

# IN PROFILE / EN PERSPECTIVE

## Northdale Concert Band

Stephen Chenette

The Northdale Concert Band is a “road band.” With no regular home concert series, they play engagements (“gigs,” if you will) in and around the Greater Toronto Area and Southern Ontario. A list of their concert sites, compiled in the early 1990s, has over fifty entries, and would be considerably longer today. In the summers, they are regulars at the Stratford Band Shell, the Aqua Theatre in Orillia, and Black Creek Pioneer Village. In the winters, they may be heard at the Scarborough Civic Centre, seniors’ residences, fund-raising concerts for churches, a Masonic Temple, a children’s hospital, or a banquet for the Chinese Community. They have played on CBC Radio and CITY-TV. The Northdale Band is the first, and only, concert band to have performed at El Mocambo, the venerable Toronto rock and jazz club which has hosted performances and recordings by U2, The Police, Elvis Costello, Charles Mingus, the Downchild Blues Band, and The Rolling Stones. Northdale’s first concert at El Mocambo was titled “From the Blue Danube to the Rolling Stones.”

### The Canada Band Project

The Northdale Concert Band’s longest road trip – and the event which established them in the forefront of those promoting Canadian wind music – was their journey to Vancouver to play at Expo 86. In the early 1980s, the Northdale Band was seeking a higher profile as a concert ensemble, and trying to raise the profile of concert bands in general. They also would have liked to include more Canadian music on their programs, but good concert-band music by Canadians was in short supply. Most bands tended not to play the music that was available: on Canada Day, 1985, seventeen bands marched past the reviewing stand during the celebrations at Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto, and not one of them played a Canadian march. 1986 was officially designated “The International Year of Canadian Music,” and the Northdale Band decided that they would make a statement by playing Canadian music on Canada Day at Expo 86 in Vancouver. They established the Canada Band Project, headed by the clarinetist Brian Dench and the flutist (and band president) Bette Eubank, and got to work.

First, they needed pieces to play. They lobbied the Ontario Arts Council and received a grant that paid the fees for commissioning six composers and the cost of copying parts. The six pieces were *High Spirits* by Louis Applebaum, *Ontario Pictures* by Howard Cable, *Vive la Canadienne* by Donald Coakley, *Processional* by Elma Miller, *Fanfare for the Uncommon Man* by Glenn Morley, and *Skyscape: Sleeping Beauty & the Lions* by Phil Nimmons. Another composer, Gary Kulesha, had already received the maximum allowable OAC grant for that year, but he contributed *Christening and Finale* to



**Figure 1. Northdale Concert Band at the Scarborough Civic Centre, 22 May 2007.**

the Canada Band Project.

It took two years of serious effort to deal with the logistics and finances of getting a community band to Vancouver and back. They secured additional grants from the McLean Foundation and the City of North York, conductor James McKay contributed his services, and the musicians stayed in student housing at the University of British Columbia. Even so, the band members had to pay a substantial part of their own expenses. The trip was all that had hoped for, and marked the beginning of a new era for Canadian band music.

At 1:00 p.m. on Canada Day, in front of the Canadian Pavilion at Expo 86, James McKay conducted the Northdale Concert Band in world premieres of the six commissioned compositions and the donated piece by Gary Kulesha. They also played compositions and arrangements by Canadians Howard Cable, Bobby Gimby, Arnold MacLaughlan, Gary Pattison, and Oscar Peterson. The band played the program a total of twenty-one times in the space of one week, at the Canadian Pavilion, the Ontario Pavilion, and the Expo 86 Bandstand.

The Ontario premieres of those works were presented on 19 October 1986, when the Northdale Band, with James McKay conducting, repeated their Expo 86 program at the Fairview Library Theatre in Toronto. In a review of this concert for *The Toronto Star*, William Littler wrote, “While the title [“Made in Canada”] recognized the fact that 1986 happens to be the International Year Of Canadian Music, it also turned out to be an appropriate acknowledgment of the Northdale Concert Band’s own praiseworthy role in invigorating the comparatively neglected tradition of sit-down Canadian band music.”

### Northdale Music Press Ltd.

The band members had expected that the commissioned pieces would be made available by an established Canadian publisher, but none proved willing, no doubt fearing insufficient demand for Canadian concert band music. So, the Northdale Band started its own publishing company. In 1992, with a Board of Directors

composed entirely of band members, Northdale Music Press Ltd. was founded, with the goal of publishing the best in compositions and arrangements by Canadian composers. Northdale Music Press is an all-volunteer organization, wholly owned by the Northdale Concert Band, and all profits are returned to the band. NMPL's president, trombonist Robert Ketchen, has spent countless hours entering compositions into his computer in order to produce the clearly printed scores and parts which characterize NMPL publications.

Northdale Music Press now has twenty-two works in its catalogue, *Music for Concert Band, Brass Band, and Small Ensembles*. With the success of the Canadian band division, NMPL has expanded to include compositions for other ensembles, and has also established the Northdale International Division. The International Division has issued the first modern publications of four works for *harmonie* ensembles (of eight to thirteen winds) attributed to Mozart, in editions by Toronto Symphony bass clarinetist, David Bourque. The success of Northdale Music Press has encouraged other publishers to issue Canadian music for concert band.

A number of the NMPL publications have become standard repertoire for Canadian bands. These include *Ontario Pictures* and *Scottish Rhapsody* by Howard Cable, *The Fisher Who Died in His Bed* by John Herberman, and *Hannaford Overture* by Scott Irvine. Howard Cable's setting of *O Canada* has become a "must-have" for Canadian bands. This writer has premiered works published by NMPL with professional concert bands in Russia and Ukraine, where they have been warmly received by both audiences and performers.

In 1993, Northdale Music Press was nominated for the Peter F. Drucker Award for Canadian Nonprofit Innovation, given each year to a nonprofit organization "in recognition of a program that has made a difference in the lives of the people it serves."

## Beginnings

Where is Northdale? This is a logical question, since many community bands take their names from a city or a location. The answer is, "Nowhere; there is no Northdale." The name takes "North" from Northview Heights Secondary School and "dale" from Willowdale Junior High School. When students who had been playing in the band at Willowdale Junior High graduated - some to Northview Heights and some to other schools - they wanted to continue playing together and formed an extra-curricular band. Ted Graham, their band conductor at Willowdale Junior High, agreed to conduct them. Bill Martyn, Head of English and the conductor of the Northview Heights school band, helped out when needed. They held weekly rehearsals, often in a hockey arena, and gave public concerts.

As the students graduated from high school, they continued playing together, and the Northdale Band gradually became an adult band. None of the original members are still with the band, but a number of current members are well into their third decade.

Bill Martyn has the longest association of anyone with the band; first as an occasional conductor and later as their regular conductor. Later still, he began playing in the trumpet section, and also served as president of the board of directors for a number of years. He retired from the Northdale trumpet section in 2006.

Noted guest soloists who have appeared with the Northdale Concert Band include the soprano, Measha Brueggergosman, trumpeter James Gardiner of the Toronto Symphony, and clarinetist Peter Stoll. Band members themselves are frequently featured as soloists on the band's concerts. The Northdale Band continues its commitment to Canadian music. Its concerts regularly feature compositions and arrangements by Canadians, including works by two skilled composers who play in the band, trombonist John Wilson and flutist Louie Madrid Calleja.

During its forty-three year history, Northdale has had twelve regular conductors, including Carl Hammond (1976-1984), James McKay (1984-1988), Howard Cable and Bobby Herriott (1988-1989), Mark Hopkins (1990-1994), and Stephen Chenette (1996 to 2010). The long list of guest conductors includes Gary Kulesha, Christopher Weait, Dennis Beck, Jeff Reynolds, Denise Grant, Fran Harvey, Gillian MacKay, and Howard Cable a frequent collaborator.

## Honours

Among its many honours, the Northdale Concert Band placed first in the four categories of the Band Contest it entered at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto in 1981, including the Canadian Championship class and the International Championship class.

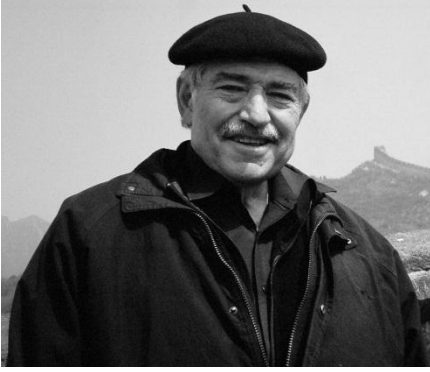
In August of 2002, the Northdale Concert Band placed second in a community-band competition organized by the Ontario branch of the Canadian Band Association held on Band Day at the Canadian National Exhibition. In the next, and regrettably the last, CBA(O) community-band competition, held in Toronto in 2004, the Northdale Band placed first.

The Northdale Band has served as the reading band for six of Long & McQuade's yearly clinics introducing new band repertoire to music teachers in southern Ontario. The band has recorded excerpts of Northdale Music Press publications for the NMPL Web site, and in 2009 and '10, the band recorded new releases by Eighth Note Publications for ENP's demo CDs and Web site.

For further information about the Northdale Concert Band or Northdale Music Press, visit the band's Web site at: [www.northdaleconcertband.ca](http://www.northdaleconcertband.ca).

(Special thanks to Bette Eubank, Jane Johnson, Paul Moyle, and Laura Rosenfield.)

## IN PROFILE / EN PERSPECTIVE



**Stephen Chenette** played in major orchestras for sixteen years, including principal trumpet with the Minneapolis Symphony/Minnesota Orchestra, Boston Pops, Denver Symphony, and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. He was for twenty-nine years a professor at the University of Toronto, where he taught trumpet and conducted the Wind Symphony and Concert Band. He has made ten trips to Russia and three to Ukraine as a conductor of professional concert bands and orchestras. He studied trumpet with Rafael Mendez, Arnold Jacobs, and principal trumpeters of the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and Boston Symphony. His conducting teachers included Leonard Bernstein, Frederick Fennell, and Hans Swarowsky.