

Bands on the Air

Series No. 5

Even Champions Have Ups And Downs

Written For The "Record"

By

"EMILE"



CONDUCTOR J. J. DREW.

... Bandsman since his school days.

THE life of a band is very much like the life of a human being. It has moments of great happiness and moments equally depressing. It has a win here and a loss there. It is sometimes arrested for debt. It makes friends and loses them, and makes them again.

In fact, it runs up and down the whole scale of emotions with as much variety as a cornetist playing in a test piece championship.

And, like most human beings, it just keeps going on.

THIS, at least, was the impression I got when I was told something of the history of the present holders of the New Zealand Brass Bands championship.

The Port Nicholson Band, which began life as the Wellington Watersiders' Band, has had its ups and downs. At the moment it is on top of the brass band world of New Zealand, but at times it has been on the bottom.

And though never actually arrested for debt, the band once had its instruments seized by bailiffs in the middle of an important contest—through no fault of its own.

IT has one other distinction, too, that will appeal to radio listeners. It was the first band in New Zealand to give a public broadcast.

That was nearly 18 years ago.

when a private company was broadcasting from the top of the Ford Building in Courtenay place, Wellington. The band broadcast through only one microphone hanging from the ceiling, but its music went over the air well. It was received as far away as Dunedin.

THE band was first formed in 1912 as the Wellington Watersiders' Band. The present conductor, Mr. J. J. Drew, was appointed in 1916, and has been with the band ever since.

Australian born, Mr. Drew first played the cornet in the school band of St. Benedict's, in Sydney, and joined the famous Newtown Band, the crack band of Australia, at the age of 18.

In this band he played under George O'Shea, Professor of Music at King's School, Sydney, and T. Mellor. Later he was professional cornet to the New South Wales Government Tramways Band in Sydney, and to the Australian Light Horse Band at Goulburn. He moved on to Hobart.

There, he was simultaneously conductor of three bands. Once he conducted two of them in competitions. One came first and the other second.

THEN he decided to go to New Zealand, but he could not make up his mind whether to go to Auckland or to Wellington. He said to his wife: "Heads, Wellington; tails, Auckland." The coin came up heads, and Mr. Drew came to Wellington and soon became conductor of what is now the Port Nicholson Band.

UNDER Mr. Drew the band went for its first contest to Dunedin, and won the B Grade championship by 27 points. The adjudicator, Mr. Percy Jones, said that the band's playing of "Lurline" was the outstanding event of the contest.

In its next contest, two years later, the band entered for the A Grade championship at Wellington, and had the honour of becoming New Zealand's champion band. It had set a fine record of two wins in two starts.

So far the upgrade, but next the down.

When the band left next year for the contest in Dunedin, the Wellington Watersiders' Union was having trouble. It had been sued for a sum of money, and the plaintiffs had won.

The plaintiffs sent the bailiffs down to the contest at Dunedin. (C. on p. 31.)



—Photo by Crown Studios, Wellington.

CHAMPION BANDSMEN OF 1938

... Port Nicholson Silver Band is heard on the air on the first Friday of every month from 2 P.M.