

MUSIC AND SPECTACLE

Band Contest at Christchurch

MORE than twelve hundred bandsmen carrying brass, silver and gold instruments to the value of about £15,000, have Christchurch as their destination for the week February 19 to 25, when the New Zealand Band Contest will be held in the capital of centennial-celebrating Canterbury.

The twelve hundred bandsmen represent an entry of forty-four bands, from towns as far apart as Auckland and Invercargill. To prepare themselves for this competition they have rehearsed four nights a week for months, and in some cases have given their week-ends to practice as well. They have found themselves uniforms worth £15,000, and they have raised about the same amount to pay for their travel and boarding expenses.

If past contests are any criterion, the Christchurch public will not be slow to welcome the bands and show their appreciation by attending the different sections of the contest. At the Victory Band Contest in 1946, 46,000 people paid admission during the week. On the Saturday, 20,000 watched the Quickstep, an event in which New Zealand bands shine particularly.

TRADITION IN BRASS

NEW ZEALAND is brass band minded. The public, in the absence of Lord Mayors' Shows, Troopings of the Colour, or Battles of Flowers, has chosen to satisfy its desire for spectacle with band contests. New Zealand Band Association Contest Committees, which are usually chaired by the Mayor of the town in which the contest is held, know, after long experience of contest organisation, that they have to serve three masters: music, spectacle and the public. All have been faithfully and ardently served over the years.

The Listener had a talk about it with L. C. Travers, of Wellington, who has long interested himself in bands and band music.

"No other New Zealand musical body is as well organised as the Brass Band Association," Mr. Travers said. "We have a well-established tradition of players becoming sympathetic and efficient administrators, and also of players developing into first-class conductors. R. J. Estall played as a boy with Jupp's Band in Wellington, then joined the Woolston Band, with which he has been associated for 53 years. He has risen from the ranks to become one of the highest rated band conductors in the Commonwealth."

After talking with Mr. Travers, and seeing part of his collection of cuttings, it was possible to get a better idea of the number of men like Mr. Estall whose association with bands goes back a surprising number of years. The brass band is incontestably New Zealand's pioneer form of musical expression, and references to band music can be read in early diaries and letters written almost as soon as the colony was settled.

MUSIC OF THE PIONEERS

NOR was the music of low quality. Samuel Stephens, whose volumes of *Journals and Letters* are well-known to historians, was struck by the ability of a band he heard in Auckland, which did something to compensate for the enervating climate he found there. "The music was very superior," he wrote, "and it really was a treat for me to hear it, as I had not heard a military band since I left England. . . . On the way I just escaped a drenching from a heavy

shower. There is certainly a great quantity of rain which falls at this place, and the humidity is excessive and very disagreeable and relaxing."

Further south, in the Hutt Valley, the residents came together during the week-ends for music and company. "There," says an account, "we met everyone walking or sitting about in summer dresses, and two or three parties of natives rolled in their blankets squatting just behind the big drum."

Further south still, in Canterbury, where the ground is flat and bicycles endemic, one F. W. Painter organised in 1893 a Bicycle Band, which was really a section or rolling ginger group of the already established Christchurch Professional Brass Band. Modern bandsmen are cagey in expressing opinions on this mobile musical combination. They don't know how the slide trombonist rode and played at the same time, and although there are rumours that the side drum

was played by two men riding tandem, one playing the drum while the other attended to steering and locomotion, photographs do not seem to confirm this.

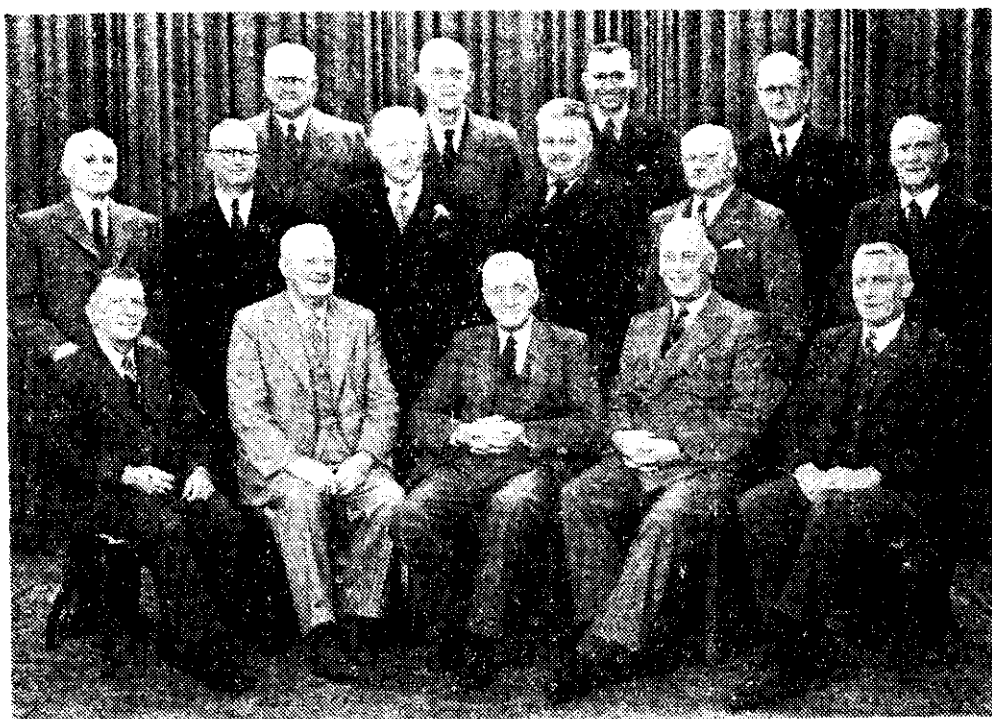
A good deal of training was necessary before the band took off on its first public musical progress. The members practised mounting and dismounting at the word of command, keeping intervals while in convoy, and worked out the best way to handle their instruments and their bicycles.

They were disciplined professionals not to be upset by minor incidents. One Sunday while they were moving down a street in their proper stations, a flighty woman cyclist came wobbling out of a gateway, touched the rear wheel of a man in the front rank, and came down. But the rear ranks were not dismayed. With a Grenadier Guardman's pose, concentration and devotion to duty, the rear ranker most closely involved rode straight over the lady's fallen bicycle, and the band went on as if nothing had happened. "Theirs not to reason why. . . ."

The band travelled to outlying districts such as Amberley and Kaiapoi, breaking formation long enough to accept the flowing hospitality of wayside publicans. Men, women and children rushed out to see and hear the new sensation, and the Bicycle Band claimed proudly that there was no other band like it in the world.

EARLY CONTESTS

FROM available records it seems probable that the first New Zealand brass band contest was held at the Christchurch International Exhibition in 1882. This was won by the Band of C Battery of Artillery, Timaru. After this band had been proclaimed the winner, the crowd demanded more music from it. The band gave them a selection from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patiéce*. At the time a stage company was touring New Zealand, and a writ was served on the



The N.Z. Brass Band Association Contest Committee, 1950. The Mayor of Christchurch and 1950 President of the Association (Mr. E. H. Andrews) is in the centre of the front row. On his left are Len C. Travers (chairman) and F. E. Talbot (secretary-treasurer).



THE CHRISTCHURCH CYCLE BAND (1898)
The slide trombonist was at a disadvantage