank you to my supervisors, Howard Evans, Peter Graham and Robin Dewhurst. The other piece that was commissioned very much with the help and guidance of Nicholas Childs was Edward Gregson’s Trombone Concerto re-written for brass band as opposed to orchestra for one of my DMA projects, with Edward Gregson being another composer I enjoy playing and listening to.

Looking back, I am so pleased and proud to have assisted the talented young players that came through Salford many of which have become leading performers and conductors in leading bands.

1. Brussels Requiem by Bert Appermont

I wanted to mention this piece as over a year ago I was in a very bad place regarding my wellbeing. Stress manifests itself in a variety of ways and for me it was in the form of a contest performance and it has taken me a while to recover from that. In the grand scheme of things my performance on stage at that particular contest was not bad, but it was not consistent with my normal level of performance. After reflecting on this over the past 12 months I realised that my lifestyle due to work pressures affected many aspects of my life. Over the past couple of years I have looked to change my eating habits, fitness and wellbeing. I have been running every day, and drinking less, but the underlying problem was still there - a frustration of not being able to change things regarding the day job. A radical change in career has resolved many of these frustrations and I am in a much better place which has in turn returned my playing to the standards I expect of myself and allowed me time to practice. Brussels Requiem was therefore a wake up call for me in terms of my future path and where my focus should be.