

American musical instruments live on in Iraq

Soldier coordinates drive to assist ceremonial band

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For Linda Horn, the two trombones that her husband and son played throughout their high school and college years are made of more than just brass – in their slides and bells they hold happy memories of band concerts, football games and afternoons spent filling her home with music.

Come September, the Horn family trombones and the legacy of the life breathed into them will travel halfway across the world into the hands of an Iraqi Ceremonial Band member.

“These instruments have blessed our family through the years and I pray that they’ll be a blessing to the Iraqi people,” Horn said.

It was the familiar tune of the Colonel Bogey March that filled the Iraqi air a fateful day in February that made Lt. Col. Cheryl McAuley take note. Having never heard an Iraqi band before, McAuley listened attentively to the Iraqi Ceremonial Band proudly play their national anthem and other traditional marches for Iraqi leadership at a graduation of new Iraqi soldiers, immediately feeling a bond with the musicians in her midst.



Courtesy photo

ALLIES— Lt. Col. Cheryl McAuley stands with Brig. Gen. Jabbar N. Karam of the Iraqi War College staff, who is helping McAuley coordinate Adopt-a-Band from the Iraqi side. Karam is the first Iraqi officer to attend the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pa., of which McAuley is a 2005 graduate. Karam is a 2006 graduate of the college.

“Music is universal,” said McAuley, whose first degree is in piano performance. “The idea that it’s coming from within, that you’re breathing life into the instrument. It just encompasses all of your senses. There’s just a thrill about music. It binds people together.”

After speaking with the musicians that brought such a smile to her face, McAuley learned that the war-torn country’s premiere military band was in need of help. Their instruments were old, worn out. Being in a war zone, they couldn’t get the basic supplies needed to make music, such

as reeds and valve oil. Their plight continued to tug on McAuley’s heartstrings after she returned home to the States.

“When I left Iraq, Iraq didn’t leave me,” said McAuley, who oversaw 4,000 interpreters during her deployment. “I think daily about the Iraqis that are there who are working to make a difference.”

So McAuley put the call out to her musician friends from across the country raising awareness of the needs of the 38-member band. With the help of Brig. Gen. Jabbar N. Karam, a member of the Iraqi War College staff, they determined a list of instruments needed and she began taking donations, both instrumental and monetary, from the Huntsville community, and across the country. Today, McAuley and company have 18 instruments down, 19 more to go.

“It’s a way for Americans to make a difference,” McAuley said. “They can send something that’s tangible that will be an enduring gift that can live on.”

After McAuley and her husband John collect the instruments, Bob Baccus, director of Old Towne Brass, looks into what repairs may need to be done to get the instruments ready for their new owners. McAuley and her husband will drive the instruments to Virginia in September. From there they will travel to Baghdad into the hands of the band, where the instruments that were once part and parcel of an American musician’s life will play for the most important moments in Iraqi military life.

“Each instrument is coming from a family and people that are willing to part with a piece of their family history and

give it to a complete stranger,” McAuley said. “These are good neighbors. We really need to take care of each other. We’re only given so much time on this earth and we’ve got to do something with it.”

While McAuley will not be there to hear the first notes the band plays with their new instruments, having felt the warmth of a genuine Iraqi smile during her deployment, McAuley can imagine their grateful reactions. With their hands over their hearts, they will say “shukran.”

Translation: thank you.

How to help the cause

If you would like to donate an instrument to Adopt-a-Band, the following instruments are still needed: 2 tuba, 2 euphonium, 2 french horn, 2 tenor saxophones, 2 bass trombone, 2 snare drum, 1 bassoon, 1 piccolo, 1 E-flat clarinet, 4 trumpets.

Any extra instrument donations will go to the Iraqi Music School.

Cash donations, tax deductible, are also being accepted to help offset the cost of any needed instrument repairs and instrument supplies, as well of the purchase of any secondhand instruments that may still be needed.

Send donations to: Adopt-a-Band, c/o Cheryl McAuley, P.O. Box 441, New Market, AL 35761. Checks may be made payable to New Market United Methodist Church; put “Adopt a Band” in the blank at the check’s lower left.