

New band leader calls for musicians

Different, jazz sound likely for 130-year-old institution

Brent Rowan hopes to stir things up with the 130-year-old Cambridge Concert Band. At least a little.

The new conductor, with his jazz background, is already making headway after six weekly rehearsals, band president David Bowie says.

"He's been extremely successful in bringing new insights into the band," Bowie said. "I think the (band) board really wanted some new life and vitality."

Rowan, 34, is quick to halt any talk of his reinventing the community fixture into a giant jazz ensemble in his own image. "I'm not here to change the musical mandate of the band. I want to help it become more diverse."

Yet he also talks about giving musicians practice drills such as they've never tried, exercises



KEVIN SWAYZE
CAMBRIDGE CONNECTION

that make no sense in isolation. Only when musicians play together do the sounds meld into something more.

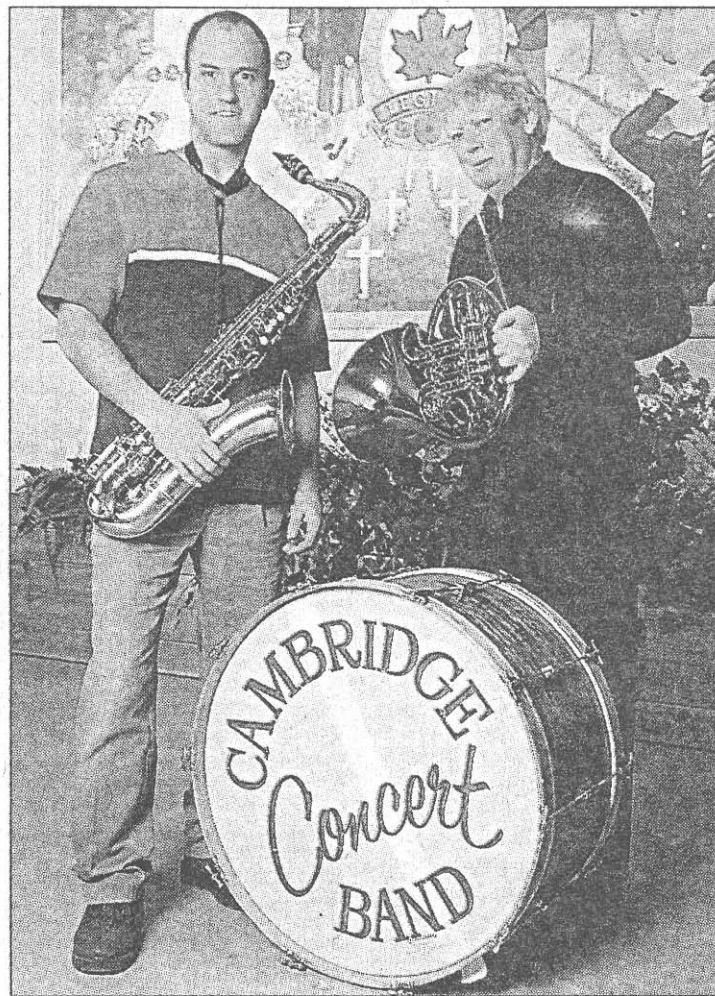
Rowan wants to infuse the members, who include teens and players up to their 70s, with the joy of jazz improvisation, challenging them to expand their skills.

"I have to be careful what I say, because I have to do it," Rowan said, only half laughing.

So as winter unfolds, players — and audiences — shouldn't be surprised to hear classics take on a different sound. Rowan wants to give people what they want to hear but perhaps not in exactly the way they expect. Imagine the Colonel Bogey March arranged with unexpected spice here and there.

"Could you make that work with a sound like samba?"

SEE BAND: PAGE B2



RECORD STAFF

Conductor Brent Rowan (left) and David Bowie, president of the Cambridge Concert Band, invite interested players to an open house and audition at 7:30 p.m. today at the Preston Legion Hall.

Band: Tough to find young musicians

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1

Rowan's not sure, but don't be surprised if he gives it a try. "I have to try to find ways to get the sound out of the band I know they can do. This band has a good sound."

The band was founded in the 1880s and spent most of its early years as a marching unit. By the middle of the 1900s, it was known as the Preston Legion Band.

It became the Cambridge Concert Band in 1973, when the city was created.

It's usual repertoire includes Broadway show tunes, classical music, Dixieland, marches and contemporary movie music.

The band has about 40 volunteer players, with about 25 attending most practices and shows. They perform about 20 times a year, often in nursing homes, at the Cambridge hospital, in parades and at public ceremonies such as Remembrance Day.

Rowan is a graduate of the jazz program at Humber College. The Guelph resident has helped conduct that city's concert band, teaches jazz on flute, saxophone and clarinet, performs shows in the area and repairs instruments.

Bowie is also from Guelph and involved with the concert band there. When Cambridge needed a conductor, word quickly got to Rowan. The musician was looking for steady work and had a newborn at home.

Attracting musicians is a funda-

mental challenge for community bands, Rowan and Bowie agree. With erratic support for music in the public school system, there's no new wave of potential members, as in decades past.

"It's always the arts that get cut first," Rowan said.

And these days, young people are only exposed to "all that junk" played on radio, Bowie said. There's so much more to enjoy, if only they could hear it.

Both men are looking for ways to help young people learn to play and appreciate music. They may run a New Horizons program in Cambridge, like the one Rowan runs in Guelph, to reach young people with no other place to learn.

The Cambridge Concert Band doesn't teach people to play woodwind, string or percussion instruments. It only takes on musicians who have an instrument and can read music and follow a conductor.

The band is holding an open house and audition tonight, in the Preston Legion Hall, at Westminster Drive and Margaret Street. The 7:30 p.m. event is the band's chance to introduce Rowan to the community.

"Your admission is your instrument," Rowan said. "You must come to play."

To contact the band, e-mail info@cambridgeconcertband.ca, call 519-624-1550 or visit www.cambridgeconcertband.ca.

kswayze@therecord.com