

The Aberdeenshire Saxophone Orchestra



SUNDAY MORNING 10AM. EVERYONE'S BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS DURING THE MONTH SINCE THE LAST REHEARSAL. CATCHING UP ON NEWS... THE JOKES ARE FLYING AND THE LAUGHTER HAS STARTED ALREADY. NO POINT TUNING UP YET, THE INSTRUMENTS ARE STILL PLAYING FLAT BECAUSE OF THE COLD. A REMINDER FROM RICHARD TO FINGER OUR LOWEST NOTES – AND BLOW WARM AIR THROUGH THE WHOLE INSTRUMENT TO WARM IT UP. THEN WE ALL PLAY ANYTHING WE FEEL LIKE.

NEWCOMERS ARE HESITANTLY peering round the door. There's no doubt they've found the right room and haven't accidentally got caught up in the church service in the main hall but is this awful racket what's meant to happen? A small miracle of memory and Richard manages to put names to the faces of the newcomers and hands out music of appropriate levels of difficulty.

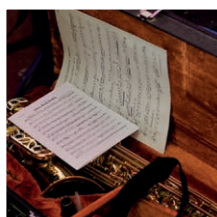
Warming up with one of Richard's own compositions, it is a bit jazzy so involves some improvisation. Vast relief to the shaky sight-readers – and a cause of deep anxiety to those who need

the security of written music. Tuning up and then getting stuck into a mixture of old and new music that Richard has brought with him. It's a massively varied selection, classical, jazz, blues, pop, rock and modern, Scottish...Just about anything really.

Somehow Richard knows when to work hard on a section or save it for another session when there's been time to practice fingering.

Stress levels rise and fall as challenging pieces mix with easy and relaxing ones.

Such a range of sounds from the six different sections. Soprano at the high end to the big bass beast at the other. >







THE AGE RANGE IN THE ALTOS A LIFE-ENHANCING ACTIVITY, YOUNG OR OLD

In each section there are usually two or three parts and often more, so that the really good players don't get bored and the relative beginners can cope. Seems to work...

12:30 already but the break is very welcome. An hour for chats and packed lunches or out for chips. Full up with lunch and a bit snoozy, time to listen while Richard starts the afternoon with some saxophone history, styles of famous players illustrated by him or saxophone playing hints.

It's someone's birthday so, picking a key apparently at random, Richard requests the playing of *Happy Birthday* with rather mixed results but a lot of laughter.

Then back into the hands-on stuff with some sight reading. Most of the pieces will be played at whatever concerts have been arranged for this summer so there's a lot to get through. By the time 4:30 comes round everyone is worn out but happy.

Roll on next month.

Foss Foster

ELEVEN YEARS AGO Aberdeenshire Saxophone Orchestra was formed with help from The Scottish Government's Youth Music Initiative fund and Justin Brook of the Aberdeenshire Council Instrumental Music Service. The remit was to provide young people, from all over Aberdeenshire, with the opportunity of playing in a performing orchestra under the expert musical direction of Richard Ingham:

Richard Ingham (middle left, standing), is the music director of Aberdeenshire Saxophone Orchestra. He has had an extensive career as a performer, composer and educator; has given solo saxophone recitals and chamber concerts throughout the UK and many other parts of the world. Numerous works have been written for him and performances have included UK premieres of many of these works.

He has played by invitation at every World Saxophone Congress since 1985; has worked with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, Opera North

and at the Royal National Theatre; has many compositions to his name including *Music for the Book of Deer*, a twelve movement suite celebrating the astonishing 10th century portable gospel book from Aberdeenshire.

Richard teaches saxophone (classical and jazz), chamber music performance, jazz performance and history of 20th century music at the universities of St Andrews and Aberdeen.

He has been teaching for forty years, always alongside his performing and composing career. Many of his students are now professionals themselves. As a jazz educator he has coached many instrumentalists, including three recent winners of the Young Scottish Jazz Musician of the Year.

THE ORCHESTRA IS JUSTLY PROUD of being unique in Scotland, playing the full range of saxophones from bass to soprano. The more unusual instruments were provided by funding from Creative Scotland and loaned to the players. The orchestra grew in popularity and gained new young players, including a few adults who were brought in to help.

It began life as a Youth Music Initiative funded project based in Inverurie. This has been a very successful undertaking and the orchestra members feel that they have been privileged to participate in this YMI initiative.

The players became very proficient with age and in one case, moved on to conducting and arranging pieces for the orchestra. Another aspect of the orchestra has been commissioning and performing pieces that were especially written for the orchestra. In June, they performed a piece called *Stramash* which was composed by composer Joe Stollery from Monymusk.

Several of the players went on to study music at Aberdeen University but still came back to play in the orchestra, as rehearsals are held all day, once a month, on a Sunday. Even two of the students, who were away on teaching practice in Fife and Dumfries respectively, continued to help Richard Ingham with music projects in those areas and they both come back as visiting players when they can.

When the funding came to an end, everyone in the orchestra came together and formed a new, independent organisation, gained Scottish charity status and are determined to continue and grow as an orchestra.

Creative Scotland were very helpful as they continued to support it during the transition period with the rehearsal premises. The Garioch Partnership in Inverurie also helped with a start-up grant.

The mission is still to offer this wonderful opportunity to as many youngsters as possible but also to players of any age. Membership will still be provided free to all those of sixteen and under or who are in full-time education. Richard Ingham is a great draw and the orchestra is a life-enhancing activity and a unique opportunity for saxophone players of any age.

This multi-generational orchestra performs: classical, jazz, pop, rock and trad. Scottish – some of which are a bit unusual on the saxophone.

A FEW PLAYERS... IN THEIR OWN WORDS

ASO is special as it is a unique experience of playing in a massed saxophone ensemble, which sounds way better than you might expect!

Zoë

My first impressions were simply "wow".

I loved that there were some pieces we played as a warm up, some for improvisation, others that were fairly easy and others that were really challenging and a long term project.

Karol



RICHARD INGHAM





As an adult, it can sometimes be difficult to find groups to play with unless you are a professional musician, so this has been such a great opportunity to do one of my very favourite things: playing with other people.

Sonia

Richard makes us all feel that we can contribute something worthwhile whilst at the same time he makes sure that our musical quality stays high – an astonishing feat.

Foss

I have already learnt so much from Richard, such as different fingerings for notes, top tips on mouth-pieces and reeds, and also not to be scared of trying to do a bit of jazzy improvisation.

Cathy

I have always seen the orchestra as a safe place to demonstrate my arrangements and improve my conducting and directing skills. If it wasn't for joining the orchestra six years ago I do not think I would be considering a Masters' Degree in conducting just now!

Bebhionn

I am now in my final year as a student music teacher and would not be nearly as confident in my ability to teach if it had not been for the opportunities the orchestra has given me to conduct, lead sectional rehearsals and witness different rehearsal techniques used by Richard to get the most out of each player.

Maggie

My son presented me with an alto saxophone on my 65th birthday, neither of us knowing whether I would be capable of producing a note from it! There is a diverse range of skills, experience and age groups in ASO, I am self-taught but the person next to me is a brilliant saxophonist.

Lexie

Within a couple of hours, I was playing the sopranino saxophone, which I didn't know existed until joining the orchestra!

Emily

My first impression was, what an unusual group of funny people – and to be honest this opinion still has not changed!

Scarlet

I was a little daunted when I first joined as I was only thirteen years old and the youngest in the group, but everyone made me feel at ease very quickly.

Glen

ASO is the only saxophone-only band that I have ever been in. It's a great opportunity for me as I get the chance to play the bass saxophone as well as other types of saxophones that I have not seen before.

Emma

My son Benjamin was the one who wanted to learn to play saxophone so we started taking lessons together and supporting each other.

Richard makes sure that we are pushed to the edge of our abilities, but never overwhelmed. Playing in other bands is just 'playing', being in ASO is about developing you as a musician.

Bruce





ABOVE:

ALL THE SIZES OF SAXOPHONE

BACK ROW L-R: Zoë Sayer from Oldmeldrum
on alto, Derek Jennings from Longside on
tenor,

Ben Arm-strong from Blackburn
on baritone.

FRONT ROW:

Emily Manson from Bucksburn on soprano,
Abigail Chambers from Portlethen on
soprano, Emma Swanson from Stonehaven
on bass

PREVIOUS PAGE 'A'

THE SIZE RANGE OF INSTRUMENTS AND PLAYERS

Foss Foster from King Edward with the
soprano and Daisy McIntosh from
Rosehearty with the bass

ALL PHOTOS: KN MAGAZINE

I would say that being in a band is one of the best ways to learn, I have learnt so much in ASO and it's loads of fun and a great laugh.

Abigail

About a year into my attendance Richard decided to put me on soprano sax, something I had never played or even held before. He just handed me the instrument and said something to the effect of "There you go, you're on soprano now." It was pretty alarming at the time, but after trying it out I found I really enjoyed it.

Sam

Youth Music Initiative offered my busy wee school a visit from a saxophone group comprising Richard Ingham and four university music students.

That day excited me so much that I decided I would mark my upcoming 50th birthday by learning to play the saxophone.

Jump forward 18 months and lots of lessons and I was playing in the orchestra directed by the same Richard Ingham and alongside the same students.

I was playing at an entirely different level of course but it gave me a real sense of achievement.

Briony

Bring your sax and come and join in (minimum grade 2 standard required generally; but special junior programme available).

A warm welcome guaranteed. Membership fees for adults only (with concessions).

Summer concert: June 20th. Look for details and contacts on the website or Facebook page

www.aberdeenshiresaxorchestra.co.uk