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# The Toronto Youth Wind Orchestra

Mark Caswell

Seventeen years ago, Colin Clarke, a high school Spercussionist, found himself yearning for more opportunities to make music in a concert band setting. With a lot of initiative and determination, Colin planted the seeds for an organization which would become the *Toronto Youth Wind Orchestra*. Over the next seventeen years, the ensemble developed a reputation for its commitment to developing young musicians and its passion for musical excellence.

## The Early Days

As a high school student, Clarke had been a member of the Peel Honour Band and the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra, enjoying every moment he spent in both ensembles. Unfortunately, the Honour Band was disbanded due to budget cuts, so to form a community band, the Brampton Youth Wind Ensemble, to make up for that loss. He visited several schools promoting his new band and was able to convince the legendary Bramwell Smith II to conduct it.

While Smith did lead several rehearsals, he became too ill to carry on, so Clarke reluctantly picked up the baton and led the ensemble through its first public performance in the spring of 1991. With only 22 members, the first concert was a little shaky, but they struggled through three pieces before an appreciative audience, setting the stage for better things to come.

The following year, Clarke, now in university, moved the ensemble to the University of Toronto, though finding available players to fill out all the sections was still a challenge. He continued to conduct the band on an interim basis, hoping someone with more experience could be found to take the reins, but no one came forward and an enthusiastic Clarke carried on. In 1993, the band made its first festival appearance at the Southern Ontario Band Festival, garnering a triple Gold and gave its first major public performance to an enthusiastic audience at the MacMillan Theatre in the University of Toronto's Edward Johnson Building.

1994 was a critical year for the ensemble. Following another well-received performance, a member of the audience approached Clarke to offer his help. Anthony

(aka 'Tone') Careless, a clarinetist, became a pivotal figure in the development of TYWO, acting as the group's first business manager, appointing a board of directors, developing a business plan and recruiting a squad of volunteers, before seeking incorporation as a non-profit organization. The name was officially changed to the Toronto Youth Wind Orchestra to reflect its new location, the improvement in the calibre of its performances and its rapidly growing reputation. As with any community ensemble, finances were always a challenge, requiring the organization to begin charging musicians a fee to belong. With costs mounting, over time, the ensemble was forced to search out another rehearsal location.

## TYWO Comes of Age

1996 was another important year for TYWO: it gave its first public performance of Gustav Holst's *The Planets* to a sold-out audience of 1,000.

As a child, Colin had two big interests, *Star Wars* and music. Without knowing it, he had heard Holst's masterpiece many times on late-night television accompanying the scrolling text of twenty-four-hour cable news. In the era before MP3s and the internet, he would record the most interesting pieces directly from the TV speaker with a hand-held tape machine. He had no idea then what he was recording but several years later, his high school band teacher introduced a piece that Colin knew well from late-night TV, "Jupiter" from *The Planets*.

Later still, Colin heard the Toronto Symphony Orchestra play *The Planets* live and decided that it would be an excellent work to transcribe for wind band. Despite having limited orchestration experience, he produced a transcription that is faithful to the original while demonstrating some highly original touches. Consider, for example, how one might transcribe the string harmonics in "Uranus" and "Saturn" for an ensemble devoid of strings. The answer came to Clarke as he sat running his finger round the rim of a water glass while pondering the problem.

In the spring of 1996, following a very successful live premiere, the Wind Orchestra made its first compact disc, featuring *The Planets*. It required a major collaborative effort, combining the talents of a CBC recording engineer, an expanded ensemble, a renowned local choir, the Belle Arte Singers and a small army of extras to play water glasses.

The same year, TYWO launched a new ensemble, the Toronto Youth Concert Winds initially co-conducted by

Clarke and David Lum. Part of the vision for the Concert Winds was to bring younger musicians into the TYWO organization, allowing them the opportunity for expanded performance opportunities outside their school music programs. It quickly developed a reputation as a strong musical ensemble in its own right, and within two years Lum became its principal conductor.

David Lum brought a lot of experience, talent and passion to the organization. As an educator, he had been a driving force in the Scarborough Board of Education as well as being a fine tuba player (having previously played with TYWO) and an exceptional conductor. He brought much to the organization, including his broad network of relationships in the musical community.

## The Middle Years

TYWO continued to expand and evolve in many ways. In 1997, it was invited to perform in Ottawa and Hull for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of MusicFest Canada. The following year, it recorded its second disc and commissioned two original pieces. In 1999, the Board of Directors held a major strategic planning session to establish a long-range plan for the organization. That year, the season was expanded to include four public performances. In 2001, TYWO celebrated its own tenth season and the fifth anniversary of the TYWO Concert Winds. To mark the occasion, TYWO made its third recording, *Celebrations*, and moved to new rehearsal quarters at St. Michael's College School in Toronto, a relationship that continues to this day.

The Wind Orchestra continued to cement its reputation as a first-class ensemble under the baton of Colin Clarke. David Lum remained at the helm of the Concert Winds for nine years, passing the baton in 2005 to Michael Perkins, who remained conductor for the next two seasons.

## Future Directions

In 2006, the Board of Directors held another strategic planning session which resulted in some significant changes. Beginning in the fall of 2007, a third ensemble was to be added to the musical family to fit between the two existing groups. The Toronto Youth Symphonic Winds is open to high school students looking to enhance their playing skills through the performance of advanced repertoire.

As part of the new structure, the Toronto Youth Concert Winds was changed to the TYWO Concert Winds, with a focus on younger students (grades 5 through 9) and their

development as budding musicians. Sommer Buttu (another TYWO alumna) will lead the "new" Concert Winds through the 2007/2008 season.

Under the current leadership of Beryl Macleod, the board of directors has helped drive the organization towards what will unquestionably be the most ambitious season in the history of the organization, a season of "firsts": The Symphonic Winds will come together for its first-ever rehearsal just five weeks before joining its big brother, the Wind Orchestra for a performance with trumpeter *extraordinaire* Allen Vizzutti, in a collaboration with the Hannaford Youth Band.

TYWO, joined by soprano Leslie Fagan, baritone Kevin MacMillan, tenor Darryl Edwards and a choir of 300 voices will perform Carl Orff's "*Carmina Burana*". And TYWO will embark on a project which moves into the realm of multimedia. Four local dance companies have been invited to interpret selected wind-band repertoire and choreograph original dance/movement for a production entitled "Danceries". Giant on-stage screens will provide a visual backdrop to the dancers in lieu of sets, displaying images of the Wind Orchestra in performance. And in June 2008, TYWO will undertake its first intercontinental tour, travelling to Australia to participate in the 2008 Sydney Musicales with a performance at the Sydney Opera House.

## The Repertoire

Over the years, the Toronto Youth Wind Orchestra has performed literature by a broad range of composers covering many styles. In keeping with its objectives, TYWO attempts to expose its musicians to challenging works that would not normally be played by high-school bands. In addition, there is a commitment to developing new works for wind band. TYWO has already commissioned two Canadian works and is in discussions regarding two more. Transcriptions have also remained an important part of TYWO programming, as this offers musicians a glimpse at some of the repertoire from the great orchestral composers. (*For a partial listing of TYWO repertoire, see appendix A.*)

## Guests and Collaborations

TYWO has had the privilege of inviting many guests to share its stage. (See Appendices B & C) and, with increasing frequency, the orchestra has taken on more exciting programs and projects, all with a focus on providing fulfilling musical experiences for both the musicians and their audiences. Soloists and guest conductors continue to grace the stage with their experience, talent and musical gifts.

Other collaborations have also been a part of the TYWO history. Recently, the composer, Eric Whitacre, spent a couple of days in Toronto working with high-school bands, culminating in a gala concert at the Toronto Centre for the Performing Arts, featuring four high-school ensembles, three visiting choirs, and the TYWO Concert Winds and Wind Orchestra. For Whitacre, it was “an absolutely amazing experience”. Collaborations will continue to be an important part of future seasons.

## A Few Highlights

TYWO believes in the value of making both studio and live recordings. Since their inception, the combined bands have made three recordings: *The Planets*, *Clearly Canadian*, featuring Canadian composers, and *Celebrations*, a collection of classic wind-band material. (See appendix D for details.)

Since 1994, TYWO has expanded its musical activities to include tours and retreats. A recent highlight for the ensemble was a performance at Carnegie Hall in New York. Following a rigorous application process, the Wind Orchestra was the first Canadian youth wind band invited to participate in the Ensemble Spotlight Series. The musicians played with fire and passion, to be rewarded by an instantaneous standing ovation.

## Colin Clarke

Colin Clarke likes to recount that his love for music was born out of watching Animal from *The Muppet Show*, (“if HE can play drums like that, I can too!”) though he was more formally introduced to music at Chinguacousy Secondary School, where, under the encouragement of John Darragh, his world was opened to music. Darragh regularly introduced his students to recordings ranging from Dizzy Gillespie to Stravinsky; and Alfred Reed to the Beatles, to give them an appreciation for the art of music in all its forms.

In time, with the growing success of the Wind Orchestra, Clarke decided to focus on “getting good” at what he loved to do. Beyond formal accreditation, however, he relates very well to young people, making him a sought-after conductor, clinician and adjudicator from coast to coast, listening with keen precision and musicality to what is going on around him. He is equally comfortable with young music students and professional musicians.

Clarke inspires his musicians and treats them with warmth and respect; he makes his rehearsals fun while remaining serious about the music; he delivers imaginative and creative programming, and is the life force behind the Toronto Youth Wind Orchestra. According to the TSO principal oboe, a TYWO alumna, Sarah Jeffrey, Colin

“has the smile, that infectious giggle, his complete and total love of music ... and lets teenagers have *fun*!”

## Alumni Reflections

Greg Colley, a trumpeter who recorded with TYWO on *The Planets* and is now head of music at Pierre Elliott Trudeau High School in Markham (just outside Toronto) recalls a Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra rehearsal that neither of its conductors attended. Colin Clarke found himself on the podium and while the wind and percussion players knew how capable he was, the strings did not. They were rehearsing the finale to Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 5 and, according to Colley, “by the end of the rehearsal the orchestra played with a fire and passion that they hadn’t played with in a long time.”

Sarah Jeffrey has many fond memories of her four years with TYWO. “I knew [he] had great taste in wind-ensemble music, which is not all that common, and that I would learn a lot from him and his group. Little did I know I would learn the entire part to Holst’s *The Planets*, which I just played with the TSO a couple of months ago (2007 season), and it was only the second time I’d ever played it; first with TYWO, and next with the TSO. It felt great to have the experience already under my belt when playing a big work like that with a professional ensemble for the first time. ... I remember everything about the way Colin had [the first oboe] playing that part. I remember how thoroughly we worked on “Mercury”, and how difficult it was to play “Neptune” at the end of the entire piece. It helped tremendously to have those things ingrained in my memory ... I felt as confident about the score as I’m sure all my colleagues did. It’s helpful when I can draw on these experiences from my student days with groups like TYWO.”

Another professional oboist, Graham MacKenzie, recalls TYWO with great fondness, “Colin is one of the few people who has the ability to communicate and transmit his love and enthusiasm for music to anyone lucky enough to be under his baton. I will never forget watching him in concerts and being blown away by how immersed he was in the music and his sheer intensity. Certainly, Colin’s greatest strength is his ability to motivate younger musicians to share his passion for music ... I would not be a professional musician now if it were not for TYWO, and certainly not if it weren’t for Colin Clarke. The TYWO experience really showed me what incredible things could be accomplished with hard work, despite all odds.”

Graham continues: “TYWO provides high-calibre concerts of music that will hopefully enrich the lives of its



audience. It provides a place for the youth of the community to go and learn about great music, meet other people their age who are also into music, and feel both comfortable and stimulated. For the musicians, it provides them with a lifetime love of music, a solid work ethic, a social circle of dedicated, inspired people, and the experience of being involved in something truly special.”

## Conclusion

Dennis Carpenter, a music educator, recently reflected on the positive musical impact that TYWO had on several of his most senior students, and how they in turn brought an immeasurable degree of musical growth and leadership back to his school. He gives a great deal of credit to TYWO for helping these students develop into stronger musicians and leaders in his music program.

The Toronto Youth Wind Orchestra, from humble beginnings, has grown into a respected organization due to the people who have helped to shape its program. To quote Colin Clarke, “We try hard to sustain a family element to our organization. We have a happy group of volunteers who know our musicians by name, and greet them at rehearsals with a hug. We send out weekly e-mails that are both informative and humorous. We hold social events on a very modest budget and we're always trying to make our musicians feel as if they're a part of something special.”

Clarke continues, “Our musicians are very respectful of each other and it's a singular pleasure to work with such fine young people. I feel our role as music educators - in addition to providing a great musical experience - is to help mold our musicians into good people, people who are respectful of others, who are tolerant and open minded, who give willingly. Whether our musicians go on to study music or not, we want our students to go into the world and be positive contributors to their communities. This is a big responsibility, which is why we hold strong to the ideals of a family. It seems silly, but that's how I felt about my high school music program.”

The last word comes from Beryl Macleod who is neither a parent nor a musician, but joined the organization after hearing TYWO in concert, and is now chair of the board: “Superb community youth wind ensembles don't just ‘happen’. TYWO has been a long time in the making and it is still a work in progress. It always will be. It's an evolving process, with every season bringing new musicians, new performance opportunities, the opportunity to expand on what works well and learn from what doesn't, to surmount the financial and administrative

challenges, and to constantly strive for musical excellence. It's an amazing organization in that it goes so far beyond musicians arriving weekly for rehearsal. We have an outstanding group of players who care for their music and for each other.

The Toronto Youth Wind Orchestra has grown beyond Colin Clarke's wildest dreams, but he continues to dream, and with the support of a vibrant organization behind him, those dreams will likely become reality. Stay tuned!”

## Appendix A – Selected Repertoire Performed

ADAMS	<i>Short Ride in a Fast Machine</i>
CHANCE	<i>Variations on a Korean Folk Song</i>
DEBUSSY	<i>La Cathédrale engloutie</i>
DELLO JOIO	<i>Scenes from the Louvre</i>
DE MEIJ	<i>Symphonies No. 1 &amp; 2 for Wind Orchestra</i>
DOWNING	<i>Symphony for Winds and Percussion</i>
GORB	<i>Awayday</i>
GRAINGER	<i>Lincolnshire Posy</i>
GRANTHAM	<i>Baron Cimetière's Mambo</i>
HINDEMITH	<i>Symphony for Band</i>
	<i>Symphonic Metamorphoses</i>
HOLST	<i>The Planets</i>
	<i>Suites for Military Band</i>
HUMPERDINCK	<i>Prayer &amp; Dream Pantomime (Hansel &amp; Gretel)</i>
IVES	<i>Country Band March</i>
KURKA	<i>The Good Soldier Schweik</i>
LISZT	<i>Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2</i>
+MATEY	<i>*Deconstruction</i>
+MERCURE	<i>Pantomime</i>
MUSSORGSKY	<i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i>
PERSICHETTI	<i>Divertimento for Band</i>
REED, A.	<i>Armenian Dances, Part I</i>
	<i>Russian Christmas Music</i>
REED, H. O.	<i>La Fiesta Mexicana</i>
RESPIGHI	<i>The Pines of Rome</i>
+RIDOUT	<i>Fall Fair</i>
+ROYER,	<i>*Un Rêve Fantastique</i>
SCHWANTNER	<i>...and the mountains rising nowhere</i>
SHOSTAKOVICH	<i>Festive Overture</i>
	<i>Symphony No. 5 (Finale)</i>
STRAVINSKY	<i>The Firebird (1919)</i>
TSCHESNOKOFF	<i>Salvation is Created</i>
TORKE	<i>Grand Central Station</i>
WHITACRE	<i>Ghost Train Triptych</i>
WILSON	<i>Dance of the New World</i>
VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS	<i>English Folk Song Suite</i>
ZDECHLIK	<i>Chorale and Shaker Dance</i>

## Appendix B: Selected Guest Artists

Soloists	Conductors
Bramwell Smith III, cornet	Andrew Cheung
Alistair Kay, trombone	James Curnow
Phil Nimmons, clarinet	Wayne Jeffrey
David Robilliard, marimba	Donald Hunsberger
Ernesto Cervini, piano	Jack Stamp
Joseph Alessi, trombone	David Lum
Peter Appleyard, vibraphone	Jessica Kun
Allen Vizzutti, trumpet	Eric Whitacre

## Appendix C: Selected Collaborating Ensembles

Ballet Jörgen
Bell'Arte Singers
Cadence (a cappella vocal ensemble)
George Brown College Department of Dance
Hannaford Youth Band
Hart House Chorus
Humber College Department of Performing Arts
True North Brass
Toronto Wind Orchestra
United States Air Force Band of Liberty (Boston MA)
University of Toronto Wind Symphony
York University Chorus
York University Dance Department