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IN THESE days of materialism, the wonderful work of the Benson brothers in forming the musical training of many of the youth of the city is to be highly lauded, and thanks to them many young would-be musicians who would otherwise never have got the opportunity, have the chance of a musical training.

The Bensons, Sammy and Christy, founded the Limerick City Brass and Reed Youth Band in 1974 in the hope of teaching the boys and girls of the city the various brass, reed and percussion instruments and the art of reading music. The long hours of hard slogging were not in vain as, after only a few months their efforts began to bear fruit. The band was a familiar sight in the city streets that time as Sammy used to guide his proteges "around town" three or four times a week and the locals complimented the boys and girls on the marked improvement shown with each outing. At that time the band was known as the Boherboy Youth Band, but because people from all parts of the city were involved it was decided that in order to avoid any further confusion the name of the band would be changed to the Limerick City Brass and Reed Youth Band.

So from January 1, 1976, the new band emerged with its new name - a name that in such a short while has become renowned for its beautiful music and dedication to the art.

However, all this was to come later. A lot of hard work, long hours and huge expense had to be put in to making this band a cut above the rest. Indoor practices were held every night in the Transport Union Hall in O'Connell St. by kind permission of the ITGWU. For the first three years of the band's existence and it was here that the real spade work was done.

The Bensons, at times, must have despaired at the task in hand, as teaching young boys and girls from 9 years of age upwards the various arts of the music business is by no means an easy task. However, they brought the boys and girls to a very high standard within a fairly short time. On top of this the mammoth task of raising money for instruments, uniforms, etc., had still to be accomplished.

The band was only about 4 months old when Sammy decided to enter a competition in Kiltinane and to everybody's delight and amazement they were awarded the first of their many trophies when they were placed third overall. The band went from strength to strength after this and were fast reaching the high standards of musical quality that is the hallmark of this very much sought-after outfit.

The crowning achievement in the band's short history was when they entered the Limerick Civic Week International Band Competition in 1975, just twelve months after their foundation, and were awarded first prize, a feat which they achieved every year since.

An incredible feat you will agree! Needless to say after these tremendous achievements the band are in great demand all over the country, opening festivals, playing the cabaret circuit, matches, etc. and on each occasion they play a wider range of music to suit all tastes. Included in their repertoire are marches by Sousa and others, the many musical themes from popular television programmes, jazz, pop, and, of course, classical and Irish music.

TOUR OF ENGLAND

In 1977, after winning the Limerick International Band Competition they were engaged to do a concert tour of England to coincide with



Limerick City Brass and Reed Youth Band, 1981. Hopes are high that they emulate their predecessors and annex the coveted top prize in this year's International Band Competition.

the Easter holidays of the following year. The boys and girls worked extremely hard for this trip, each contributing £1 per week for 50 weeks and the band fund subsidised the balance for a fantastic 10 day tour. This was the first time that a Limerick band had been asked to tour England and the boys and girls did themselves, their band and their city proud as they outshone themselves in every way. Each year since, an invitation is received by Sammy to do a repeat show, but other pressures have forced them to defer these invitations to another date.

AMERICAN TOUR

On the morning of their departure to England a confirmation letter was received booking the band for a tour of America from March 8 to 29th, 1979.

This tour proved an outstanding success from the outset. St. Patrick's Day parades in the Mid-West are held on different days so the band were able to take part in the parade in Louisville, Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio, on successive days, and in both parades they lifted first prize against very stiff opposition. The band made many new friends on this tour and many of them have paid return visits to Limerick just to renew old friendships. The Americans were very impressed with the extremely high standard of performance by the band and they expressed their amazement that the band were voluntarily run and not subsidised in any way by the Arts Council or by the Government.

While in the US the band bought new uniforms, the design of which was Sammy's own idea. When completed it will be the most attractive in these islands.

NEW HALL

Ever since its beginnings in 1974, it was evident that the building of its own premises would be a prime target for the band, but the first objective in this goal was the acquisition of a site which was realised in the capital of soccer in Limerick - Caledonian Park.

Now the real work began. A lot of money was needed and many hard hours were put in by a dedicated few - Sammy, Christy, Eddie Benson and Bernie Heffernan, particularly, with help from other members of the public, work commenced on the site. When the foundations for the new hall were laid and a 12ft. high boundary wall erected it was evident that a very large amount of money would be required if the hall was ever to be completed. So, after long discussions with the band and the architect it was decided to borrow the money by using Sammy's property as collateral. This meant that the band committee needed to raise in excess of £500 per month for 7 years if they were to remain solvent. On top of that the go-ahead committee borrowed £10,000 for the American trip resulting in an extra £500 per month being



Pictured recently in their magnificent new premises were Sammy Benson (band master) Christy Benson, Bernie Heffernan, Eddie Benson, and John Hannon.



Sammy Benson (Band Master)



On parade and on their way to winning the International Band Competition in 1977.



International Band Competition winners, 1976.



This group of musicians were the winners of the International Band Competition in 1978.

added to the already high repayments.

So, within a few months the hall was built - not completely finished - but the band were able to move in. Again a lot of hard work had to be done both on the hall and forecourt and on the site generally.

With the very heavy cost of borrowing and the heavy repayments needed every month it was decided that

the only course of action open to the committee would be to approach the different Government Departments in the hope of getting grant aid for the by now massive project. With no grant aid forthcoming it was decided to enlist the aid of Mr. Desmond O'Malley, Minister for Industry, Commerce and Tourism, who succeeded in getting a grant under the youth

employment scheme. The first grant was for £6,900 in 1979, and again in 1980 they received £11,800. This money could only be used in youth employment and none could be used for badly needed materials or for any other purpose.

So, with youth workers available money had to be found for materials, and with the usual foresight by the Bensons this money was

once again raised. The youth employment grant is now finished and there is still a lot of work to be done on the project which consists of a beautiful maple floored hall capable of seating in excess of 600, a full-size kitchen, games room (pool, etc.), a music stock room, an instrument room, a shop and dressingrooms off the stage. On the outskirts of the hall, there is a car park which is also used for tennis, basketball, soccer and squash, while indoor games include basketball, soccer, badminton, pool, table tennis, etc.

FUND RAISING

From the outset, the fundraising has been very intense and each year more and more money is required. There is no fee for tuition, instruments and music is supplied, so also in the uniform. So in order to raise the money needed just to survive the members collect around the city while the band gives a recital. The band only collects in the city centre as it is no longer financially possible to travel to outlying areas.

These recitals only cover the cost of our existence," said Sammy Benson in the course of the interview. A flag day every so often also helps to keep the coffers from going dry. Also several raffles are held over the year which gives a great boost to the financial situation.

Since the youth band moved into the hall in Caledonian Park weekly bingo sessions are held on Wednesdays and have gradually become part of the social scene in the area. A weekly dance is also held on Friday nights to old time and modern ballroom dancing which are very well supported.

Last year a series of discos were held for the younger set but as usual 3 or 4 hoodlums not allowed into the dance were making a nuisance of themselves outside the complex so it was decided to stop the discos altogether.

Other sources of income for the band include the many engagements at festivals, sports outings, etc. These are really the band's major source of income and without these engagements the band would cease to exist.

The band have two remaining ambitions for the future - the first being the dire need for a new set of instruments at a cost of approximately £20,000 and to complete the new uniform which will cost in the region of £5,000. With the existing financial problems it will be quite some time before these ambitions are realised.

However, the youth band goes on teaching new pupils every night of the week, the art of the various brass, reed and percussion instruments.

Outside of the £1,000 per month repayments, the band have many other expenses so if any music-loving reader wishes to contribute to their coffers they could send their contribution, no matter how small, to Mr. Christy Benson, The Bungalow, Dublin Road, Limerick.

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This group was pictured prior to their departure for England in 1978.

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