**Several special moments: By Brett Baker**

When I look back on what is now quite a long career in brass banding (20 years since I joined Faireys in 1992) there are several special moments that I can remember vividly and that I will never forget.

The first was joining the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain in 1989. I come from an isolated area of the UK, known as ‘The Forest of Dean’. This is a district in between two rivers and therefore sandwiched between Wales on the left and England on the right. In this area we have many brass bands but not many famous brass band players visiting the area. The excitement of joining the National Youth Brass band and meeting and interacting with, Roy Newsome, Frank Renton, Bramwell  Tovey, John Maines, Bob Childs, Howard Snell, James Watson to name but a few was a very exciting and I felt very privileged. Without doubt the most special occasion for me was recording the 40 years young CD with Harry Mortimer conducting Life Divine, I cannot begin to explain how thrilling this was, and also to have the opportunity to play the beautiful trombone solo Elaine in the composition Tintagel written by Denis Wright. Roy Newsome particularly asked me to play the solo and it was a great honour for me to be featured on the disk with the great Roy Newsome conducting.

The second special moment in brass banding that sticks in my mind was playing with Williams Fairey band in 1995. During this year Phil Wilbys test piece Revelation was the British Open test piece. The band was conducted for the first time by James Gourlay who had just been appointed and was taking the band to his first contest, and this was to be a contest that saw the departure of several players in the band due to Major Parkes being asked to step down and some players not agreeing with that decision. As a result the atmosphere on stage was electric. Faireys at the time was a very fine band having won the Open National and Europeans in 1993 and 1994 but had has some misfortune since winning the Europeans in 1994. The performance was so intense and so emotional that I came off stage crying and noticed that many of the other players were also crying (something you do not do when it’s an all male band). I remember wiping the tears from my face as I went back down to the changing room and my old teacher Steven Walkley coming up the stars as he was playing with Sunlife and he said “My goodness was it really that bad???”

The band actually came second to Black Dyke that day it’s not always the winning performances that stick in your mind just the special ones. This band had several months previous to the British Open accompanied me on a solo CD and the accompanying on that CD still today is some of the best I have ever experienced. It is funny that the first times in life of anything seem to stick in your mind as special.

The third special moment in brass banding that stands out for me was being a tutor of the National Children’s band of Great Britain which is a group of the finest 8-14 year olds in the country. I have always been passionate and proud about encouraging the next generation of players and these young people are a pleasure to work with, polite committed and inspiring. The first ever concert that the band did was back in 2004 in the residential courses main hall. I was so proud of the players as they worked really really hard and found myself crying with pride next to Michelle Ibbotson the cornet tutor. Embarrassing… but true!

I have had many fantastic performances with bands over the years and normally I am a very calm and unemotional character on stage so if the tears start to flow then it really has been something special.

I have been very fortunate to get many amazing experiences from playing in brass bands such as Faireys and Black Dyke and Flowers. However most often now it is encouraging others to play to the best of their abilities that gets me the biggest thrill today. Inspiring others is a great feeling.

So in summary  I also remember the feeling of excitement when winning a contest for the first time like the British Open in 1993 and also the Nationals in 1993. However I was even more excited when I played at the Australian Nationals for the first time in Adelaide with Brisbane Excelsior Band, banding in the Antipodes is very different in terms of how supportive bands are towards each other. I remember a total stranger from a rival band coming up to me and saying “Thank you for playing in our contest and making it something special” I was flattered. The band I played in won all five sections of the contest with the irrepressible Howard Taylor at the helm. That was such an amazing feeling and I am proud that the band continued to win a whole string of contests then year after year, at the Australian and New Zealand National Finals, with Kew Band Melbourne achieving a similar feat in 2011 at a contest hosted in Adelaide, once again I was very proud of the bands hard work and achievement.

Of course Black Dyke Band has an amazing contest record and has recently seen changes in 14 of its personal so it feels like playing with a new band. I look forward to this fine band having a great year of contesting and proving even more special moments for me to reflect on in years to come. I have been fortunate and honoured to have been part of some very special moments with some fantastic bands and hope to do so for some time yet.