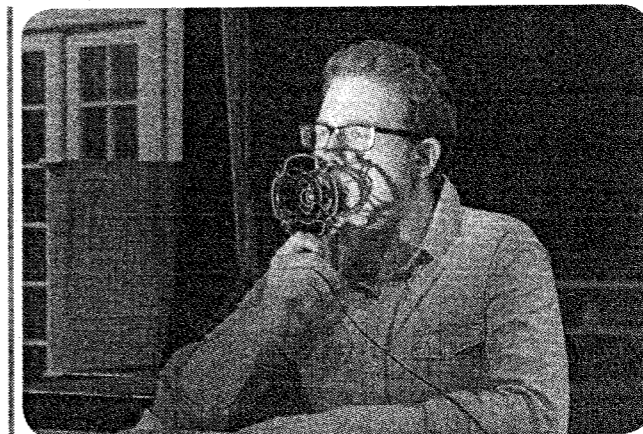
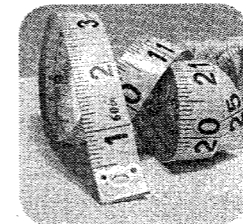


# Leader 2

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## U2's big debt to Limerick

They couldn't sing in tune and had not yet mastered their instruments but U2 had the 'it factor', as Bono recalled of the group's victory at a Limerick band contest in 1978. UL graduate **Grainne O'Brien** tells the story

**T**HE aspiration of the organisers of Limerick Civic Week 1978, was to 'embrace [the] whole community and bring in people from outside it'. The latter mission was certainly achieved when four teenagers from Dublin, Paul Hewson (Bono), Adam Clayton, Larry Mullen and Dave Evans (The Edge) came to Limerick and won the Pop Group '78 competition organised by Junior Chamber Limerick as their contribution to the Civic Week activities.

The Pop Group '78 competition was a new initiative, designed to provide an event which young people might relate to, as a result of feedback that Limerick Civic Week had in prior years become 'too preoccupied with

**"I just remember we hit it. Something goes off in the room...I could tell by everyone's face in the hall that we'd really connected" - The Edge recalls the gig in the Stella**

traditional and classical music.' Junior Chamber Limerick put a proposal for a pop music competition to P.J. Power, the person responsible for the running of Limerick Civic Week, and with the support of Limerick Mayor, Frank Prendergast, Pop Group '78 was included as an event in the 1978 programme. Power, now a successful Limerick property consultant, has since described how: "Discover-

ing U2 will always be on my CV. That was a very special night and another plus for our city." Junior Chamber was given the task of running the event and raising all the necessary funding. The members of the Junior Chamber who made up the Pop '78 committee were Eamonn Walkin, Mary Bradshaw, Ann Hartigan, Teresa Dunne, Yvonne Boucher, Noreen Hickey and P.J. McMahon.

Another of the team who assisted in organising the Pop Group '78 competition was Denis Leonard, a past-president of Junior Chamber Limerick. Denis became the founding chairman of the Limerick Civic Trust in 1983 and, as its director for the next 26 years, he implemented the Trust's vision of the betterment of Limerick for the benefit of its citizens, visitors and future generations.

Sponsorship for the event was secured from Harp Lager and The Evening Press newspaper, and the Bird family agreed to provide the Stella Ballroom on Shannon St., Limerick as the venue for the competition.

The contest was judged by Billy Wall, Head of >>Continued on page 2



Bono, Adam Clayton, The Edge and Larry Mullen as they appeared at the Stella Ballroom in Limerick for the Pop '78 contest as part of Limerick Civic Week 1978. It was the show that really put them on the map for the first time – the rest is rock 'n' roll history!

# U2's unforgettable night in Limerick

>>Continued from page 1

Light Entertainment at RTE, Jackie Hayden, CBS Records, Paul O'Brien, President, Junior Chamber Limerick and Disc Jockey, Mike McNamara.

A total of 36 pop groups entered the competition from around the country and one of these was a five member group from Dublin, initially entered as 'The Hype'. However when they arrived in Limerick they changed the name on their entry to 'U2' and performed under that name for the first time at the Pop Group '78 competition. Mike McNamara later recalled how he 'was brazen enough to tell Bono that name (The Hype) was awful, and he replied they were changing it to U2. I told him that was even worse.'

March 18 1978, the day of the competition, would become known, according to Adam Clayton as: 'the exact moment of becoming U2.' Winning the competition would begin a series of events that would see U2 become the biggest band in the history of pop music. Larry Mullen's said of the competition: 'we had no real idea how winning in Limerick would change our lives.'

Larry tells in U2 by U2 how he almost missed the competition - he and his father arrived at Connolly station at around two o'clock, only to realise the train to Limerick left from Heuston Station at twenty minutes past two.

The boys were joined on the trip by a group of supportive friends. Bono said of the train ride: 'It was very exciting to be on a train with your mates going somewhere to play in front of the music business. It was rock 'n roll.' Adam Clayton's father, Brian, a pilot who was over-nighting in Shannon Airport nearby, also took the opportunity to see them play.

The Edge recalled the group's concerns that the competition would be 'some dreadful amateur free for all'. However it soon became obvious that the calibre of the 'talent competition' was of much higher quality than the boys had anticipated.

However, while acknowledging the skills of the other competitors, Bono later identified what he felt was the difference between U2 and the other groups in the competition:

'There were bands there that could play in time and in tune with great confidence, all of which we couldn't pull off. But you know, some bands have everything but it. We had nothing but it.'

The group played 'a few' original songs though there seems to be some uncertainty as to what they played on the day. The consensus is they played three original numbers, 'Street Missions,' 'The TV Song' and 'Life on a Distant Planet.'

Village, a well-known local group



Bono's brother, Norman Hewson, centre, with Mayor Maria Byrne and Brendan Ryan, Ken O'Callaghan, Guinness and PJ Power at the old Stella Ballroom for the unveiling of the plaque

PICTURE: ADRIAN BUTLER

with a lot of support in the crowd were the early favourites. Describing how U2 were received by the crowd, Dave Evans (The Edge) recalled:

'I just remember we hit it. Sometimes something goes off in the room...I could tell by everyone's face out in the hall that we'd really connected'

On the day they filled the room with an amazing energy, most of the audience comprised of other band members who had performed in the competition and their supporters, word in the hall was these Dublin guys were good...not as good as us...but good... One of the young Limerick people who attended the competition recalled: 'My friends and I agreed that they were by far the best band on the night -- although we never imagined just how far they would go!'

The four boys waited in the audience, with the group of friends who had travelled with them on the train, while the

remaining acts performed. As the four judges huddled to make their adjudications, the friends of the band were more optimistic about their chances of winning than the band themselves. As they waited tensely for the results to be announced the band were hopeful, but never imagined they had won, or even been placed. Surely their use of original material or, perhaps, a home-town bias would be an obstacle to their success?

When the announcement was made by compere Mike McNamara, that U2 were the winners, their seat row exploded, as Adam Clayton described:

'It was just unbelievable that we could have won such a thing. I mean, in the way that you think maybe you can win the lottery or something, that was the way I thought about it. And then to have actually won was just an amazing buzz. I remember grabbing the chair in front of me and slamming it down. I slammed it down on my dad's foot. And he didn't

really know why, because he hadn't realised that we'd actually won.'

The Edge recalled:

'Our row went ballistic. Pod (a friend who had travelled with the boys to the competition) jumped about a foot in the air and landed on top of me, nearly breaking my leg with excitement. Because of the way the competition was run it was more likely we hadn't placed at all, so from the jaws of utter defeat and ignominy we plucked victory. We couldn't believe it. I was completely shocked.'

The Mayor of Limerick, Cllr. Frank Prendergast presented the trophy to the winners and Colm Clarke, the Limerick representative for Guinness presented the £500 cheque. Jackie Hayden of CBS records provided the band with the opportunity to record a demo in a recording studio.

The competition received coverage in one national evening newspaper which

reported the winners as:

'U2 Malahide' made up of 16 year old Larry Mullen of Rosemount Ave. Artane, an Intermediate Cert. Student at Mount Temple, Dave Evans (16) of Ard na Mara, Malahide, Adam Clayton (17) a Leaving Cert student, and Paul Hewson (17) of Ceaderwood Rd. Ballymun, who is also doing his Leaving Cert.'

The press report continued...

In second place were Rockster, also from Dublin and the Limerick group Village were third, the only all-girl group in the contest, Harmony, from Tallaght, Co. Dublin who got an enthusiastic reception, did not place.'

The celebration that evening was somewhat subdued as the boys were all underage to be served alcohol, and therefore could not enter the festival club in the Royal George Hotel, where they were staying overnight. They simply stayed up all night in their rooms, unable to get home because the last

train from Limerick to Dublin had long since departed. They spend the next morning in the local fairground waiting for the train. Adam was elected to pick up the cheque, which he handed over to his father for safe keeping. And that was it, in the context of what they became, a small victory for the boys, but perhaps most importantly it provided a massive boost in self confidence for the band as The Edge recalled:

I've no idea how good we were or what the competition was really like. But to win at that point was incredibly important for morale and everyone's belief in the project.

Prior to 1978 the Limerick Civic Week project had been instrumental in advancing the careers of some of the finest classical musicians, singers and traditional Irish music groups. With its Pop Group '78 competition it was to shape forever the history of popular music.