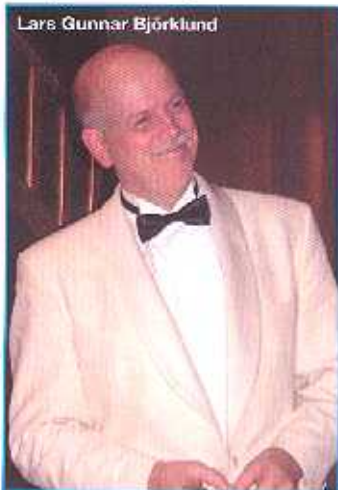


**AS Sweden prepares for its annual brass band Championships next weekend, GRAHAM CROOKSTON looks at recent developments that are strengthening brass bands there.**

THEY SAY that ill winds blow no good and this is especially true of the town of Värnamo in southern Sweden. Last winter's storm, Gudrun, with its hurricane force winds, devastated vast areas of forest around the town, leaving huge areas of destruction. Next weekend, however, new life and a more positive blast is expected as the elite of Swedish banding storms the town. Värnamo, over the last few years, has become the annual home of the Swedish Brassband Festival.

The first ideas for a brass festival emerged in the early 1980's and the first Swedish Championships were won by Solna Brass in 1982. Since then, it has been a cycle of hot and cold, with some periods of high activity and others of total disinterest. Since the mid-1990s, however, there have been intensive efforts to re-establish a stable base for a festive brass occasion and, over the past few years, a format has been created which has captured the interest of most brass band-loving Swedes. International connections have always been important in keeping Swedish banding in line with European developments and the support given by the neighbouring Nordic countries has been of particular assistance. The late Herbert Möller was a long-standing champion of banding in Sweden. Since his passing, the role as advisor to the Brassband Festival Committee has been taken over by Tom Brevik.

In recent years a conscious effort has been made to focus on youth and education in an attempt to increase interest in brass playing. This year is no exception. The



Lars Gunnar Björklund

popular Minibrass camp has been a vital step in the improvement and it is encouraging to see many of the talented younger players now taking up positions in the more experienced senior bands.

In an effort to support growth in the movement, this year's festival opens on Friday afternoon (11th) with a masterclass for brass teachers and students with the unusual title, 'Of course, I'll play the baritone!' The aim is to give advice and support to brass instructors and provide insight into the music and materials that can be used in teaching student groups, from trios to full orchestras. The international character of the festival is set from the beginning, with the seminar being led by the Norwegians, Tom Brevik and Sissel Larsen, aided by Werner Youth Brass. As a finale to the afternoon's event, Solna Brass, under the leadership of Lars-Gunnar Björklund, will perform in the Festival's opening concert.

The evening will close with the Minibrass contest, with the players

in the five competing bands all under 15 years old.

Saturday's event is dominated by the contests in the three main classes. This year sees a change in format in the competition for the Championship bands, with a more substantial test-piece, George Lloyd's Royal Parks, to be included as part of an otherwise free 30-minute programme. Adjudicating is the international trio of Jappie Dijkstra, Alan Morrison and Mogens Andreassen.

Gothenburg Brass Band has dominated the scene over the last few years, having won on every occasion since the turn of the century. Fresh from its tour of the USA, Gothenburg should be in spanking form and must once again be regarded as favourite to take home the title with Professor Bengt Eklund's enthusiastic and expert leadership marking the way.

Solna Brass has, over the last few years, suffered the frustration of being pipped at the post by Gothenburg in some very close run contests. In an effort to add a little more edge to its playing, Solna succeeded earlier this year in attracting James Watson to an intensive and rewarding training weekend. Lately, however, the band has suffered some setbacks in its preparation for the competition, with a number of unexpected illnesses giving Lars-Gunnar Björklund a somewhat shaky build-up.



Solna Brass

An exciting new addition to the brass band scene this year is the formation of another Gothenburg based group, the Windcorp Brass Band. With the aim of bringing bandmen from southern Sweden together into this new brass band, it is expected that this will add a new dimension to a competition

Himes as part of their programme.

This year's gala concert offers some of the best brass music available. Leading the occasion will be last year's Swedish Champion band, Gothenburg which, since its previous appearance in Värnamo has completed tours to USA, Australia and New Zealand, where

## Winds of change blowing through Swedish banding

normally dominated by the duel between Gothenburg and Solna. The members of the new band are experienced brass band players and a high level of playing is now expected, as on the previous occasions they have come together.

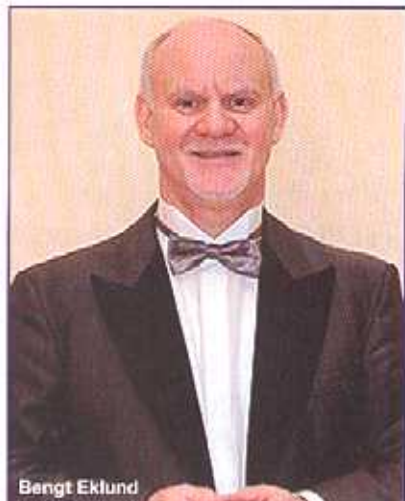
The band is conducted by Alexander Hanson, a rising star with a long family tradition of banding in The Salvation Army. At an early age, he learned to play the cornet and later has studied conducting at the Sibelius Academy. His father, Torgny, well-known both as an adjudicator and a conductor, will adjudicate in the Lower Section competitions.

Completing the field of five bands are Bethlehem's Church Brass Band, also from Gothenburg, and Malmö Brass Band. Although neither can be regarded as favourites, they are capable, on the right occasion, of splitting the top three.

Ten bands will battle out the B class with their 25-minute programme that will include Appalachian Mountain Folk Song Suite, by James Curnow. The smaller C class, with four bands competing, including two youth bands that have progressed from the Minibrass section, will compete with a Prayer of Thanksgiving by William

it managed to snap up the title of New Zealand Champion. The highlight of the concert, however, will be the appearance of Canadian Brass, making a quick detour from its British tour to entertain the expectant Swedish audience.

A truly international flavour then is on offer from the team led by Festival President, Arne Nordström. With the support from regional and local councils and a strong voluntary force of local band enthusiasts, it is difficult to see any other outcome than the quiet little Swedish town being blown away by more enthralling winds than last winter.



Bengt Eklund