

Training Workshop

“Developing ensemble skills and techniques in young musicians”

There is plenty of controversy revolving around the different ensemble skills and techniques, and discussions about which ones work best are rife. However, there is a general agreement that the best way to improve these skills and techniques is for the members of the group to develop a rapport with each other as they practise and play together. Through the development of better ensemble skills and techniques, especially with the younger generation but also with the more seasoned members, the band will be able to prepare for concerts in a more efficient and effective way. With this in mind, the Imperial Band Club embarked onto the project “Developing ensemble skills and techniques in young musicians” under the scheme “Creative Communities” managed by Arts Council Malta.

The programme of the three-day workshop was prepared and led by Mro Helge Haukås, in collaboration with the Club’s musical director Mro

Anthony Borg, and was tailor-made for the Imperial Band. This workshop was specifically designed to develop and enhance musical skills and techniques of participants collectively, thus enhancing team work and team building within the Band. Helge Haukås is an established musician and a renowned conductor having a long professional and successful career in music. He has been visiting Malta regularly for the last seventeen years, making him well versed with the local wind band tradition. During his visits, he participated regularly in both rehearsals and concerts with the Imperial Band; the last time was in September 2018 when he played as a soloist with the Imperial Band during the annual feast concert.

The first day of the workshop took off with an introduction by Mro Haukås giving a brief explanation about the workshop, including an outline of the goals expected to be attained by the end of the three days. The first item on the agenda



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was focusing on instrumental skills. In order to enhance these skills, the Band played 'Ensemble Etudes' mainly made up of chords, scales and hymn tunes. The 'Ensemble Etudes' were also used as warm ups for the Band at the beginning of each day of the workshop. Since then this practice has been adopted by the Imperial Band as part of the Band's rehearsal routine. The second item on the agenda was tone production and breathing. In order to enhance these two different techniques the Band performed 'The Medallion Calls' from "Pirates of the Caribbean". Besides this, during the performance Mro Haukàs included also skills enhancing team playing, focusing mainly on making each section of the Band aware of what its role is within the piece (for example, which section has the principal tune, or which section has the accompaniment). The last item on the agenda focused on the control of sound in rhythmic music. For this item the Band performed '5E Funk'. This is an ideal piece to help the Band control sound in rhythmic music, but one has to keep in mind that this style is non-existent in our repertoire. So this was an added benefit as the Band was introduced to a new style of music.

Day two started off with warm ups using both 'Ensemble Etudes' and 'Group Scale Etudes'. The first item of the agenda was to focus on articulation.

In order to enhance these skills the Band performed 'Parade of the Wooden Soldier' again a new piece for our Band. This was followed by '5E Funk', a continuation of the last item of the agenda for day one. The idea was to make the Band more familiar with the new style of music. The next item on the agenda was a solo with a Band accompaniment. The idea here was to develop cantabile qualities within our musicians, and also to make the Band understand its new role, that is, how to back or accompany a soloist. 'Fix You' is piece for solo trumpet and Band. In this piece Mro Haukàs was the soloist whilst conducting and the band accompanied him. This helped the Band to easier adapt to different roles in a few minutes. The last item on the agenda was training rhythm without instruments. 'Rock Trap Hand Percussion' is a four part rhythmic piece, each part having different rhythmic patterns. The aim of this exercise was to make the band more aware of the importance of rhythm in music.

The last day of the workshop started as that of the day before with warm ups. Then, Mro Haukàs went through what was done during the days before, explaining again the goals after each item. After this, the Band went through all the different pieces. At the end of the workshop an informal concert for parents and guests took place, showing what was

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achieved during the three day work shop.

Through this educational experience, our musicians continued to develop a number of skills which are fundamental to any musician. It was a very positive experience for all the participants, one which continued to enhance the ability of playing together in an ensemble, while simultaneously improving upon each individual's playing skills. Other skills which were developed through this

workshop, such as team-working, are valid not only for musicians but also for society at large.

This project continues to demonstrate that, although the great majority of the musicians of the band clubs in our towns and villages are not professional musicians, they take the art of music seriously. They go through great pains to further their musical abilities in order to offer free concerts of a high quality which are open to all.

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