



Bond of Friendship Tour 2024 *Eynsford Concert Band Tour Malta*

Sandra Lane & Vivienne Astall

Eynsford Concert Band, a symphonic wind ensemble based in the small Kentish village of Eynsford embarked on a week-long tour of Malta in April 2024. The tour was arranged with support from both Għaqda Mużikali Imperial from Mellieħa and the Malta Tourism Authority. We have built up a warm and strong relationship with Għaqda Mużikali Imperial over almost four decades and this was our sixth tour to Malta. They were incredibly hospitable giving us a friendly welcome and we came to appreciate how important the contribution that these band clubs are to Maltese society. In almost every Maltese town and village you will find one or two and sometimes three band clubs, each having their own amazing premises, all have paying members and a band affiliated to them making this somewhat unique to Malta.

The band arrived in Malta with an extended party of 70 people (50 players) all staying in the Luna Holiday Complex in Mellieħa.

We were delighted to be invited to play at local events and the band immediately got to work with a joint rehearsal with the Imperial Band in preparation for a combined concert in the Mellieħa square.

The following day Michael Smith, Lt Colonel (retd) BA (Mus) LRSM held a conducting masterclass for several of the musical directors from the local music societies. During this masterclass Mike covered various topics of conducting from rehearsal preparation, leadership/management, rehearsal techniques and how to communicate ways to improve the music/playing to the musicians in the band. The musical directors who attended the masterclass found this to be a very positive experience.

Day three of the tour saw us perform a

concert in Annunciation Square in Sliema by kind invitation of Soċjetà Filarmonika Stella Maris where we performed many favourites such as William Tell, Game of Thrones (which was partly filmed in Malta), Mr Blue Sky amongst others and an arrangement of a Eurovision entry called Little Child as sung by Mary Spiteri in the 1992 Eurovision Song Contest which went down very well with the local Maltese audience. Meeting for a drink at the local band club, where we could meet other members of the



band community was a pleasure. It was evident that Malta has a long-standing band tradition.

Day five was the joint concert in Mellieħa where both bands performed a short programme of varying styles of music under the leadership of both musical directors, Anthony Borg for the Imperial Band and Michael Smith for Eynsford Concert Band. Both bands came together with a massed bands finale

(over 100 players) including a new composition by Carl Borg a musician with the Imperial Band and who is currently studying music composition in Belgium, both bands benefiting from experiencing the two different styles of conducting. The concert was well attended and we had the honour of the Minister of Tourism Hon. Clayton Bartolo joining us in the audience. We are grateful for the support of

the Malta Tourism Authority for their assistance in making this tour happen.

On the penultimate day of the tour, we performed a concert in Pjazza Jean De Valette in the capital Valletta. Beforehand, we met with representatives of the two band clubs, Kings Own and La Valette. Here, we learnt about their history and about the social and musical elements provided by the clubs. We exchanged gifts to honour our partnership. Later, we had a large and enthusiastic audience followed by a generous reception at the Mayor's residence hosted by the Deputy Mayor.

During the bands free time everyone had the opportunity to visit the many cultural places of interest on the Island including Mosta, Mdina, Valletta, Blue Lagoon and Malta's sister island of Gozo. We were enchanted by the rich history and vibrant culture. The people of Malta are friendly, hospitable, and charming.

This has been a truly memorable trip and we look forward to continuing our friendship with Għaqda Mużikali



Imperial in the coming years and look forward to the next invitation to visit Malta.

If other musical groups are interested in visiting

Malta then please contact the Malta Tourism Authority for more information, or visit the website visitmalta.com.

Mike Smith BA (Mus) LRSM

Mike took up the appointment of Music Director, Eynsford Concert Band in 2012 bringing with him a wealth of musical knowledge garnered from an extensive career in Army Music as a Director of Music.

Under his baton he has led the band on concert tours to Antwerp, Malta, Utrecht, Norway and Austria; helped raise considerable funds for a number of charitable organisations including The Soldiers' Charity, Motor Neurone Disease Association and in 2023, Barnardo's. In 2014 he led the band to be crowned National Concert Band Champions and, in 2016, ECB was the first band to represent the UK at the European Championships for Wind Orchestras.

Keen to expand the musical opportunities for the band, Mike has helped build close, long-term affiliations with other musical ensembles including the Band of the Grenadier Guards the Imperial Band Mellieħa, Malta and the Kent Youth Wind Orchestra.

Away from the band Mike recently retired from the Army after 39 years of service in Army Music. During that time, he led a number of high-profile Army bands as Director of Music including the Band of the Grenadier Guards and The Band of The Royal Corps of Engineers and held the position of Chief Instructor at The Royal Military School of Music. He attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in April 2020 when appointed Commanding Officer, Regional Bands of the British Army. His last engagement in uniform was the Coronation Parade for King Charles III in May 2023.



Anthony Borg

Following in the footsteps of his late father and grandfather who were both members of the Imperial Band Club (playing trombone and euphonium respectively), Anthony started his musical career with the Imperial Band as a trumpet player in 1979. The Imperial Band Club is very much a part of Anthony's family history - his brother is the Club's President, his sister is an active member of the choir and Anthony's son, Samuel, plays the trombone in the band. Anthony was appointed Assistant Musical Director and Brass Music Teacher in 1988 and he has held the position of Musical Director of the Imperial Band Club since his appointment in 1997.

In 1980, Anthony joined the Għaqda Korali u Orkestrali Maria Bambina of Mellieħa as a trumpet player, and from 1989 to 1994, he was also the orchestra's Musical Director. In addition, Anthony was for many years the Musical Director of the Soċjeta Filarmonika Prekursur of Xewkija in Gozo.

BOND OF FRIENDSHIP MALTA TOUR 2024

'Bond of Friendship' Joint Concert

Imperial Band, Mellieħa, Malta
and
Eynsford Concert Band, Eynsford, United Kingdom

Friday 12th April 2024
Mellieħa Parish Square

Eynsford Concert Band



Eynsford Concert Band is a symphonic wind ensemble that has been based in the small UK village of Eynsford since 1972. The band has 50 playing members from all over the Southeast of England that aspire to attain the highest standards of musicianship within a social and friendly environment. It enjoys performing a wide range of concert band repertoire from popular music arrangements and orchestral transcriptions to classic and modern wind band works.



The band tours regularly and, over the years, has grown in both size and reputation and prides itself on its eclectic, challenging and rewarding repertoire. We are firmly rooted in our community and every year raise substantial amounts for local charities.

In 2016, we were proud to have been the first band to represent the UK at the European Championship for Wind Orchestras and in 2022 we celebrated our 50th Anniversary.

We first visited Malta in 1986 and this will be our 6th tour to the island, returning in 1987, 2002, 2003 and 2014. Through these visits we have formed a close relationship with the Imperial Band Mellieħa and, in 2003, helped with organising the inaugural Mellieħa International Music Festival. We are thrilled to be invited back to Mellieħa to further strengthen the bond of friendship that has developed between us over the years.



Imperial Band



The origins of the Imperial Band Club can be found in the 'Constitutional Club' which was established in 1924. In 1928, a band club was formed under the name of the Imperial Band Club and in 1929, the club acquired its first instruments, 45 pieces in total plus percussion instruments. Since the very first musical programme which took place in the Mellieħa Village Square in September 1930, the Imperial Band Club has gone from strength to strength.

With 50 active musicians, the Band has enjoyed a number of successful overseas visits including playing concerts in Sicily (1948), Tunisia (1995), Germany (1999) and Italy (2007 and 2017). A new and positive development in 1998, saw the development of the Imperial Choir which was formed with the aim being to perform during activities organised by the Imperial Band.



In addition to its regular commitments in Mellieħa, the Band also involves itself in activities outside the village including taking part in official national celebrations.

Over the years, the Imperial Band Club has developed and made connections with a number of non-Maltese bands and these relationships have resulted in a range of joint concerts and initiatives. As the Imperial Band approaches its centenary year, we are delighted to take part in the 'Bond of Friendship' joint concert with Eynsford Concert Band, a concert celebrating over 20 years of friendship.