

**COLWELL ARTS JAZZ ENSEMBLE
AACHEN/WÜRSELEN TOUR
Thursday 10th to Monday 14th April 2008**

Colwell Arts Jazz Ensemble (affectionately known as CAJE) has just returned from a five-day tour in Germany. CAJE is run through Gloucestershire Music Service under it's conductor/maestro Mike Sallis.

The 26 strong band plus family members left UK in a large green and yellow Applegates coach with luggage, instruments, PA systems etc stashed away in the hold of the vehicle and after a swift tunnel crossing were soon wending their way through France, Belgium, Holland and Belgium (again!) before arriving in Aachen some 12½ hours later (somewhat behind schedule thanks to certain Belgian motorway incidents).



We pulled up in front of the Hotel Mercure am Europaplatz, a large plush hotel, which was to be our home for the next four days. We quickly found our allocated rooms and, reunited with our instruments, hastened down to a conference room not 30 minutes later for our first rehearsal in Germany. He's a strict taskmaster, our Mr Sallis!

Friday was our first scheduled concert at a German Grammar School, Pius Gymnasium which has established links with Sir Thomas Rich's School. We joined on the stages (yes there were two!) with the 'Pius Big Band' and its younger counterpart, 'Brass Kids'. After an interesting afternoon joint rehearsal, Pius band members laid on afternoon "tea" for the visitors - soup, salads, pasta, tarts and drinks - it was here that our vegetarian friends made their first mistake - the soup wasn't - but we all had a good laugh about it afterwards.

Come evening time the school Aula (the main hall) was abuzz with anticipation (audience and band members alike). We played to a crowded hall of parents and friends. The music director Ulrich Brassel at Pius Gymnasium was very enthusiastic, welcoming and excited about this first joint project and hoped that future ventures with perhaps junior bands from Gloucestershire might ensue.



The next morning saw us standing in a windy market place under the shadow of the Dom where we played for shoppers and passers by, attracting large enthusiastic crowds. One of our player's husbands had begged an electric connection for the keyboard, guitar, bass and vocalist's use. There was a problem keeping the music on the stands but nevertheless, we kept going.

That evening, we were playing in a nearby Greek Restaurant, a main venue of the local jazz scene, and although the audience was not large, the Greek owner was very happy with his English friends who stayed on afterwards and drank his ouzo until some unearthly hour in the morning!

Sunday saw us all back on the bus travelling 11km away to Würselen where we were to play at Euregio-Kolleg. This concert was arranged through 'European Partnership - Help for Schools in Need' charity, and all the proceeds from the free-will donations at the concert, and the other gigs, were sent to support the charity's latest project of building a new school in Sevaré in Mali, Africa. The staging was set for us and we quickly set up and had a practice before the crowds arrived. We had another excellent concert.

Monday morning after a huge breakfast at our Hotel Mercure am Europaplatz, we boarded our Applegates coach for the return 11½ hour journey, this time the British motorway system providing the delays. It seemed longer going home but we were all happy and proud of our achievements. We had learned a lot about and from each other, raising dramatically our collective musical standard, which would not have been possible in our 2 hours a week practice session.

We had a memorable time and hope that one day in the future, it will be repeated.



Report by:-

Celia and Phil Brown (Tour organisers)