



NTSB 20TH ANNIVERSARY

It seemed like a good idea to buy a set of steel pans at the special school in Whitley Bay where Dave Edwards worked: He had spent a couple of years in a London school and had learned to play pan with the ubiquitous Gerald Forsyth. A little research showed that another school a few miles away had just ordered a set of pans from Tony Charles, so Dave decided to get the same pans in the interests of consistency. That was in 1989.

From the beginning it was envisaged that there would be community access in the form of an after school steelband open to all young people in the area as well as wide use of the pans in the school. Interest from the adult education department resulted in an adult evening class also which was the first unit to get off the ground in Jan 1990. The young peoples' band started a term later.

Little did we realise how popular the Woodlawn North Tyneside Steelband would become in a short space of time. The adult band got the first gig at an

adult education showcase at the end of the first term and they put out a reasonable version of two or three tunes which were to become band 'standards'.

We were persuaded to run an all age summer school that first year which saw us performing in local town centres and attracting more players into the band. These performances also resulted in our first gig requests. It seemed that once the community were aware that there was a steelband in the area they all wanted us to play at summer fairs, BBQ's and similar events. This took us a little by surprise, but gigs soon became

a large part of the bands life, and also provided a useful income stream. All our gigs were done as a mixed age group band.

After a couple of years the band outgrew the school and we moved to a local community centre using our earned income to buy more pans from Tony and become truly independent in every respect; it was at this point that we became North Tyneside Steelband. **The arts development section of the council has always been very supportive towards us, paying tutor fees from the beginning, and they still give us an annual grant to develop our artistic programme (thanks folks!).**

We were beginning to make links with other steelbands and helped to set up a strong north east steelband network. NTSB learnt a lot from taking part in the National Steelband Festival for its last few years in the early 90's; seeing bands from other areas inspired us towards higher musical achievements. After the demise of the national festival we hosted a smaller scale annual event and were able to play alongside steelband institutions such as Lambeth Youth, Pantonic All Stars and North Stars. But this really stretched our resources and our attention became focussed on the music, running extra sessions for the growing membership and meeting the increasing demand for performances which was becoming our main income.

In 1997, we reached a major milestone when we received a large lottery grant to buy a bigger trailer and new pans. Changing over to chromed 4ths/5ths tenors really helped us to develop our own sound and style and helped to generally 'raise our game'.

We began attracting players who were already accomplished musicians. They helped the band to become more professional, and started what is now a very strong NTSB tradition of pan teaching, writing and arranging. Some of these players have gone on to become professional pan musicians and tutors.

NTSB was asked to manage the Steelbands North project in 2000; a Youth Music funded initiative which saw £110,000 injected into the north east steelband network to train young tutors, purchase three sets of outreach instruments and formalise the regional support network. This period saw the creation of several steelbands in the region which have thrived subsequently, and pan people all over the world are now familiar with the quarterly Steelbands North newsletter.

It was around this time that we were able to start working with steelband leaders from other parts of the country which we consider a real privilege. We have learned a lot from inspirational personalities such as Dudley Nesbit, Scott Sinkler, Earl Rodney, Toussaint Clarke, Arthur Culpepper and others to whom we will always be indebted.

Another milestone was winning through to the Schools Proms stage of the National Music for Youth Festival at the Albert Hall in 2003, a fantastic experience which we were delighted to repeat in 2008. In 2006, the players organised a national 'buskathon' which saw them playing (with permission of course) in nine city centres from Cornwall to central Scotland and raising £15,000 to buy a new minibus and trailer.

NTSB was placed firmly on the steelband map in 2008 when one of our senior players won the solo pan competition at Pan Explosion, the first time that title had gone to a player from outside London. Several senior players now arrange and teach the band, and around 9 players teach in local schools.

NTSB have recorded 3 CDs since 2004 and are working on a new one to be released next spring. The titles and content of each one accurately reflect the fact that whilst the band have developed their own style and remain strongly committed to developing musical excellence, they don't take themselves too seriously and always include a healthy element of fun in all their music and activities.

We've received a lot of help and support along the way from many people which we're extremely grateful for. They say it's not arriving but the travelling that's important, and we've certainly enjoyed our 20 year journey. We don't feel that we're at our destination yet and we're looking forward to the next 20 years travelling.

By **Dave Edwards**

