

THE MORTIMER MEDAL

LAST YEAR SAW THE INAUGURAL PRESENTATION OF THE MORTIMER MEDAL in honour of the late Harry Mortimer C.B.E., to be awarded in recognition of outstanding service in the development of young brass players. At the annual dinner this honour was awarded to Nigel Boddice for his work North of the Border at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and with the West Lothian Schools Brass Band, who currently enjoy Scottish, British and European Championship status.

Nigel Boddice A.R.A.M. was appointed principal trumpet with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in 1975 following three years of study with the late William Overton at the Royal Academy of Music and a brief spell with the London Festival Ballet... as a trumpeter! The highlights with the BBCSSO included far flung tours to Hong Kong, Canada and Europe, the 1990 season of the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts where Nigel was featured as soloist alongside David Owen Norris in the Shostakovich piano and trumpet concerto, and the honour of being the dedicatee of a trumpet concerto commissioned by BBC Scotland from the composer John Hearne.

In the early years in Scotland, spare time activities were dedicated to conducting brass bands, notably Clydebank, Scottish C.W.S. and Newtongrange and summer holidays were given over to the National Youth Brass Band of Scotland organisation. It was a way of giving back a little to the movement that had provided the background for a professional career. Nigel was from Church Gresley, South Derbyshire, where he was taught to play the cornet by his father and grandfather (who incidentally was a colleague of HM at one time) and from where he went on to become the leader of the National Youth Band of Great Britain.

In 1978 a significant development came with an invitation to teach at the R.S.A.M.D. where Nigel has had the opportunity to work closely with ambitious young musicians, many of whom have gone on to professional careers, both as players and teachers. In fact these days many a pupil of a former pupil arrives in Glasgow seeking help (which can come as a wee bit of a shock!).

Twelve years ago, a casual telephoned invitation to conduct a weekend course in Linlithgow for the West Lothian Education authorities was then an unknown (but soon to become) major change in career direction. The success of that first engagement led to regular visits and has developed now into an organisation which enjoys an International reputation. This year alone, the sixty strong band have retained their National titles, cut their first CD called "Cartoon" on the Polyphonic label featuring former cornetist Angela Whelan (one of the representatives chosen to be featured by the Worshipful Company of Musicians in the Wigmore Hall recital series), recorded for the BBC Radio 2 programme 'Listen to the Band', and above all represented Europe in the International Youth Festival in Sydney, Australia.

Each year young hopefuls from all schools in West Lothian, usually between the age of 11 and 15, seek an audition and all are heard by the conductor and a representative from the peripatetic staff. On entry, they then spend two or three years sitting amongst the senior players, until, through the upper age limit restrictions, they then get their chance to accept and take the responsible positions. Of course, it is not always that simple, but it is loosely based on the old fashioned apprenticeship scheme where youngsters served their time with the experienced and skilled. Progress is always monitored and individual potential allowed to blossom. The youngsters are actively encouraged to listen and partake in all forms of music and the repertoire they are set reflects the widest possible range of composers and styles. An acknowledgement must also be made to the adult bands in the area who have supported the scheme favourably over the years and to whom most of the children play during and on leaving the West Lothian Band. There is a real sense of community give and take, and all concerned seem to benefit.

So far, the teaching in individual schools in West Lothian (formerly joined together with all Lothian districts and based in Edinburgh) has been free, and the commitment to the



The author, Nigel Boddice. Photo: McMillan Photography

peripatetic system has been enormous (640 instrumental teachers in the Lothian region before the 1996 area break up). The worry now is whether this ideal will be financially possible to continue in its present form. Therefore, fine ensembles across the wider musical spectrum such as the Youth Orchestra, the Jazz Band, The Symphonic Wind Band, and the Fiddle Orchestra will be put under pressure both from the continuation and standards question. Other Scottish authorities, albeit reluctantly, have axed significant groups; for example, the Carrick Youth Band from the old Strathclyde region and a vibrant youth orchestra from the former central region. It is to the credit of Lothian, and now West Lothian, that they have resisted the use of the axe and were recognised themselves recently with the presentation of a National Music Award for their belief in a full musical educational programme.

As to the future, Nigel Boddice will concentrate on his conducting career, having relinquished his chair in the BBCSSO after more than twenty years of distinguished service. In the last eighteen months he has made his debuts with the Ulster Orchestra in two educational concerts, the BBCSSO in the "War Requiem", soon to be released on a Naxos CD, and at the R.S.A.M.D. There have been invitations to conduct the Highland Region Youth Orchestra and Glasgow University's gifted Kelvin Ensemble. He has accepted the position of conductor in residence at the Aberdeen International Youth Festival and in the future will commute to Norway to appear regularly with Kongsliche Norges Marine Musikken. There are plans to tour Sweden in 1997 and an invitation to conduct a series of string orchestra concerts in Armenia.

Nigel hopes that the future will give adequate opportunity for all inspired and aspiring young musicians to have the chance to work with the finest musicians possible. He himself remembers, with much feeling, the legendary Harry Mortimer and his brothers Alec and Rex taking and paying special attention to him whenever their paths crossed. He recognises that we who can put so much back into the system must find the political, financial and artistic goodwill to take the initiative whatever and whenever possible.

The Mortimer Medal was widely appreciated in Scotland upon hearing last year's announcement, and sincere appreciation is acknowledged to Margaret Mortimer and the Worshipful Company of Musicians for the 'bombshell' news to a surprised, overwhelmed but nevertheless proud recipient Nigel Boddice.