

## Blow for Albania

By June Emerson  
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*St. Michael-le-Belfrey in York is well known for unusual activities, but on 9th September, for the first time ever, it rang to the sound of about twenty bassoons. As June Emerson reports, players from as far away as Newcastle and Kent had made the effort to come and do their bit to raise funds for the embattled musicians of Albania.*

The day's music was organised by Ian Charters into a sequence which started with Bach and Handel and explored every possible colour in the musical spectrum.

Quite a few works had been arranged especially for the occasion including several by Geoffrey Emerson: Mozart Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*, Wagner *Die Meistersinger von Nurnhallerton* and Sousa *Liberty Balls-Up*. Graham Lyons composed an intriguing *Breton Hills Boogie* which involved some effective clapping and stomping.

To give the players a break every now and then there were Guest Spots. The first was given by 'Funf Fagotti' a group from Harrogate. Their performance included a tender rendering of *The Bassoon Song* by Quentin Ashlyn, arranged for voice and bassoon quartet by Ian Charters, who sang all the verses (which is not often heard).

The CSQ quartet from Opera North gave the next spot with music very effectively arranged for bassoon, violin, clarinet and double bass. Most memorable was their new arrangement of Elgar's *Nimrod* with David Baker playing unbelievably softly.

William Ring from T.W. Howarth then explained the development and potential of Howarth's mini-bassoons. He and his colleague were on their demonstration stand all day, giving advice, doing small repairs and selling some useful bits and pieces.

The final Guest Spot was the local Hill Top Bassoon Ensemble, which gave a performance of Alan Ridout's *The Shepherd's Calendar*. This work, for four bassoons and narrator, is made up of a theme and twelve variations based on extracts from the poem by John Clare. It is one of Alan Ridout's most attractive and moving works.

Between these welcome breaks the players battled manfully on and although there were moments when we thought we could not possibly play another note, somehow we kept going for the full eight hours as planned. The final item, Widor's *Toccata*, for all bassoons present plus three contras, was a truly grand finale.

Throughout the day baffled members of the public came and went, some staying long enough to have some refreshments and drop coins in the collecting tins. The funds are not quite all in yet but the total looks like being very comfortably over the £1,000 mark. We very much hope to beat the horn group who held a similar day earlier in the year and totalled £1,148 with only seven players.

Thanks to all who came, to our dear local friends Jeremy and Pauline who kept us supplied with tea, coffee and biscuits, to John Myatt who paid for the hire of the church and to T.W. Howarth who contributed towards the expenses of publicity and administration.

Will we do it again next year? Well, watch this space.

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