

Salvationists was a sight to behold and one rarely if ever seen on the streets in Rome.

The Saturday evening 'Festival of Praise' took place following the march in a real atmosphere of excitement and celebration. Highlights included a beautiful rendition in Chinese of the song *You Raise Me Up*, sung by Yuze He, Congolese refugee bongo players performing with great passion, and a combined band and bongo rendition of Pharrell William's *Happy* that triggered a spontaneous glory march cum conga that included most of the congregation and even the General and his entourage. Musically the band also contributed to the evening with the exciting *Starburst* (Dan Price), *Almighty* (Roger Trigg), *To Boldly Go* (Peter Graham), the reflective *Wells* (Sam Creamer) and the cinematic *Glory Hallelujah* (Kevin Larsson). The timbrels then combined with the band for a big finale showpiece in Peter Graham's *Lord of the Dance*, which included an

exquisite rendition of the middle movement, *Lament*, featuring John Starkes on euphonium, that led to rapturous cheers and applause at the end of an amazing and inspiring day.

After some well-deserved food, rest and sleep, Sunday morning saw Boscombe Band enhanced with several members of the Italian Command Band joining us to play *Amen, Amen!* (Brian Bowen) and *Guardian of my Soul* (Darren Shaw), before the final Holiness meeting. We also witnessed the commissioning of a new officer (Captain Maria Catalanotto) after a powerful and passionate rendition of *Procession to Covenant* (William Himes). The General spoke about mobilising for God in a sermon that challenged British and Italian Salvationists alike, and the combination of an emotionally charged appeal and the beautiful singing of *The Spirit of the Lord* by Ayoung Lee saw large numbers of seekers flocking to the mercy seat. At the conclusion of the meeting,

General Andre Cox was invited by Bandmaster Howard Evans to conduct the band in the march *Victors Acclaimed*, which he gladly accepted and led in a stately rendition of Albert Jakeway's music.

During the final meeting of the weekend, the officer thanking the band and timbrels for their contribution, spoke the following words of appreciation: "In a situation where translation could have been a challenge, you proved that music is a language beyond words." This must be our motivation as Boscombe Band moving forward, that wherever we find ourselves, the music and message must speak clearly and truly of our love of Jesus and the desire to bring others into his Kingdom. Although our musical message blessed the Italians, I'm sure every member of our band and timbrels would attest that we took much more blessing and inspiration back to the UK with us to serve him with renewed vigour into the future.

## OVERWHELMING PURSUIT OF PRAISE AS VENABRASS VISITS MALAWI Marcus Venables reports

On 27 September, Venabrass travelled halfway around the world to support the music ministry at the Territorial Congress and Commissioning in Malawi. Venabrass is a small Salvation Army brass ensemble made up primarily of the Venables family, with a supporting player or two. Based out of Toronto, Canadian Salvationist Robert Venables and his four sons, Barrington, Brindley (now based in New York), Harrison and myself, along with our good friend Cameron Rawlins, were privileged to be sent by the Canada and Bermuda Territory as musical support. The group was accompanied by Majors Chris and Tina Rideout, who represented the group as the executive officers. Malawi is one of Canada and Bermuda's partner territories and has been giving support for a number of years.

Upon arrival, we went right into action at a joint rehearsal with the Malawi Territorial Band. Bandmaster Charles Chimimba, who was a delegate the previous summer at the Leadership Development Institute in Toronto, led the rehearsal. We walked into the rehearsal venue to find a couple of hundred children hanging around. It would seem most of them had spent the night there sleeping on the floors, using whatever they had for beds and blankets. As soon as the rehearsal started, the young people all came to the front of the hall to listen. This rehearsal would be their morning entertainment. I had a thought-provoking moment when I looked at some of the instruments the band was using. Forget about

working slides and triggers, some of these instruments had a mud-like formula to seal the cracks and holes, making it work with whatever they have available.

The special guests for the congress weekend were General André Cox and Commissioner Silvia Cox. Venabrass was featured by playing a selection at each of the services. Over the years we have built up a vast amount of sextet arrangements of some SA standards. The items played over the weekend included *Milestone*, *Celebration*, *Lightwalk*, *Laudate Dominum*, and others. Cheers and applause would start at any moment during a performance, so it was clear that people were thrilled to experience the music.

An all-female Salvation Army brass band from South Africa was also participating in the services. It is a fantastic group full of energy. The full band joined alongside the Territorial Band and Venabrass for a number of the services for both song accompaniments and selections. Even though not everyone understood the same language or had ever played together before, the band was able to play in harmony and accompany the congregation in singing.

On the Sunday morning, there was a march of witness with over a couple of thousand Salvationists. As Venabrass was preparing, the assumption was that we would be using tune books. However, as soon as we got to

the starting point and looked around, it was clear this was going to be an *ad lib* march since no one else had any music. At one point, Venabrass played the march *Montreal Citadel* from memory, and the others in the band joined in without ever having played it before. One particular moment that made us all realise what we take for granted was seeing the snare drummer using small tree branches he had just picked to play the drum. After seeing this, Harrison (the Venabrass drummer) decided to gift his drum sticks to the young man. This was a simple yet meaningful moment.

As I reflect on this trip, I am struck by the overwhelming pursuit of praise by the Malawi Salvationists. The way in which they find joy in worship is outstanding. It really makes me wish that our lavish lifestyle would be matched by our praise and joy. The gratitude we have for our circumstances is often hidden as we face minor problems in the grand scheme of things. Rather we should be bursting with praise and passing that on to as many others as we can. I pray that the people Venabrass connected with while in Malawi would feel encouraged and inspired by our music making, that they may remember playing alongside us and be encouraged by those shared moments together in the days ahead. I know the entire group was blessed by the ministry and interactions we had. This trip will serve as a reminder of what we have to be thankful for. May it push us to give more in service, and pass on a joyful spirit of praise in the days ahead.