

BANDS ON THE AIR

SERIES No. 8

The Good Old Days

*Kaikorai Remembers Its
Antiquity, Its Funny
Stories, Its Palmy Days
and Hopes*

Special to the "Record"

by

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SOMEHOW or other bands aren't what they were.

When I was investigating the history of Kaikorai Band the other week, they told me that the famous old combination was well back on the road to health after a long illness—but, for all that, I can't see even the keenest bandsman doing what Kaikorai's drummer did in 1904—beating the skin off his hand rather than admit he had dropped his drumstick.

It happened at the Palmerston North contest during the Quickstep Competition. To stop and pick up that dropped stick would have meant disaster. So the drummer just clenched the heroic fist and carried on. By the end of the march there was no skin on the back of the hand. But Kaikorai won! There are some good stories available of those palmy days. At one contest a certain player was unable to play his part to the satisfaction of Mr. Laidlaw, the conductor. The player was distressed at having to stand down, and to save his face with rival bandsmen to whom he had been boasting as to what "his band" was going to do, it was decided to let him take his place on the night of the concert. So that he would not upset the combination a cork was inserted in his instrument, and so he played—silently and full of pride.

Humorists and Musicians

AT the New Plymouth contest, 1902, a cornetist in the solo competition was making an indifferent effort. The accompanist was so disgusted that he "walked out" in the middle of the recital. As soon as the soloist saw what had happened, he bowed to the audience, placed his cornet to his mouth, and played himself off the stage with the "Dead March in Saul."

Two players were very nervous about making their debut in a solo competition in another contest. So one said to the other, "Jack, if I break down in my solo, you rush in with a bucket of water and sing out, 'Fire!'"

But for all the humour, real musicians were made by Kaikorai in those days.

Kaikorai's proud boast is that it is the oldest properly constituted band in New Zealand. It was formed in 1881, and the first conductor was Mr. T. Chapman, outstanding cornetist of his day.

True, there were other bands before the Kaikorai, or perhaps it would be better to say, "musical combinations." They mostly flourished on the wild and woolly goldfields. The Green Island Band was properly constituted a little



HARRY OSBORNE.
Supplies the punch.

before the Kaikorai, but it did not live long.

Mr. Chapman established the Kaikorai, and he was succeeded as conductor by Mr. E. Stratton, another brilliant cornetist.

BANDS had a good following in the south in those days, and the earliest contests were all held in the South Island. The first contest under the auspices of the new New Zealand Band Association was held at Dunedin in 1891. In 1892 the first contest held at Wellington saw Kaikorai carry off the third prize, and the following year at Christchurch it tied with the Wellington Garrison for second place. Invercargill Garrison Band won at Invercargill in 1894, Kaikorai second, but unexpectedly Kaikorai was awarded first prize, for it was proved that Invercargill Garrison had committed a breach of the rules.

The band was in the running at every contest after that, being awarded seconds and thirds regularly, and obtained an honourable third in the North Island contest, and the largest to date, held at New Plymouth in 1902.

Another Cornetist

IT was now that the Kaikorai Band had its third change of conductor. Mr. G. B. Laidlaw, "Frae Bonnie Scotland," and, believe it or not, another fine cornetist, took over from Mr. Stratton. Under his conductorship the band participated in 11 contests, and was only twice unplaced.

In those days the band was incredibly keen. Practice was a sacred rite. Mr. Laidlaw resigned from the band in 1918, and was followed by Mr. H. Davie. He had been a member almost since the beginning, and as a tenor-bore player had triumphed in many contests.

Mr. Davie was only one of several highly successful solo players. My informant, Mr. Kerr, won the Dominion cornet championship in 1905, a distinct honour. The band has a roll, too lengthy to enumerate (Continued on p. 38.)