



Which music store shares its birthday with Mozart?  
Nicola Bland finds out!

# A musical hub

**There can be few retailers in their third** century of business that have ridden recessions, depressions, changing times, wars, evolving societal needs and emerging cultural requirements. Just thinking about the concept of a Company surviving to trade into its third century, in this day and age of economic maelstrom, challenges credulity.

Yet one exists; deep in the heart of historic York, in the old quarter at 18 Lendal Street can be found the modern-day incarnation of the 254-year old Banks Music. With over 10,000 square feet of retail space spread across three floors and 25 music professionals with over 150 years of combined experience, Banks Music has one of the largest selections of musical instruments, accessories, sheet music, examination material, tutor methods and instructional DVDs available in the world. It also houses a specialist classical CD department, and a dedicated digital and stage piano showroom.

Established in 1756, the Company now falls under the auspices of the Music and Print Group, which purports to offer the world's largest selection of sheet music, books about music, tuition books, music software, musical instruments and accessories!

Until five years ago when it was bought by Music and Print, Banks had retained its status as a family-run business. Today, the business upholds that proud heritage whilst embracing the future, as a stroll around its prestigious shop at 18 Lendal Street will confirm.

The ground floor is dedicated to electronic guitars, drums, keyboards and synthesisers – in essence everything needed to record music, whilst

the lower ground floor houses one of the biggest Roland and Yamaha digital piano studios in the country. The mezzanine floor is a bespoke classical guitar studio stocking models ranging from £250 to several thousands of pounds, after which you'll hit the classical floor accommodating one of the biggest sheet music collections around for wind band, brass band, dance band, ensemble and instrumental music, including GCSE A-Level and further education music, primary school resources, examination syllabus material for all the main examining boards, as well as school ensemble, orchestra and flexible ensemble music. There is also a wide range of woodwind and brass instruments to choose from, plus an incredible classical CD collection of 7,000 titles embracing classical, jazz, opera, easy listening and DVDs, representing over 200 labels.

Said Commercial Manager, Ben Robinson: "We stock over 2,000 titles in our brass band catalogue and it's constantly being up-dated. Everything you need to set up an ensemble can be found here, and we also provide a piano for customers to try before buying."

Although Banks didn't major on retailing brass band instruments in the past, recent developments have seen its sales of them increase dramatically, which Ben believes is due to the tiptop in-store customer service offered. So the first floor now displays most major makes and models including Artemis, Besson, Trevor James, Yamaha, Jupiter and Odyssey. Finance and interest-free credit programmes are in place too,

and if what you want isn't in stock, Banks will source it for you. Some of the offers are tempting – when I visited the store, a Xeno cornet was being sold at Internet prices, backed by the reassurance of after sales customer care.

Aside from the store's incredible selection of merchandise for every genre of music, the jewel in Banks' crown is its staff – all experienced and transparently passionate about music, and with the skills to guide customers every step of the way from 'novice-hood' to a virtuosic performance. Said Ben Robinson: "Customers of any level, standard and instrument can come to us and know that we will help them expertly." For example, John Cocker, who spent 30 years in military music, is the brass band sheet music specialist – what he doesn't know about music for the brass band, soloist or



Ben Robinson in the brass-wind section

ensemble isn't worth recording on a postage stamp and he's regularly asked to draw up concert programmes for bands, package it up and post it off. If Banks doesn't stock a particular piece of music, John knows where to source it!

Banks also hosts regular in-store workshops and master classes with free repairs by trumpet designer / master craftsman, Peter Pollard. So far this year they've staged a Denis Wick mouthpiece and accessory session, a trumpet master class hosted by Mark Gillbanks and a Yamaha Neo Tenor Horn workshop. The first Saturday in December (4th) saw the launch of the Odyssey Premiere range of student instruments, designed in conjunction with Peter Pollard and manufactured by the Leeds-based J. Hornby Skewes. (See page 45 in our reviews section to learn more about the range).

Summarising, Ben Robinson commented: "We don't want to be just a store, but a hub of music. We want to create a musical experience for people. 2011 will be a fantastic year – we have so many events planned covering every single aspect of music, to continue building Banks reputation as a centre for music." ■