

90 years on and Cecilians continue to strike right notes

By Rebekah Commane

THE Cecilian Musical Society, was, in the words of the late Fr Stephen Bates SJ, responsible for more marriages than the Knock Marriage Bureau, with often up to 20 couples tying the knot in any given year.

And the coupling up of members continues to this day.

Aidan Boucher, president of the society for the past two years, estimates that Fr. Bates married 20 Cecilian couples a year at one period, and delighted in the unions formed by members.

The now retired insurance official has been a Cecilian since his arrival in Limerick in 1968, and he, in the company of Joe Donnellan, touching half-a-century of unbroken service, spoke to the Limerick Post about its history. Aidan and Joe's respective wives, Noreen and Frances, are also Cecilians.

In 1950, Fr Stephen Bates became president, and remained a stalwart of the society for the next 40 years. He retired in the eighties but remained involved until his death in 1990

Now celebrating its 90th year, the society maintains strong family connections, with relatives of the cast of the first performance in 1919, present in today's line-up. Ann Hackett is one such example, her mother Violet was a member of the first ever cast in 1919.

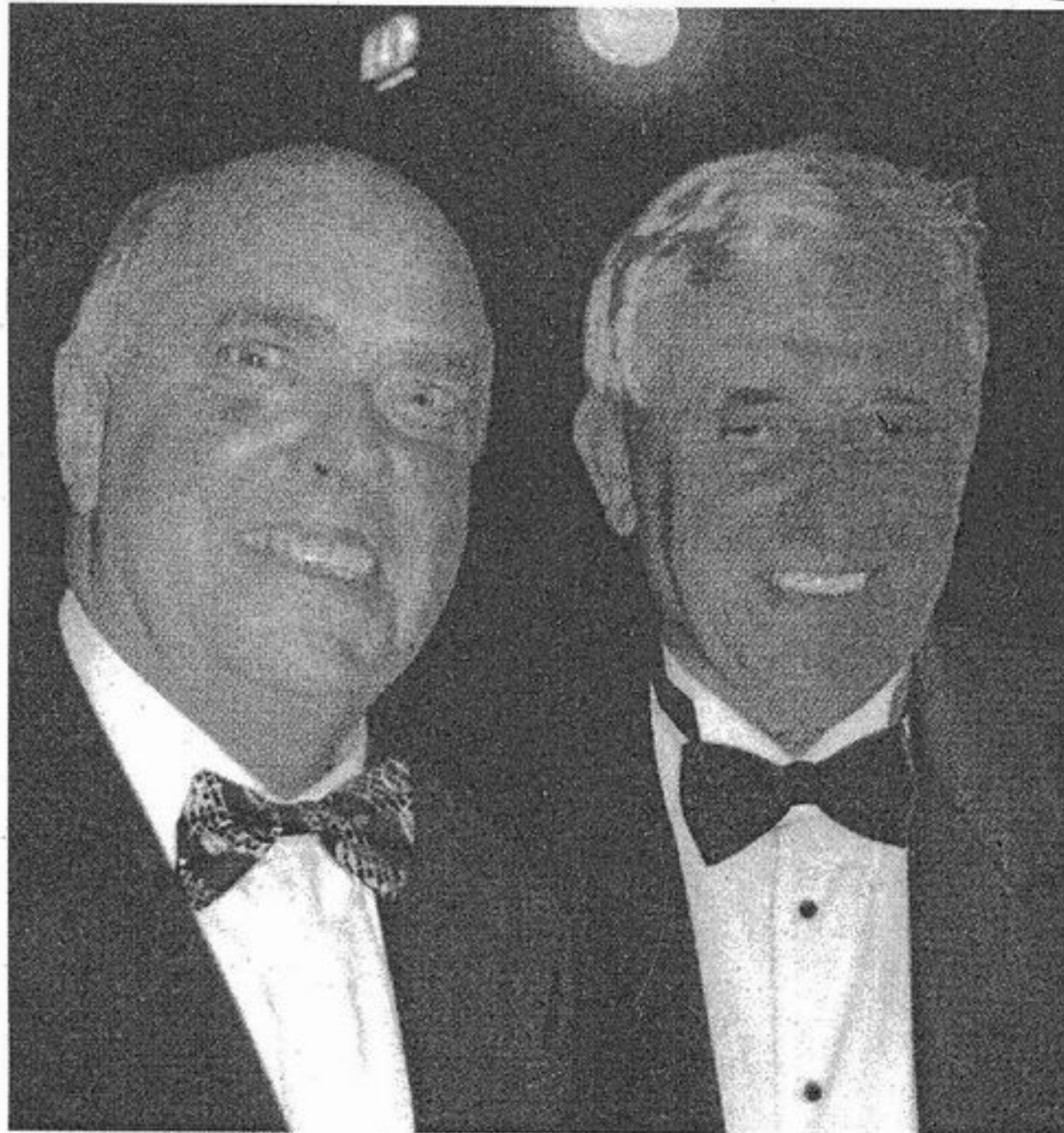
The society originated when Fr. Laurence Potter SJ, Rector of The Sacred Heart College, was seeking ideas to raise funds for the renovation of the Jesuit Church organ.

It was decided to stage a musical, and so the Crescent Operatic Society was formed, and 'A Greek Slave' was performed in The Theatre Royal, Cecil Street, in 1919.

In 1924, the society officially formed, with Trial By Jury, with the internationally known Limerick-born tenor Joseph O'Mara, lead soloist.

The name 'The Cecilian Operatic Society' was taken on, as suggested by the then District Justice MJ Flood, with the newly renovated organ in place at the Church.

From there, they went on to perform classic R&H musicals such as The Gondoliers in 1925, and The Mikado in 1926. Anna Doyle and Claire Donnelly are also Cecilians, and daughters of Mary Taylor Nestor



Joe Donnellan and president of Cecilians Aidan Boucher at 90th anniversary of the society. Mary Taylor Nestor and Eileen Taylor O'Connell in the 1926 performance of 'The Gondoliers'.

and Eileen Taylor O'Connell who appeared in the The Gondoliers.

The 1930's was a quiet decade for the society, but it was brought back to life in the 1940's under the guidance of Frs. Vincent Dennehy and William Saul.

In 1947, the new buildings at Crescent College provided a stage and dressing rooms for the society, through the foresight of Rector Fr. Redmond Roche. This was their home for the Cecilians for the next 55 years.

For some time, the society produced two shows a year, and also a pantomime at Christmas, to help defray the expense involved in the building of the new building.

A then current state-of-play with their bank debt featured in the entrance hall, with the graph showing a downward trend with each passing year.

In 1950, Fr Stephen Bates became president,

and remained a stalwart of the society for the next 40 years. He retired in the eighties but remained involved until his death in 1990.

"That was the end of an era", said Aidan, "he had been the kingpin for 40 years".

The Crescent College hall was sold in the nineties, but the society was accommodated their until 2004, before the board of Management at the College provided a new home for rehearsals, with performances taking place in the University Concert Hall.

Over the years the Cecilians have performed a multitude of roof raising performances, including the second musical society performance of My Fair Lady, which was produced by Joyce Bradfield, who came over from London, and whom both Joe and Aidan credit with introducing amazing standards.

Numerous talents also graced the stage over the years, including Suzanne Murphy, Kay Condon, Tom D'Arcey, Phylla Collins, Ged O'Donovan-Reid, Jean Merrigan, Philip Byrne, James N Healy, Eddie O'Neill, and Noel Harris.

There were also some ingenious characters behind the scenes, according to Joe and Aidan. One such was stage manager Louis de Courcy, who saved the day in 1972 during the ESB strikes. He managed to secure the loan of generators from stores in the city, ensuring that there would be a supply of electricity so that the show, Hello Dolly, could go on.

In April, the Cecilians held their birthday celebrations in the South Court Hotel, with a gala concert. Following the show, Aidan was inundated with letters and phone calls from those who recalled attending the society's shows as children, and revelled in reliving these memories. As a result of the success, there will be a repeat show in March of next year.

The society are currently preparing for this year's production-42nd Street, which Aidan promises to be a light, fun show for all ages. David Griffin will play the leading man, continuing on the family tradition, as his parents were both active Cecilians.

Summing up the community, social and family ethos behind the society, Joe explains how, on a trip to Marbella with his wife last summer, they ran



into three more couples, who were all Cecilians, and had met through the society.

He explained that this type of ongoing connection was what the society was all about, and that the encounter would surely have made Father Bates smile.

National dance archive at UL

THE University of Limerick has announced the establishment of Ireland's first national dance archive to be based at the Glucksman Library.

The Dance Archive of Ireland will be established through seed funding of €140,000 from the Arts Council and came about through initiatives and a feasibility report carried out by Dance Research Forum Ireland, a body set up in 2003 by Dr Catherine Foley, director of the MA Ethnochoreology and MA Irish Traditional Dance Performance at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at UL.

Ballykeeffe Park status updated

THE director of Environment and Emergency Services, at Limerick County Council, Gerry Behan, revealed that agreement has been reached to transfer the lands at Ballykeeffe Neighbourhood Park and related planning issues, to the council.

Progress will be detailed to councillors at the next meeting of the Adare Electoral Area.

The Nazarene as Teacher

THERE is an open invitation to attend Limerick Philosophical Society's next public lecture in Mary Immaculate College, on Monday, November 30, 8pm. The guest speaker is Dr Frank Flanagan, whose talk 'The Nazarene as Teacher' focuses on Jesus' excellence as a teacher, which "was often obscured by the appeal of his message".

Dr Flanagan will emphasise His method rather than the familiar substance of His teaching as Jesus Christ the Lord.

Demand increases for Lions Christmas Food Appeal

SHANNON and District Lions Club are experiencing more demand than ever this year, as they begin their Christmas Food Appeal for those in need.

In response, the mayor of Shannon has appealed to the public to give what they can to help those in need get through the festive season.

"The club does fantastic work for the needy and I'd ask the public to respond generously, and donate what they can", said Mayor Sean McLoughlin.

The club, which has been running for 27 years, has seen more requests for help in past weeks, according to president Frank Fitzgerald.

He explained that the charity

also helped to fund old folks parties in Sixmilebridge, Shannon, Cratloe and Newmarket-on-Fergus, as well as in Carrigoran House.

"We definitely would have seen more demand this year", Frank told the Post. "We are also involved in helping local charities. Most people who need help over Christmas know that we exist and contact one of our members, or other organisations would point them in our direction".

They will now launch their 'Food Appeal' to ensure that those who need help over the Christmas period will get it.

"Traditionally, we would have collected food to give out over

Christmas, but as times changed we began to fundraise instead, and we buy the likes of food vouchers for supermarkets in the locality".

Fundraising days for Shannon and district Lions club will be held in Skycourt Shopping Centre in Shannon, on December 3 and 4.

The Newcastle West & District Lions Club will also hold a flag day in aid of their local needy on Saturday November 28 in the town.

A Christmas Carol Concert will take place in the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Newcastle West on December 10.