



# MICHAEL PURVES-SMITH



The end of this academic year saw the retirement of Professor Michael Purves-Smith from WLU's Faculty of Music .... not a retirement from **music**, by any means, just from academic duties. Over the years, Michael has had an impact on many people, and on this page there are four short recollections of him – written by two colleagues, Boyd McDonald and Gordon Greene, a Wellington Winds member, David Arthur, and Earl McCluskie of Chestnut Hall Music. (Also, check out the Michael Purves-Smith fan club on Facebook!)

Michael and I came to Wilfrid Laurier University in 1976, the same year as Ann Hall, Garth Beckett and Owen Underhill. The Dean of the Faculty of Music, Christine Mather, introduced Michael as the Baroque expert from Brock University – someone she would sooner have on faculty than deal with as competition down the road. Michael, at the time, was keyboard/oboist in “Quatre en Concert” with Peggie Sampson, cello, Christine Harvey, soprano and Deryk Aird, violin.

Around 1979 Dean Mather developed a budget for purchasing a harp in preparation for an incoming student. When the candidate failed to appear Christine decided to use the funds to purchase a fortepiano - “and we’ll put it in Boyd’s studio” - hence my introduction to period instruments! Soon Michael invited me to join members of Tafelmusik who conducted Summer Workshops at Laurier in the early eighties.

Michael and I were co-directors of the CPE Bach Anniversary Festival hosted by Wilfrid Laurier in 1988. This was during Gordon Greene’s term as Dean and occurred soon after the Faculty of Music moved into the newly constructed Aird Building. At the Festival Michael conducted the CPE Bach Double Concerto with Lawrence Ritchey, harpsichord, and myself at the fortepiano.

Collaborations with Michael and the WLU Orchestra continued with the Mozart C minor Piano Concerto and Poulenc Two Piano Concerto with Garth Beckett. As conductor of Wellington Winds Michael invited me to play the Weber Konzertstucke a couple of times and the Haydn G major Concerto, which he aptly arranged for wind ensemble.

Michael was my mentor in orchestration. He gave me valuable suggestions in arranging my piano piece, “An Artist’s Neighbourhood”, for wind ensemble. The piece was composed for the video of Waldemar Neufeld’s art work. Michael included this piece on Wellington Wind’s CD of Canadian Composers including Glenn Buhr, Peter Hatch, Derek Healey and his own “A Prairie Schubertiad”.

Our collaboration continued on the squash courts. As I recall we were pretty well matched. However, it became clear that our enthusiasm was causing too many near collisions, so we gradually weaned ourselves from that sport.

Michael, co-founder of the Nota Bene Period Orchestra orchestra, has accepted a commissioned to compose a work for the Orchestra and vocal group, TACTUS. As Chair of the Board of I look forward to the premiere scheduled for April, 2010.

Boyd McDonald, June 1, 2009



Michael Purvis Smith played a pivotal role in the Faculty of Music for all the years of his service. He was the main connection with the schools by cultivating close friendships with music teachers, promoting Band Workshops in which school groups came to the campus and played. As director of Wellington Winds for twenty-five years or more he maintained close ties with many local school music teachers who played in that fine ensemble.

Michael’s passion for music earlier than the mainstream repertoire served the Faculty very well also. He directed what was called “The Baroque Ensemble”, a credit ensemble that prepared and performed music from the Renaissance, Baroque, and early Classical periods. Pianists experienced the harpsichord, wind players tried horns without valves, violins were strung with gut strings, and singers learned vocal ornamentation suitable for Handel operas for example. As a major contribution, pre-Mozart operas were prepared with appropriate orchestra, period costumes, suitable vocal technique, and dance ensembles were included.

I remember Michael’s tenacity when he had a good idea that his colleagues may

Although the Wellington Winds had its beginnings in Guelph in 1981, the organization soon found itself looking for a permanent music director. Michael, already very busy with many commitments at Wilfrid Laurier University, including the University Wind Ensemble, agreed to take on the position. His knowledge of the repertoire and his desire to build the Wellington Winds into a first class ensemble were valuable assets. Concert venues in Guelph soon included Waterloo, then Elmira and Kitchener. The Winds established itself as one of Canada’s leading community concert bands with an annual season of four pairs of concerts.

not have been sufficiently enthused about to give him the support he desired. As dean during ten of Michael’s years on faculty I admired him for his imaginative ideas. However, there were times when it was not easy to implement what he wished to do. As I’ve thought about those times, I liken Michael to an attack dog that has its teeth in you and will not let go. I mean that in the kindest sense, as a compliment, because Michael’s service to the Faculty would not be as significant had he not been as tenacious.

He has incredible gifts that make him a sort of “renaissance man” - - virtuoso performer on oboe and harpsichord and recorder, fine conductor of large ensembles, quite prolific as a composer, well read in early music performance practice, and in literature in general. I admire Michael very much and we all wish him well in retirement. I can guarantee, however, that retirement will only mean more creative productivity for the invigorated mind of Michael.

Gordon Greene,  
Dean, Faculty of Music 1979-89 and 2005-06

If you ever have a chance to work with Michael Purves-Smith, don’t hide, jump at this opportunity. You may live a somewhat shorter life as a result, and your hair might be greyer a bit sooner than if you did not, but you will certainly enjoy an experience that will enrich your musical life. When I first moved to this community in the mid 80s, Michael was the first musical figure I worked with through my association with the Wellington Winds. My experiences range from a candlelit session deep in the bowels of the Wilfred Laurier University’s old Theatre Auditorium facility (we needed the fluorescent lights turned off because of their noise), to full sessions in the beautiful acoustics of Church of Mary Magdalene in Toronto, to a recent two-CD production representing much of the vocal solo and chamber works of Michael: it has been a privilege to witness up-close the emergence of a composer better known to many us as a conductor and Baroque early music specialist.

Perhaps one of my best recollections comes from a recording session with the early music ensemble Greensleaves, of which Michael’s wife Shannon is a founding and guiding member, and for which Michael arranges and sometimes writes music. We were recording a carol arrangement entitled *Resonet in laudibus* that uses as its foundation this popular mediaeval carol. Midway through the session, we took a break and I heard the sound of recorders from the studio floor. I must have missed the memo informing me about this turn of events, for when I went out to investigate, Shannon and Michael were indeed warming up on soprano and alto recorders, and I was compelled to conceal my surprise... I had not known that Michael was an accomplished player of recorder, as well as oboe, harpsichord, and Dixieland piano.

As the session resumed, the carol took an unexpected turn, as Michael had inserted a Polish Christmas carol in the middle followed by a Polish “concerto secondo”, featuring some virtuosic recorder duo playing. The whole effect is seamless, and you would think that this is the way the music had been presented for many centuries.

Greensleaves is currently recording its next CD of Polish early music, and Michael’s involvement with that project as well as his continued contributions to the wind ensemble community as one of the driving forces for the Music Is For Life Symposium planned for next year, assures that our region will continue to benefit from this remarkable man.

Earl McCluskie, Chestnut Hall Music

including locating additional personnel, arranging and composing music needed for concerts, writing grant applications, and advancing the Winds’ profile across Canada. Michael’s commitment to young musicians, bands and community music-making was evident in his initiating and organizing the first Music Is For Life Symposium, a recent cross-generational four-day band event involving 140 musicians from Ontario and beyond. It’s success promises future repeats. The Wellington Winds and its members, past and present, are most grateful for 26 years of superb and generous leadership.

David Arthur, bass trombone, Wellington Winds