

Royal Marines

impress Company guests at Portsmouth annual open day



Welcome aboard: Master David Hill and members of the Musicians' Company set off on their dry-land tour of the Royal Marines' School of Music, Portsmouth

Liveryman Michael Spencer writes A beautiful summer's day, with a breeze blowing off the sea – what better occasion could be found for the Company visit to the Royal Marines' School of Music in Portsmouth.

After security checks and coffee we were taken first to watch the drummers at work, and, as with all activity at the school, one was immediately impressed by the thorough and detailed grounding that all recruits receive. How good it was to see, in one room, a notice that said, in essence, "The faster the practice, the poorer the result"!

Then to a lively, spirited and unusual performance of a Sousa march, arranged for two euphoniums and two tubas, and on to

the old naval prison, which has been imaginatively converted into a teaching and practice block. Each student has his own "cell" for practice, study and music storage during his time at the school; tutors have double cells, and we visited lessons with a variety of instruments.

We were given a resumé of the work of the recruits, and it was pleasing to hear what a large part singing and aural training, using the Kodaly method, plays in each day's work. We also learnt that the school now has its own music degree course, the first year in Portsmouth and the remainder by distance learning, when students move elsewhere.

Students have often to play two instruments to diploma standard, as well as undertaking a

great deal of theoretical work. In addition, they have to do basic military training, and train as medical orderlies, should they need to be deployed in war zones, as bandsmen were in Kosovo.

A library of hundreds of symphonic band works and matters of copyright, performing rights and associated concerns is administered by a small staff who also despatch music all over the world. There is also a store of instruments which could equip a band of some 90 players from scratch – even if the bass drummers would have to wear synthetic tiger skins in case of emergency!

The school also produces its own "in-house" magazine, and employs a marine with a degree in lighting, stage and concert management to arrange large-scale events.

The intensive and searching Bandmaster course costs some £30,000 per candidate and covers aural training, sight-singing, conducting, composing, orchestrating and arranging along with musical history, theory and harmony. Each student has a computer station, fully equipped with Sibelius softwares, and on the morning of our visit they were studying the work of the English madrigal composers.

After an excellent lunch in the officers' mess we were taken on a conducted tour of HMS *Victory*. The fife and drum players of the 18th century marines who served aboard her would be amazed at the professional training received by the modern generation of young marine musicians, which must be as thorough and efficient as anywhere in the world.

