

# British Army: Military Music [C1]

Le bande dell'esercito britannico non suonano solo in occasione di eventi cerimoniali. Sostengono anche le truppe, sollevano il morale durante le missioni e rendono omaggio ai veterani e ai caduti.

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**Throughout** most of its history, the British Army has had regimental bands to promote military music and **boost** troop morale. However, the number of bands was reduced at the end of the Cold War. The Royal Corps of Army Music, a unit of soldier musicians in the British Army, was first formed in 1994. While British Army musicians might be best known for the **bearskin** hats and the **smart** red uniforms that they wear at Trooping the Colour, also known as The King's Birthday Parade, their job extends far beyond **pageantry**. Army music comprises **duties** at **overseas** army bases and ceremonial events throughout the year in honour of newly-trained army cadets, repatriated soldiers and veterans. To find out more, Speak Up spoke to two military musicians, Major Matthew Simons, the Director of Music and Officer Commanding for the Band of the Welsh Guards, and **Warrant Officer** Class 2 Robert Howe, the Band Sergeant Major of the Welsh Guards Band. As Matthew Simons and Robert Howe explained, being a military musician in 2025 involves more than the pomp and ceremony of events like Trooping the Colour. We began by asking them about the main highlights of the year for army musicians. **Robert Howe:** Our two biggest **gigs** of the year are obviously Trooping the Colour, and the second one is the Cenotaph Parade in Whitehall, which is the Remembrance Sunday parade, which is huge. Thousands and thousands of veterans all march past the Cenotaph, and the Massed Bands of the Foot Guards stand at the Cenotaph and play them through the whole time. We have various other things; we have bands travelling all over the world playing for various occasions. But our main role is the **publicduties**, so we find ourselves marching around outside Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle and doing the Changing of the Guard ceremony. And **on top of that**, we have to do musical training, all that sort of stuff as well. So it's a busy programme, but I think people join army music for the variety. And no week is the same, you don't work Monday to Friday, 9 till 5. And I think people enjoy that. **Matthew Simons:** The

number one priority is state ceremonial and **publicduties**. The second one is support to troops in training — the esprit de corps piece, whereby we might play for soldiers who have just completed their training. So that's a really important thing because it sets those soldiers up for a **fulsome** career in the army. Another thing is what we call "troop morale support", so we might find ourselves on operations performing more contemporary music in places like Iraq and Afghanistan to entertain troops in **hotspots**, just to give them some **light respite** and to take their minds off the operation just for a brief moment. So supporting troops on ops. And also, commemoration and repatriation, those things are really important. The veteran community is really, really strong in the UK. So quite often we'll perform concerts for charities and things like that **to raise money and awareness**. And repatriations as well. Obviously, sadly, the nature of conflict means that occasionally soldiers do lose their lives, and whenever you see a soldier arriving by airplane into Brize Norton, being returned to the UK, quite often you'll see a military band there to honour them on their way back.

## IN COMBAT

As Simons explained, some, but not all, military musicians have been involved in military combat, as all musicians in the British Army have received military training. He also described some of his **duties** in his role as Director of Music beyond the preparation of Trooping the Colour. **Matthew Simons**: I've been in Operation TELIC which was the operation name for the war in Iraq in 2003. That's my only truly operational experience with what they call large-scale intervention. But I've done tours of Afghanistan and various other theatres. Very recently, I led a team to Iraq, which had several musicians in it to teach Iraqi army musicians. So ultimately, yes, as musicians, we are still liable to conduct operational tours if the need should arise.

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# Glossary

- **on top of that** = in aggiunta a ciò, inoltre
- **hotspots** = aree di conflitto
- **light respite** = breve sollievo
- **pageantry** = sfarzo
- **Warrant Officer** = maresciallo
- **smart** = elegante
- **to raise money and awareness** = raccogliere fondi e sensibilizzare
- **duties** = compiti, incarichi
- **overseas** = all'estero
- **gigs** = esibizioni, eventi
- **public duties** = funzioni pubbliche
- **boost** = stimolare
- **bearskin** = pelle d'orso
- **Throughout** = nel corso di
- **fulsome** = senza limiti