

# Keeper Vincent is custodian of many musical treasures

WHEN Vincent Prendergast decided to retire from local junior soccer in his mid-40s he found himself at the crossroads of what had been a hectic lifestyle. As a goalkeeper, Vinnie had seen it all. He was one of the best to come out of this city over the past 50 years, won an FAI junior cup medal with Caledonians in 1970 and became the youngest keeper to play in the League of Ireland in 1955 when he was selected for Limerick AFC against Bohemians at Dalymount Park.

Coming from a family that is steeped in musical tradition, Vincent Prendergast always had a keen interest in opera and following a sporting career that saw him excel at rugby with Shannon and become All-Ireland 100 yard sprint champion, he devoted his spare time to his second favourite pastime.

On this coming Monday, Vincent will chair a meeting at Woodfield House Hotel, Ennis Road. It promises to be an historic occasion for at that meeting the Limerick John McCormack Society will be formed: "It is being set up in memory of the late Harry Connolly who died last year. This is the seventh season of our Music on Disc series which has been going on since 1993. These take place at the Woodfield House Hotel on the last Monday of each month from September to May from 8 to 10.30pm with a short interval. After the session we have a drink and a chat in the bar and our usual attendance varies from 30 to 50."

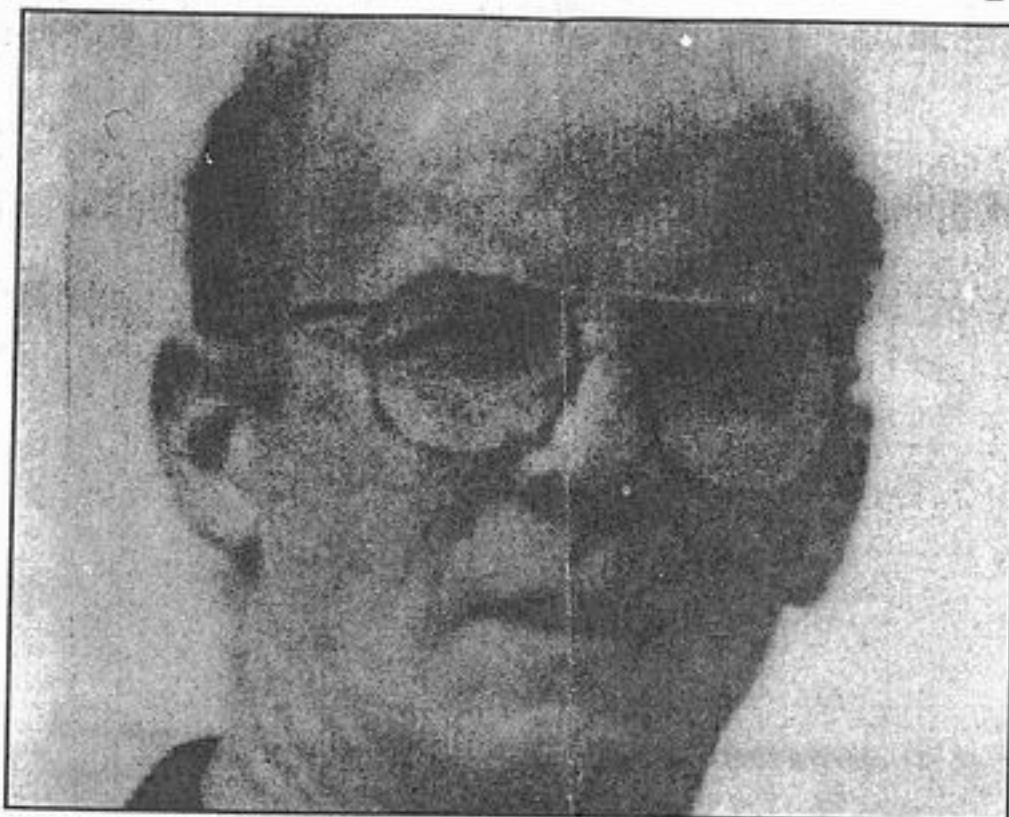
The musical programme includes

opera, operetta, Gilbert and Sullivan, Broadway musicals, choirs, orchestras, brass bands, drawingroom ballads and ballet. Admission is free with just a nominal charge of £1 to cover the hire of the hotel room: "Austin Gibbons has been very generous to us throughout the years. Even if there is a double booking, he gives us the room. Sadly, some of our stalwart supporters have passed on over the years such as Harry Connolly, Eamonn Devereaux, Maureen Keyes, Dom and Mary Scanlon.

"These recitals began in 1984, the year of McCormack's Centenary. People such as Joe Hardaker, Joe 'the Dane' Hayes and John Reddan were there from the start. I joined later with Harry Connolly. At the moment we are getting quite a few younger people to come along to the music sessions which is encouraging. At the end of each year we give the selection of the programme over to the members who pick their favourites for that special evening."

Vincent Prendergast has now taken on the mantle of Limerick's 'Mr Music.' His weekly local radio programme is acknowledged as one of the most popular on the airwaves at present and his dedication to this new-found niche in life is to be admired. It takes, he says, about a week to put together the monthly Music on Disc programme and variety ensures that all tastes are catered for.

Musical evenings have been part of Limerick life for many decades and Vincent Prendergast was one of a



From football hero to musical presenter . . . Limerickman Vincent Prendergast who will launch the Limerick John McCormack Society at the Woodfield House Hotel, Ennis Road on Monday night next.

small group of young people who attended the Gramophone Circle evenings in the Dominican Hall during the 1950s and early 1960s. These

were run on the first Monday of every month by Fr Hunt, a Dominican friar with a keen love of classical and operatic music. They attracted a unique

blend of Limerick's music lovers who gathered in a small room, its walls draped in heavy curtain material, while the presenter of the programme placed the vinyl records on the old gramophone without any introductions. Fr Hunt would place only two notices of the programmes for the forthcoming Gramophone Circle recitals — one in the porch of the Dominican Church and the other on the window of a local business in O'Connell Street.

Vincent Prendergast, one of four boys, was something of a hero during his early sporting days: "When I played my first game for Limerick against Bohs I was only 16. I had hardly ever been in Dublin before and the entire Bohemians team came to me to wish me well before the game. Sean O'Brien was in goal for Bohs that day. He was a printer by trade and he died last June. I rang his wife to sympathise with the family."

Scotsman Jimmy Docherty was the manager of Limerick AFC during that period and, according to Vinnie, had a great influence on him: "I played three seasons with Limerick and look back on that period as one of the most influential of my life. It is an era that I have never forgot and a focus for everything. One of my great regrets is that soccer has left the Markets Field. It should never have happened. I was reared only a short distance from that ground and as a young boy would look in through a hole in the gate just to see the condition of the pitch.

"I was always fascinated by goal-

keepers and Billy Hayes, the Limerick international, was my hero. I often worried about what I would do when I finished playing. Music has filled that void for me. I have one of the biggest collections of classical and operatic albums in this region as well as a variety of rare recordings and operatic programmes. One recording, Messiah, conducted by Malcolm Sargeant, is particularly precious to me."

Vincent's three brothers, Frank, the former city councillor; Cyril and Ralph are all well known in this city. Their father, Sam, was a local baker, following a long family tradition, and a talented musician. A trumpeter, he played with the Boherbuoy Brass and Reed Band, taught the great Bud Clancy and was one of the few people in this city who could almost instantly transpose music from sheet music to written form by hand.

Vincent Prendergast is married to well-known pianist and musical director, the former Molly O'Donovan. The couple live in Caherdavin and have four children: John, Billy, Lorna and Julieann. Molly comes from a well-known Athlunkard Street family and is involved with the Caherdavin and St Munchin's choirs and is organist at the Redemptorist Church.

Vincent's book, 'A Set of Curious Chances,' a history of light opera and musicals in Limerick, was launched last year and has almost sold out. A few copies still remain but will be sold over the coming festive season.

— AIDAN CORR