

NOT ON THE AIRBAND SERIES No. 7

Their Moving Music..

A Bicycle Band That Died

in 1910 — But Its Soul

Goes Pedalling On

Special to the "Record" by

ERIC BAKER

THOUGH they pedalled along bumpy roads they always hit the note—those bicycle bandsmen of Christchurch thirty years ago. Very literally they played moving music, and here is their story.

The famous Bicycle Band—there was nothing else like it in the world—was an offshoot of the Christchurch Professional Brass Band, which was formed in 1892 by Mr. Fred Painter and Mr. Thomas Dalton. Mr. Painter organised the Bicycle Band about 1895. He was a well-known distance rider, and the holder of more than one record for the "high bike." He was also a skilled trick rider.

The older generation in Christchurch will remember the time when the announcement, "The bicycle band is coming," was the signal for everybody to rush into the street. Naturally, even to-day, when cycles are fitted with every mod-con., one might reasonably ask how the men could play while riding.

They could, and they did. They held their instruments with one hand and steered with the other.

The big drum was slung from the handle-bars of one cycle and the drummer played with one hand. The side-drum needed two hands, so the man who played it rode tandem behind another rider. Concrete or bitumen roads did not exist, and a player was ever liable to encounter a bump or a rut in the middle of an intricate pianissimo passage. But nobody cared, and the band got along "very nicely, thank you."

OCCASIONALLY the band made a distance trip, as far as Kaiapoi, or even Amberley. Hotels showered hospitality on the players and few hostilities were passed without a visit.

Brave old days! Like the troubadours of old, the players were welcomed for the music they brought.

For some time before taking to the road the members practised mounting and dismounting, and, before they achieved perfection, many a fine piece of brass and many a head took a dent or two. When the band first took to the road on a Sunday, a woman cyclist rode out of a gateway in Caledonian Road, just scraped the back wheel of a cycle in the front row, and came a cropper. The man in front of



whom she fell, so the story goes, kept his balance. The gallants stopped to see if any damage had been done to the lady, but all was well, and off went the band again.

After several creditable trips into country districts, during which the bandsmen met head winds, storms and punctures, it was decided to go in for a little publicity, so parades were held in the city streets. They caused a sensation! The crowds took to them, in a kindly way, and their success as a two-wheeled musical combination was assured.

EVEN if, strictly speaking, this story is out of order in a series devoted to the history of broadcasting bands, we can't resist the temptation to print it. If Christchurch's bicycle band had been alive to-day it certainly **WOULD** have broadcast. . . .

HABITUÉS of the old Opera House, now the St. James Theatre, Christchurch, will remember the band's first appearance on the stage. The players rode on from the wings, did a figure-of-eight, and then repeated the stunt, but this time with their instruments. Which serves to indicate that stunt publicity is no new thing.

A trip to Rukia was so strenuous that one member collapsed on the way home. He rested for a while and then sought out a farmhouse, where the farmer's wife cooked him a fine large steak. He returned to the ranks a new man and they say, the other bandsmen could hardly keep up with him on the way home.

Naturally, many people outside Christchurch were sceptical when they heard of the bicycle band. One man wrote down from Wellington asking for a photograph. He had had a wager about it, and wanted definite proof. He got it, and won the wager.

On another occasion a man who was walking round the world—they still do this sort of thing now and then—arrived in Christchurch. He was told about the band but did not believe a word of it. The next Sunday morning the band took him out with them. Photographs of the stunt were used by Australian and English newspapers, and one picture won a prize in a novelty competition. (C. on p. 44.)