

Joseph Curran – Orchestra Tour to Belgium, Summer 2016

I spent a week in late June 2016 on tour in Belgium with the Cambridge University Wind Orchestra (CUWO). This was CUWO's inaugural tour and so represented a significant opportunity for both the orchestra and its players. Even more so for me; I had been involved with planning, organising and running the tour, from its conception through to disembarking the coach at the end of the week in London. As such I had the opportunity to develop not just musically, but also in my organisational and leadership skills too.

Although based in Ghent, we travelled to perform in four venues across Belgium. The tour repertoire consisted of selected highlights from the past year's concerts and included Nigel Hess' evocative *East Coast Pictures*, Ticheli's explosive *Vesuvius* and a band arrangement of the well-known Shostakovich *Jazz Suite No. 2*. We were received well by large audiences in both the informal performances in a Bruges town square and a bandstand in Ostend, and also in church concerts in Ghent and De Panne. Performing for the incredibly hospitable people of De Panne on the last night was one of the highlights; we received a standing ovation for what was undoubtedly the best concert on tour.

One of the surprises of the tour came in Bruges, where we were scheduled to perform a concert in a town square opposite the iconic Concertgebouw (concert hall). Upon arrival we discovered the 'town square' was more of an empty space surrounded by major roads on all sides, and the chairs we had arranged were nowhere to be seen. With the wind picking up we were sceptical of whether it was even worth unpacking and performing – we felt sure that nobody would be able to hear us over the road, leave alone be willing to stop and listen. We came close to abandoning the concert all together. However, after some discussion we decided to give it a go and to our surprise and delight not only did the sun come out, but people congregated from all sides of the square and stayed to listen to our concert. A party of school children even sat down on the ground and joined in, drumming on their legs! We were amazed by the warmth and enthusiasm of the people, many of whom stayed for more than an hour to listen.

In addition to the music, we also had a chance to explore Ghent around the hostel and also a day off on which we returned to Bruges to spend the day exploring. Both towns are unique and beautiful in their own ways, I loved Bruges in particular – there is a calm and peaceful attitude to life, and this is echoed by the picturesque winding streets and canals. I hope to return to explore it further one day.

On the coach home I was reflecting on the experience of running a tour; I found it hugely rewarding but most definitely challenging too. In particular, I found it a challenge to think as a mass of 49 people continuously. I rapidly got used to the mind set where meet times are 15 minutes early and the time to walk anywhere en masse is doubled! Thanks to good prior organisation and team work the tour ran very smoothly, which I am extremely proud of. I would like to thank Pembroke College for their support in helping me fund my place on the trip. I have learnt so much from the process and am excited to try and do it all again next year.