CHAPTER 1

1890-1904

A MUNICIPAL SCHOOL

Following the successful competition for amateur bands at the Dublin Artizans' Exhibition of 1885, a report on the state of bands in Dublin was prepared and presented in 1887. With the foundation of the technical schools at Kevin Street in 1887, arising from the same Exhibition, it was proposed at a meeting between a number of city bands and Dublin Corporation to found a municipal school of music. The school was founded in 1890 by a grant from the Corporation to the Royal Irish Academy of Music, 36 Westland Row; and continued under the aegis and direction of this body until it was taken over by the City of Dublin Technical Instruction Committee in 1904, and housed in the Assembly Rooms, (now the Dublin Civic Museum), in South William Street, later moving to Chatham Row premises, formerly the Fire Brigade Station.

The City Musicians

The custom of having music for processions and ceremonies of Dublin Corporation was deeply rooted in the city's history. The City Assembly records of 1561 state that the Mayor of Dublin entertained the Lord Lieutenant and the Privy Council at a dinner, following which the Mayor and the City Assembly with the "City Music" accompanied the Lord Lieutenant and Council to Thomas Court by torch-light.

Appointment to the "City Music" was much sought after. Sometimes the group were accused of being very disorderly, quarrelling among themselves, and an order of the Assembly (Corporation) was passed to regulate the city musicians. Their attendance on the Lord Mayor and the magistrates of the city included "the riding of the franchises" as the cavalcade progressed along the city boundaries.

In 1723 the city band were attired in "blue coats and laced hats to be provided by them at their own expense". Nine years later, on complaining of the worn out state of their uniform they were provided with a new set "to be worn when they are obliged to attend the city". The many ceremonial events of the year's calendar called for their services, such as the swearing-in of the Mayor, mentioned in 1600. It can be seen from this that the civic fathers of the past had a band of music whenever and wherever required.

The City Basin, James's Street, having trees and shrubs planted and flower beds and gravelled walks laid out in the early eighteenth century, soon became a popular resort for the people of the city. A candidate in the Parliamentary elections of 1737, Councillor Simon Broadstreet, engaged "a band of music" to play there once a week "for the entertainment of the ladies and gentlemen, and his fellow citizens".

When Ranelagh Gardens were opened in 1767 they became a favourite leisure spot and venue for recitals of both vocal and instrumental music. These gardens were ousted in popularity by the opening of the Rotunda Gardens, which held great sway until the Act of Union, when most of the aristocracy forsook Dublin for London. In
1806 military bands were giving concerts on Sunday evenings on the Mall in Sackville Street, and these bands were also a notable feature of city life.

The Rotunda Gardens in 1790

After 1838, Temperance Societies were established in many parts of Dublin and every society had a band, as a counter-attraction to the public house. There were also many trade union bands and independent bands, and great occasions, such as Daniel O'Connell's Monster meetings or afterwards the O'Connell Centenary celebrations, brought out almost every band. The Workingmen's Clubs in York Street and Wellington Quay had famous bands, and before the age of radio and television being a bandsman was a way of life.

Artizans' Exhibition 1885

The York Street Club Band won first prize in the competition for amateur bands at this Exhibition, and in accordance with a resolution passed during the Exhibition, Mr John O'Donnell, who had organised the contest, prepared a report on "The State of the National Bands of Ireland" which was issued in 1887. Remarking that there were thirty bands in Dublin, the report stated that except for four the bands were being supported by their members and did not have the means to supply good instruments. In some cases in order to pay to repair their instruments, they had to dispense with the services of their teachers. He suggested that an annual band contest be held, with a number of good instruments as prizes. A leader writer in The Freeman's Journal commenting on the suggestion stated that our amateur bands have a place in the life of the country of no mean importance. To thousands they are the only Music.

A proper system of instruction was called for, in addition to a knowledge of music and an appreciation of native airs:

The Orange pipes and drums of the North have absolutely taken possession of that glorious melody, The Boyne Water, the grand old recruiting song of the Wild Geese, An Spailpin Fánach.

The Coulson Bequest

Overlapping with these events was a development which provided a substantial sum of money for music education in Dublin. The Coulson Bequest, created in 1881, in which the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the Lord Mayor and Corporation of Dublin, together with the Executors of Miss Elizabeth Coulson's will were made trustees of a bequest of over £13,000 to found an Academy of Music in Dublin for "the sons and daughters of respectable Irish parents, possessing natural music talent, who may be taught and instructed in instrumental music, and particularly on the piano".

In 1884 Dublin Corporation decided to administer the fund through the existing Royal
Irish Academy of Music; provided it was kept as a separate foundation and the Corporation were given adequate representation on the Council of the Academy. The Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests agreed with this proposal, and gave notice to the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice petitioning sanction for this interpretation of the will. A series of different legal interpretations ensued, and by 1887 the administration of the scheme was still being debated. In October 1889, however, a comprehensive scheme was agreed and sanctioned on the joint administration of the Coulson Bequest by the three principals - the Corporation, the Coulson trustees, and the Academy.

**Foundation of the Municipal School of Music**

Meanwhile a meeting of delegates from the amateur bands of Dublin and suburbs was convened for the Workingmen's Club, York Street, on Sunday, 2 September, 1888. The following bands were represented:

- Workingmen's Club Band (York Street)
- St. James's Band
- Irish National Foresters' Band
- Bricklayers' Band
- Dundrum Band
- Inchicore Band
- St. Kevin's Band (Bray)
- St. Mary's Band (Rathmines)

At this meeting it was decided unanimously to represent to the Corporation "the necessity for an adequate provision being made for the instruction of the members of the bands out of the funds which will be placed at the disposal of the Governing Body of the Royal Irish Academy and the Coulson Bequest under the new scheme of management of these funds".

The meeting was followed by a deputation of protest on behalf of the bands to the Municipal Council. The spokesman of the deputation, which was received by the Corporation on 10th September, 1888, was Mr John O'Donnell, who pointed out that there were over a thousand young men in the city and county of Dublin who were members of amateur bands practising wind instruments; and added that the "Academy of Music has all through studiously ignored this class. What the Council has done is this: they have kept up a wind instrument class...for such pupils as could attend from 10a.m. to 12 noon - hours during which no working man could attend". He urged the Lord Mayor "and the gentlemen of the Corporation who are members of the new governing body of the Academy to interfere energetically in the management".

The Municipal Corporation, as constituted in 1888, was not interested in furthering Workingmen's Bands, and merely referred the matter to their representatives on the group of trustees for the Coulson Bequest set up by the Vice-Chancellor's Scheme of 1886. However, O'Donnell's representations to the Educational Endowments Commission then sitting, apparently had the curious effect of inducing the Council of the Academy to solicit an annual subsidy "to the purposes of Musical Instruction at moderate charges in the Municipal School of Music", of which the Governors would be the Governors of the Academy, and in which members of the organised city bands would be taught at reduced fees. Neither pianoforte nor stringed instruments would be taught at the Municipal School, which
the Academy suggested should be housed in the Assembly Rooms at South William Street, as noted in the following Corporation report of 1890:

To the Right Honorable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Burgesses of Dublin

Submitting suggestions received from the Governors of the Royal Irish Academy of Music for the application of the sum of £300, included in the Estimates for the current year, to the purposes of Musical Instruction at moderate charges in a Municipal School of Music.

We beg to report having received from the Governors of the Royal Irish Academy of Music the following proposal for the establishment of a Municipal School of Music, towards the support of which might be applied the vote of £300 included in the Estimates for the current year viz:-

Suggestions for Musical Instruction in the Dublin Municipal School of Music, in connection with the Royal Irish Academy of Music.

1. Governing Body to consist of the Governors of the R.I.A.M.
2. Pianoforte and Organ not to be taught.
3. Singing not to be taught.
4. String instruments to be taught at the Academy.
5. Wind and Percussion instruments to be taught in the Assembly Rooms, William Street.
6. Teachers to be appointed as may be required.
7. Moderate scale of Fees to be charged.
8. Members of Trade or other Bands not being supported out of Public Funds to be taught at reduced rates.
9. The best performers to be selected from the City Bands and other Pupils, to be formed into a band.
10. Such instruments as are required for performing and instruction may be purchased or hired and kept in William Street under the control of the Governors. Pupils and Members of Bands may provide their own instruments, or purchase them on an instalment system to be established by the Governors.
11. Music for Bands to be kept in William Street, or in the Academy, and to be under control of Governors.
12. Register of all Pupils to be kept at the Academy; and also of Pupils taught there, in William Street.
13. Remuneration may be given to Officers and Servants of the Academy for extra duties.
14. Pupils and Members of Bands shall sign an undertaking to abide by all orders of Governors on entering the School. Disobedience of orders to be cause of removal.
15. The School Session to coincide with the Academy Session.

Assembly Rooms, 58 South William Street, now the Dublin Civic Museum

The Musical Journey 1890–1993

The Freeman's Journal, 6th October, 1890
It is for the Municipal Council to decide whether the scheme meets with their approval, or whether it should be amended in any particular, and we therefore beg to submit the matter for your consideration.

All which we beg to submit as our report this first day of July, 1890.

James Shanks
Chairman
Finance and Leases Committee

The Corporation agreed to these proposals and the School opened on 15th October 1890. The report for 1890 of the Royal Irish Academy of Music gave the first annual report of the Municipal School of Music, noting that some time must elapse before any important results can be expected, as efficiency is to be attained only after a considerable period of study. The pupils are increasing in numbers, and the citizens of Dublin, it is hoped, will, at no distant date, reap advantage from the expenditure of their funds.

The reports of the Royal Irish Academy of Music provide fascinating insight into the development of the fledgling Municipal School of Music.

The School made steady progress, as evidenced by the Academy’s 1891 report:

The classes in the Municipal School have been very well attended, the number of pupils being, in each class, as follows:

- Piccolo: 3
- Flute: 6
- Oboe: 1
- Clarinet: 11
- Cornet: 16
- Sax Horn: 11
- Trombone: 2
- Drum: 3
- Tonic Sol-fa: 36

By 1893 it was reported:

A class for teaching singing by the Tonic Sol-fa method has been established under Mr W.H. Nesbitt, and is doing steady work. The following are the numbers attending the various classes in the Municipal School:

- Piccolo: 4
- Flute: 6
- Oboe: 4
- Clarinet: 12
- Cornet: 13
- French Horn: 2
- Sax Horn: 10
- Trombone: 3
- Bombardon: 3
- Drum: 9
- Tonic Sol-fa: 36

A Municipal Band

The 1895 report included a proposal to establish a Municipal Band:

The Governors are in a position to report that both the instrumental classes and the Tonic Sol-Fa class are now larger than they have been since the formation of the School; the pupils learning instruments now number 75, and the Tonic Sol-Fa class 33, in all 108. The Governors are further desirous of having a successful Municipal Band constituted at as early a date as possible, believing that this will have the effect of bringing together the most promising material in the city, for the purpose of carrying out the object which the Corporation have at heart.

The 1897 report showed the involvement of the School in the newly-founded Feis Ceoil:

An effort was made to establish a Municipal Band, but in consequence of the irregular attendance of pupils at combined practice, it was found impossible to establish it with any hope of success. Nevertheless, the School is doing excellent work in advancing and encouraging the culture of musical education on the part of those who perform in the City Bands and elsewhere. At the recent Feis Ceoil 22 pupils played solo parts and some were prize-winners. The Tonic Sol-Fa class is doing good work.
The 1898 report, though again noting it had been impossible to form a Municipal Band, stated:

Most encouraging improvement has taken place in several of the City Bands whose members have availed themselves of the teaching of the School. The Tonic Sol-Fa class is doing good work, but it is hardly appreciated as widely as it deserves by the class for whose instruction it was instituted.

String Classes
In 1899 it was reported that attendance at the School for the previous year had been 105, and that both a bugle and a violin class had formed. In addition it was noted:

During the summer season the Committee authorised the Bands to give performances in the City Parks and Recreation Grounds, which were much appreciated by the citizens.

In 1900 the violin class comprised 21 pupils, and overall attendance at the School had increased to 125:

Separate Professors of the Drum and Bugle have been appointed, in the room of the late Mr Trundle, whose demise the Governors much deplore. He was an excellent teacher of both instruments; and a faithful officer of the Board.

The Board of Governors considered it advisable to grant Certificates to Prize-winners in the School, and having consulted with the Lord Mayor, Sir Thomas D. Pile, Bart., he agreed to preside at a meeting in the Mansion House, and distributed the Certificates to Prize-winners in the School on Saturday evening, 25th January, 1902.

The pupils of the School, assisted by some of the R.I.A.M. Pupils, and the Band of the Workingmen's Club, 41 York Street, rendered a programme of music during the evening in a manner alike creditable to themselves and their Professors. The Club Band is recruited to a large extent from the Municipal School.

By 1902 the violin class had increased to 42.

The number on the register in September term, 1902, is as follows:

- Piccolo: 2
- Flute: 8
- Oboe: 5
- Clarinet: 24
- Horn, Cornet, Euphonium and Bombardon: 47
- Drums: 27
- Violin: 42
- Violoncello: 2
- Tonic Sol-Fa: 9
- Bassoon: 1
- Slide Trombone: 4
- Fifes: 34

Total: 205

At the end of the year 1901, the Board resolved to give a Challenge Shield, value £20, and a cash prize of £10, to be contested by the City Bands, which were accordingly competed for in the year 1902.

Classes in the Theory of Music were also instituted during the year 1902, and the consequent improvement in the intelligent rendering by the pupils of their parts has been very marked.

Premises
The provision of suitable premises was a constant problem – one that endures to the present day. One of the first official reports makes special reference to that matter:
Dublin Castle,
29th May, 1903

Sir,
I am directed by the Lord Lieutenant to transmit to you, for the information of the Governors of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, a copy of the Report of the Inspector in connection with Scheme, No. 39, under the Educational Endowments (Ireland) Act, 1885.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant
J.B. Dougherty

The Secretary,
Royal Irish Academy of Music,
36 Westland Row

Report of Inspection of the Royal Irish Academy of Music

Your Excellency,

I have the honour to submit for your Excellency’s consideration the result of my inspection of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, Westland Row. I have also inspected the Municipal School of Music, where there are now 139 pupils in attendance, and in every Department good work is being done: this remark applies especially to the Violin Class, upon which Mr Darley has reported very favourably. Since last year a class for “Theory of Music,” under Mr Weaving has been established, and every pupil must pass in this important subject.

I drew attention last year to the wretched cellar in which Mr Mitchell had to teach his class. I understand that the Municipal Authorities promised to make some improvement, but nothing has been done beyond allowing the temporary use of a room, which may, at any moment, be required when a distraint for rent occurs in the City, and the space is needed for storage purposes. Mr Mitchell is then ejected, and his drum and fife class resumes its studies in a flagged passage, badly lighted and fireless. I am sure, if the Corporation realised the discomforts which he and his class endure, they would do something to alleviate them.

The lighting of each room would be greatly improved by substituting mantle burners for the present naked gas-lights.

I would also suggest that some scheme of prizes, however small, should be instituted in connection with this School for the encouragement of the pupils.

L. Edward Steele, Inspector
His Excellency,
The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland