

A MUSICIAN IN THE MILITARY

M. FLAUTIST

The Canadian Forces offers a large array of trades, and although musician is not one that typically comes to the forefront of one's mind first, the musicians of the Canadian Forces play an important role in the organization. The Royal Canadian Artillery Band stationed in Edmonton, Alberta, is an exemplary illustration of this. The Band recently hired a handful of Reserve musicians for a three month contract. After winning one of these contracts, I did not know what to expect, as I did not have much knowledge of the RCA Band, or of the Royal Canadian Artillery itself. Over the past two and a half months, I have learned a great deal about this band, and will outline my discoveries here. Most notably, the Royal Canadian Artillery Band offers top-level quality in musicianship and professionalism, creates opportunities for young musicians, benefits its members and its community through travelling, and granted me the honour of working in a first-rate unit of the Canadian Forces.

From a musician's point of view, it is a huge honour to be a part of the Royal Canadian Artillery Band. The ensemble has a noticeably high standard of musicality, offers a professional environment, and boasts state of the art equipment and facilities.

Working under Captain Arsenault, the Royal Artillery Band reaches exceptional musical standards. Every member of the band has a high level of personal musical skill, and when brought together to work with the director, the collective talents of all members contribute to an outstanding musical outcome and experience. To play among other highly-skilled musicians encourages one to raise one's own level of skill, so as to be an efficient member in rehearsals, and to

contribute as much to the band as possible. To aid in the growth of individual and ensemble progress, the RCA Band enjoys state of the art equipment and facilities. The Lecture Training Facility, out of which the band operates, is equipped with a very acoustically pleasing rehearsal room, as well as sound-proofed individual practice cubes and recording equipment. The presence of practice cubes allows for musicians to work individually, on their own instrumental technique, without the distraction of other sounds, and the recording equipment facilitates fantastic opportunities for the band to widen their audience by producing CDs and professional recordings. The possession of musical instruments, music stands, sound equipment and a well-stocked music library all contribute to the band functioning at its highest potential.

The RCA Band also proffers an extremely professional, yet welcoming, work environment. The chain of command is used efficiently, as well as all matters concerning administration, scheduling, and constantly keeping the band “in the know.” Rehearsals are conducted in a professional manner that keeps the musicians’ needs in high priority, i.e. breaks and length of rehearsals. There is also much attention paid to the personal wellbeing of all members, as time in the weekly schedule is designated to allow for personal Physical Training and personal musical practice. Members are encouraged to maintain a healthy level of personal fitness, and I appreciate the time allotted in which to do so. It is also wildly important that the schedule allows for personal practice time, both to work on music assigned by the director, and also to improve one’s own musical technique. I feel that the schedule of rehearsals, breaks, physical training, and

free time keeps the musicians' wellbeing in mind, and allows for us to flourish as musicians and members of the Canadian Forces. The RCA Band works as an organized, well-oiled machine, which is evident upon hearing and observing the quality of music and professionalism.

The music world is a very competitive one, and young musicians have a seemingly increasingly difficult time finding jobs in their field. Positions in orchestras are nearly impossible to obtain, leaving young musicians with little to no experience and opportunities. I, too, fall into the category of a young musician whom is constantly seeking opportunities to perform. The Royal Canadian Artillery Band has provided me with the chance to play with an extremely high quality, professional ensemble, which is a privilege denied to many other student musicians. The chance to play with the RCA Band was so pleasing, in fact, that I opted to spend a semester away from school in order to play with the band. Opportunities such as this do not come up very often in the life of a young musician, so I felt that I could not turn it down. In the world of classical music, one's playing abilities trump the degree behind one's name; of course playing with the Royal Canadian Artillery Band would improve my capabilities as a musician, so it seemed obvious that my degree could be put on hold. I am tremendously lucky to be playing with a professional ensemble before having finished my degree, and for that I am enormously thankful. It is an honour, as a young student musician, to be employed to play my instrument in a professional environment, surrounded by phenomenal players, an outstanding director, and wonderful facilities, all while representing the Canadian Forces.

Many of my university colleagues will not have this opportunity, so I am quite grateful to the RCA Band for offering this opportunity.

The Royal Canadian Artillery Band is stationed in Edmonton, Alberta. I grew up in Mississauga, Ontario for my entire life, and in the past few years I have relocated to London, Ontario, to pursue my music degree. Ontario was the furthest west that I had travelled, as it is not viable for students to travel while in school, due to the demands of university as well as budgeting. Travelling to Alberta to live in Edmonton for three months has been an extraordinary experience. I think it is undeniably important for Canadians to explore our own country, and the RCA Band is allowing me to do that. Besides now residing in Edmonton, the ensemble participates in performances all over Western Canada; so far I have travelled to Calgary, and the band anticipates more performances that will include travel. Of course it is a pleasure to visit new places, but I also think it is of great importance that the band travels, so that we may have more presence in the communities of Edmonton, Alberta, and all of Western Canada. It is quite crucial that both the civilian and military populations are aware of the Royal Canadian Artillery Band, both as a performing ensemble and as an accessible representative of the entire Royal Canadian Artillery. Many civilians do not often experience close contact with soldiers of the Canadian Forces, but the RCA Band's travels help to facilitate the connection between civilians and Forces members. Good examples of this are the opening of the new Legion in Edmonton, the first historic concert presented by the Canadian Forces Pipes and Drums, and the upcoming Christmas concert, out in the Edmonton community.

Some military members, too, may not be aware of the presence of the Royal Canadian Artillery Band, so performances at mess dinners and military facility openings help to establish our role in the Forces (examples being the Alberta Sheriff's Mess Dinner, 12 October 2012 and the opening of Valour Place, 2 October 2012.) The Royal Canadian Artillery Band continues to reach into nearby and farther communities, by sending a variety of ensembles out into the region covered by Land Forces Western Area. The ensembles, which include a concert band; jazz band; voice, guitar and piano trio; Celtic group, ten piece Windage Salon Orchestra; and pop/rock/mainstream group, perform at an array of venues, which helps to expand our reputation and prominence.

Besides playing with a fantastic ensemble and reaching out to different communities through travelling, the Royal Canadian Artillery Band has provided me with the highest honour and privilege: working within the Canadian Forces, and – more importantly – representing the Canadian Forces. I have not been sent overseas, nor do I foresee myself undergoing that training. I fully support our soldiers and their undertakings around the world, although I cannot be there overseas to join the efforts; being a member of the Canadian Forces is a tremendous honour for me, and I appreciate the chance to represent our soldiers here in Canada.

A few weeks ago I was privileged with the opportunity to volunteer to speak at a Remembrance Day ceremony. I travelled to an elementary school in Edmonton, Alberta, and took part in their Remembrance Day assembly. The Canadian Forces provided me with a very effective speech to present, and I was

honoured to take part in the school's moving ceremony. After the assembly I was taken to various classrooms, where children were very enthusiastic in asking questions about my job, life in the army, and what the army does. I was happy to answer the children's questions, as well as clear up myths or misunderstandings about our army. I am so thankful to the Forces for having given me the chance to reach out to the young community, as my elementary school had never had a visitor from the military; I feel it was also beneficial for the children to see and interact with a female member of the Forces. Again, although I am not fighting overseas, I was quite happy to be able to impact five hundred civilians here in Canada's own community. As I made sure to explain to the students, I am not part of the overseas efforts, but I am instead representing those fighting and deceased soldiers, who cannot be here to represent themselves.

A Master Warrant Officer, now Captain, once told a group of military musicians – myself included – that the role of musicians within the Canadian Forces is vitally important, as, through parades and performances, we are often the only Canadian Forces soldiers that civilians will see. We, he said, are representing those who are overseas; although we cannot claim that we have taken part in the hands-on efforts in Afghanistan, we offer to the public a tangible representation of Canadian Forces soldiers, who can be seen interacting among Canadian communities. Many civilians will never see a soldier on the battlefield, but if they see them among their community, working hard in their

own country, they will likely be more conscious of the ubiquitous and ongoing efforts of the Canadian Forces all around them.

When I joined the Canadian Forces, I felt almost like a “guest” at first, more of a musician working on the sidelines of the powerful organization making much headway in national and international matters. After hearing that Master Warrant Officer’s speech, though, my attitude changed tenfold. I now realize that it is my duty to represent the Canadian Forces here in my own country; it is our job to keep the civilian community informed and aware of the role of the Forces, as our overseas soldiers cannot be present in Canadian communities to remind people of their efforts. It is a great honour, then, to travel with the RCA Band and perform for both civilians and military personnel, reminding them of the omniv- and ever present role of Canadian soldiers. I am truly thankful to be able to contribute this to my country.

As my time with the Royal Canadian Artillery Band nears its end, I have put a lot of thought into my time here, and am exceedingly glad that I took the position I was offered. Not just another job, my contract with the RCA Band provided me with the chance to play with an extraordinarily talented ensemble, meet a number of fantastic musicians and Forces personnel, improve my skill in my field, travel to a new place, reach out to my new community, and – above all – represent one of the most prestigious and honourable organizations in Canada. Once I leave the RCA Band, I will seek out further contracts with the unit in my hometown, for I wish to continue to work with, for, and among the individuals of the Canadian Forces. In only three months, the Royal Canadian Artillery Band

instilled in me a longing to continue my work in the Forces, and take whatever opportunities I am offered. I feel that the RCA Band, although a very small portion of the Canadian Forces, is a fantastic representation of the dedication, professionalism, and passion that is found across all of the Royal Canadian Artillery, and across the entire Forces. It is my intention here to not exaggerate the fine qualities of a regular force military band, but to draw accurate, well-deserved attention to this fantastic group. As I know that my future may not *necessarily* hold any further work with the Royal Canadian Artillery, I have truly enjoyed my time here, and have found it to be a true honour.