

Concertina Bands

Introduction

The late nineteenth century saw the emergence of many new forms of organised working-class music making including bands, orchestras and choirs. The most widespread and enduring of the instrumental ensembles were those of the “brass band movement”, an institution now recognised as “one of the most remarkable working class cultural achievements in European history”⁵⁸¹ and “one of the more important aspects of British art music as well as popular music in the nineteenth century”.⁵⁸²

Trevor Herbert⁵⁸³ has shown how the brass band movement developed from a variety of early nineteenth century roots to become fully fledged around 1880. By the end of the century, thousands of bands were in operation, their classic location being small, relatively self-contained industrial communities. In common with other working-class leisure activities of the period, the movement involved major elements of middle-class inspiration and patronage embracing reforming zeal or an “improving” educational drive. This included a “downward flow” of attitudes and music (generally transcriptions of “art” music) to the working classes who made “them their own, investing them with a new and lasting identity”⁵⁸⁴ and developing a popular repertory. The formation of bands was tied to the new leisure patterns, opportunities for performance and emerging aspirations of both players and audiences. As with the development of the free-reed instruments, the brass band movement was dependent on important developments in musical instrument technology, design and manufacture.

The brass band movement also accommodated a network of concertina bands, ensembles using the English instrument but quite distinct from the professional and amateur affairs of the Victorian middle classes discussed in earlier chapters. Information relating to these bands is limited and scattered but there is enough material, particularly reminiscences and brief histories of individual bands, to paint a broad picture of their development and activities. The growing critical literature relating to the brass band movement helps us to understand their context.

⁵⁸¹ Russell, *Popular Music...*, p.162.

⁵⁸² Herbert, Trevor *Bands: The Brass Band Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Milton Keynes, 1991), p.7.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.* and Herbert, Trevor “The Rise of the Brass Band Movement”, paper delivered to the symposium *Brass Roots: 150 Years of Brass Bands* held at Edinburgh University of Collection of Historic Musical Instruments (25 August 1989).

⁵⁸⁴ Herbert, *Bands...*, p.49.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

The first concertina bands appeared in the 1880s, the time of the consolidation of the brass band movement, and adopted many if not all of its conventions and aspirations and much of its repertory without any evolutionary contribution of their own. The specific forces behind the formation of the first concertina bands are difficult to identify. The fact that the English concertina was regarded by some as an instrument of rational recreation ensured its suitability for organised music making and is one likely factor. Local circumstances and individual initiatives would also have been highly important. The South Shields Concertina Band was started as a consequence of a lively social scene in which the concertina already enjoyed a high degree of popularity and the Heckmondwike English Concertina Band developed from a loose collection of musicians in the Heckmondwike and Liversedge areas of Bradford who, in 1902, joined up with a few more players from the neighbouring areas of Cleckheaton and Low Moor.⁵⁸⁵ Keighley Concertina band was formed in 1893 by four brothers who were enthusiastic players.⁵⁸⁶

Concertina bands were most commonly found in the industrial North of England, in areas which were also the cradle of many successful brass bands. Russell has noted a great concentration in the Yorkshire textile districts⁵⁸⁷ where at least twenty-two concertina bands were active between c.1885 and 1814.⁵⁸⁸ The largest numbers were located within an area encompassing Halifax, Bradford and the towns of the heavy woollen district, Batley, Dewsbury and Morley, where one of the first successful bands, Wyke and Low Moor Model, acted as a stimulus.⁵⁸⁹ According to Nigel Pickles,⁵⁹⁰ other important centres of concertina band activity were Ashton, Oldham, Manchester and Heywood in Lancashire and Mexborough and Heckmondwike in Yorkshire. Bands also emerged in North East England and, to a limited degree, in industrial Central Scotland. The Brass Band News of October 1889 was able to claim that it had over two hundred concertina bands on its advertising list, though no truly accurate count is available.⁵⁹¹

Like brass bands, the concertina ensembles were comprised mainly of working-class males who shared the principal sources of employment in the area. Tony Kell,⁵⁹² for example, has noted that the South Shields Concertina Band was formed by miners, shipyard workers and seamen while my own research suggests that the Glasgow English Concertina Band drew a number of its members from the Springburn locomotive works in the city.

⁵⁸⁵ Pickles, Nigel "The Heckmondwike English Concertina Band" NICA 351 (October 1987), pp.5-9.

⁵⁸⁶ Woods, Steve "Keighley Concertina Band" TCN 8 (October 1972), p.12.

⁵⁸⁷ For early histories of bands in this area see The Cornet (August 1903), The British Bandsman (8 June 1907).

⁵⁸⁸ Russell, Popular Music..., p.284.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.195 and Pickles, "The Heckmondwike...", p.5.

⁵⁹⁰ Pickles, Nigel The Mexborough English Concertina Prize Band Liner notes, Plant Life Records (PLR 055) 1983.

⁵⁹¹ Russell, Popular Music..., p.195.

⁵⁹² Kell, Tony "South Shields Concertina Band" in NICA 334 (February 1986).

The Life and Times of the Concertina

Exceptions to the typical concertina band were those associated with the Orange Movement in Liverpool.⁵⁹³ These were more part of a sectarian sub-culture which elsewhere has spawned flute or accordion bands. Serving a different function, these were not tied to the infrastructure, repertory and conventions of the brass band movement and accommodated female as well as male members. As discussed in Chapter 9.0, the Salvation Army and other evangelical groups also developed concertina ensembles to suit their own purposes.

The Concertina Band

The standard brass band format dictated the make up of the emerging concertina ensembles, and manufacturers readily produced instruments of different compass to match their brass counterparts. Some concertina bands were informally organised in reflection of their principal role as entertainment at local social events. Others, particularly those involved in competitions, had a more formal structure, including assigned parts, designated as in brass bands. The Ashton-under-Lyne Concertina Band, for example, was divided into:

- Bandmaster
- Conductor
- Soprano
- 2 Solo Cornets
- 1st. Clarionet Repiano
- 2 2nd. Cornets
- 4 3rd. Cornets
- Euphonium
- 1st. Baritone
- 2nd. Baritone
- 1st. Trombone
- Solo Tenor Horn
- 1st. Horn
- Drummer⁵⁹⁴

The musical evidence suggests that conventionally tuned instruments were used and that bands used specially arranged concertina parts rather than reading directly from brass band arrangements.⁵⁹⁵ The fact that the otherwise versatile instruments, if tuned to other pitches, would be unsuitable for many other uses outwith the band must have

⁵⁹³ NICA (September 1956), p.2. According to Concertina World 388 (November/December 1992) p.3, The Merseyside Concertina Band is still in existence.

⁵⁹⁴ "Ashton English Concertina Band" in unidentified news cutting c.1930 reprinted in Concertina Newsletter 17, p.27.

⁵⁹⁵ However, I have encountered second-hand concertinas tuned to Bb and other keys.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

been an important consideration in the adoption of standard, rather than specially tuned, instruments. Some bands used orchestral arrangements, naming the instruments 1st. Violin, 2nd. Violin etc... and others, such as the Northumberland and Durham Concertina Club, simply named the parts according to the range of different concertinas commonly available; Treble, 2nd. Treble, Tenor-Treble, Baritone, Bass and Double Bass. In the latter case (Example 8.1), all parts were written in the treble clef to take account of the fact that different sizes of English concertina have the same keyboard arrangement but sound different octaves.

Although most bands comprised only English concertinas, it is noted that one band used Anglo-German models until they could afford to upgrade⁵⁹⁶ and, in others, Duet concertinas were used by some players. Oral sources suggest that, typically, members owned their instruments rather than relying on the band's resources, although it is reasonable to assume that the circumstances of ownership might vary from band to band. The large bass instruments and other "specials" are likely to have belonged to the ensemble. The concertina band should not be viewed as a "poor man's brass band", for manufacturers' price lists offer quality brass instruments at considerably lower prices than their equivalents in concertina catalogues.⁵⁹⁷

Performances usually took place with the bands in seated position but they could also play on the march, with the heavier instruments supported by light straps. It is noted how in one band:

All instruments were provided with a brass socket into which a lyre-clip screwed to hold the music cards... Another accessory which was used was an open-ended cylinder of waterproof material, elasticated at the ends; this fitted over the bellows to protect them when playing outdoors in inclement weather.⁵⁹⁸

Photographic⁵⁹⁹ and oral evidence shows that uniforms similar to those worn by brass bands were standard.

Other instruments had a place in the concertina band. It has been noted that the South Shields Concertina Band had an accompanist on piano and harmonium⁶⁰⁰ and the concert harp was also used. Percussion was common, as in the Glasgow band:

⁵⁹⁶ This use of cheaper, less advanced instruments in the early years of bands was not unusual. Flute bands, for example, often began with tin whistles until they could afford flutes.

⁵⁹⁷ Myers, Arnold, in "Instruments and Instrumentation in British Brass Bands" (Appendix 1 in Herbert, *Bands*, pp.169-195) notes that top quality Cornets in Bb were being offered at £9 in 1889, £14 14s 6d in 1913 and £10 15s 8d in 1927. Their concertina equivalents were sold at considerably higher prices.

⁵⁹⁸ Woods, "Keighley Concertina Band", p.13.

⁵⁹⁹ E.g. Photograph and feature on the Barnsley and Worsbrough Bridge United Concertina Band circa 1920 in *Barnsley Chronicle* (11 August 1972).

⁶⁰⁰ Tony Kell, "South Shields Concertina Band".

The Lambton Worm

Treble
1st

Allegro.

Chorus

2nd Treble

Allegro

Chorus

Tenor-Treble

Allegro

Chorus

Bass

Allegro

Chorus

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the piece 'The Lambton Worm'. The score is arranged for four voices: Treble 1st, 2nd Treble, Tenor-Treble, and Bass. The music is in 9/2 time and G major. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The score includes a main melody and a chorus section. Dynamics include *f*, *mf*, and *f*. The score is written on multiple staves for each voice part, with some parts marked 'Chorus'. There are some handwritten annotations and a large 'X' mark on the Tenor-Treble part.

Example 8.1 The Lambton Worm.

Source: Library of the Northumberland and Durham Concertina Club, The North East of England Open Air Museum, Beamish (Catalogue 1985.348).

The Life and Times of the Concertina

Concertinas, it was all concertinas and side drums and the big drum and all the effects. And bells and everything. It sounded marvellous you know.⁶⁰¹

Often the programme would be varied through the inclusion of a solo from an outstanding player, a guest singer or another instrumentalist, such as a flautist or a cornet player from the brass band world.

Repertory

Evidence from programmes and band libraries confirms that the repertory of the concertina band was modelled closely on that of the brass ensembles. In his history of the Heckmondwike English Concertina Band,⁶⁰² Nigel Pickles identifies the principal items in the band's repertory:

Scottish Memories, (with imitations of bagpipes)	W Rimmer
Memories of the Opera	W Rimmer ⁶⁰³
Precioso	Brooke
Washington Greys	Graffula
Hallelujah Chorus	Handel
Alpine Rose, fantasia	Rimmer
Pirates of Penzance, selection	Sullivan
Chorus (from 12th Mass)	Mozart

A programme⁶⁰⁴ for a public park concert by the South Shields Concertina Band offered a similar selection:

March	The War Correspondent	G E Holmes
Overture	The Arcadians	Monkton and Talbot
Intermezzo	Simplicity	H Sullivan
Overture Selection	In the Land of Scott	Craig
Selection	From the 12th Mass	Mozart
Intermezzo	Les Sylphides	O Cussans
Selection	Navyland	Edw. St. Quentin

⁶⁰¹ David Galloway: Eydmann 86.01.05.

⁶⁰² Pickles, "The Heckmondwike...", p.6.

⁶⁰³ The band corresponded with the composer regarding this arrangement.

⁶⁰⁴ South Shields Public Library (n.d.).

The Life and Times of the Concertina

March	Our Nominee	W. Esberger
Hymn Tune	Abide with Me	Liddel
God Save the King		

Nigel Pickles has also listed the music in the library of the former Mexborough English Concertina Prize Band:⁶⁰⁵

Polka	Lady Florence	J. Ord Hume
Quick March	Our Cavalry	Oliver Herzer
Intermezzo	Village Bells	A. Piquard
March	Martial Air	H. Purcell
Fantasia	Echoes of Scotland	W. Rimmer
Quick March	Death or Glory	R.B. Hall
Descriptive March	Jamie's Patrol	Sidney Dacre
Schottische	Merry Men and Maids	J. Ord Hume
Prelude and Air		H. Purcell
Quick March	The Celebration	J.A. Greenwood
Polka	The Sentinel	J. Ord Hume
Grand Fantasia	Memories of Britain	W. Rimmer

Here we find many parallels with the music of the brass band world. This comprised “respectable” popular music, including “art”, “light” and specialist band works, selected to serve specific functions such as marching, dance, entertainment, contests and civic ceremonies. Selections based upon popular Italian opera were used extensively in contests from the brass bands’ earliest period and were also heard in concerts alongside pieces from musical comedy and operetta, marches (often from the military band canon), patriotic or “national” (i.e. Scottish, Irish, British etc...) music, novelty pieces and solos. By 1890, sacred music had largely disappeared from the programmes of secular brass bands, this music having been taken up by the emerging Salvation Army and mission bands. Hymns were played at Sunday concerts and other occasions as required.

However, the general range of music associated with the concertina groups was more limited than that heard from brass bands. For instance, the selections based on Wagner, which were popular with brass bands from the 1870s, or the works of great composers such as “Gems from Chopin” and “Gems of Schumann” popular in the early twentieth century, found no place and there was little music composed specifically for the concertina band. Many concertina bands played selections of local material and popular dance music. The Northumberland and Durham Concertina Club, for example, included in its repertory selections of traditional dance tunes

⁶⁰⁵ Pickles, “The Heckmondwike...”, p.6.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

(Example 8.1) and local songs⁶⁰⁶ and Steve Wood records how the Keighley Concertina Band's repertory contained many popular dance tunes in the way of marches, two-steps, fox-trots and waltzes.⁶⁰⁷

Steve Wood has also noted⁶⁰⁸ how music was taken from various brass band journals and was either inserted into the player's tune book for use at practices and concerts or was pasted onto stout cardboard for use when marching. Such cards were known as "five on a card" as there were three tunes on one side and two on the other.

It is difficult to reach firm conclusions regarding the sound of the concertina band. Although several bands made gramophone recordings,⁶⁰⁹ these do not offer a good insight into their natural sound. Nevertheless, a hearing of two discs: "Barcarolle from Tales of Hoffman" and "Glow Worm Idyll", by Ashton-Under-Lyne Concertina Prize Band, and "Sunday Parade" and "Old Memories", by the Heywood English Concertina Band,⁶¹⁰ lead me to suggest that the band sound was probably closer to that of an organ than that of a brass band. Furthermore, the character is somewhat mechanical, in the manner of a large barrel or fairground organ.

Nigel Pickles has recently reconstructed the sound of the Mexborough English Concertina Prize Band using the original scores and instruments.⁶¹¹ The sound (Tape Item 8.1) can be described as full and rich but cold and heavy, lacking the clarity, "lift" and textural variety of the brass ensemble. The concertinas did, however, offer the full range of novelty effects, such as imitations of organs and bells and bagpipes, discussed in my chapter on the music hall.

The North of England Open Air Museum at Beamish holds a number of parts used by the Northumberland and Durham Concertina Club. In Example 8.1, I have copied the four parts of "The Lambton Worm" together for comparison.

⁶⁰⁶ For example, "Community Songs No.3" and "Jack Armstrong's Jigs" (Tape 1977.146) and "Selection of Hornpipes, Reels and Jigs" (music manuscript 1985.348) in the Library of The North of England Open Air Museum, Beamish, Co. Durham. The music was specially arranged for concertina ensemble by Henry Stanley, Birmingham.

⁶⁰⁷ Wood, "Keighley Concertina Band", p.13.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p.13. The journals from which the music was taken were: The Liverpool Brass Band (Military) Journal, The Champion Brass and Reed Band Journal and Feldman's Brass and Military Journal. Other music was published by Hawkes and Son of London during the period 1913-1932.

⁶⁰⁹ The Premier English Concertina band recorded "The Shamrock Irish Selection" and "A Darkey's Dreamland" (Albion 1130A), noted with photograph in Concertina Magazine 8 (Autumn 1984), p.19. The Ashton English Concertina Prize Band recorded six sides for HMV Records: "The Contest" (March by J. Ord Hume), "Nautical Moments" (Allegro Marsiale by Aubrey Winter) "Barcarolle from Tales of Hoffman" (Offenbach), "The Glow Worm" (Idyll by Paul Linake) "Narcissus" (Entr'acte by Ethelbert Nevin) and "Casino Tanze" (Grand valse by Gung'l), listed in "an Ashton Newspaper around 1930" and reproduced in CN 17, p.27. The Heywood English Concertina band recorded two sides: "A Sunday Parade" and "Old Memories".

⁶¹⁰ Stephen Chambers Collection, Dublin.

⁶¹¹ Pickles, The Mexborough...

The Life and Times of the Concertina

The most striking feature of this arrangement is the texture, the heavy sound produced by three of the four instruments sounding three and four note chords, particularly in the verse where the second treble plays off-beat chords.⁶¹² This extract, which is from a longer selection of local song tunes, was obviously not a listening piece arranged for the concert hall or competition platform and is more likely to have been used in informal gatherings, public house “smokers” and other social events where communal singing might be called for.

Performance Settings

The bands undertook a variety of engagements in their home areas. Concerts in public parks, particularly on Sundays, were common and cinemas, gaols, hospitals, “smokers” and socials also used their services. James Ash, a member of The Ashton-under-Lyne Concertina Band in the 1920s, describes how:

At that time, we had engagements every Sunday in parks all over Lancashire and Yorkshire. Sometimes booked by an agent... During the summer we hired a 40 seater coach and for one week toured the Potteries, Durham and the Lake District moving on each day. We also did the Midlands, Malvern and round about, this went on for several years.

In winter, we did mostly Sunday concerts afternoon and evening quite a lot in the five towns of the Potteries, where they had first class concert halls, belonging to the local authority, with very comfortable tip-up seats and accommodation for between 100 and 200, we were very popular in those days 1930-35 going back year after year.⁶¹³

During the 1920s, The Keighley band played in gala processions, dances at the local Mechanic’s Institute, open air dances in the parks in summer and the annual St Patrick’s Day Ball at the Roman Catholic Church. There was also an annual visit to York which included a band concert.⁶¹⁴

In relation to ceremonial music, there is a surviving photograph⁶¹⁵ of the Heckmondwike band marching through a crowded street on the occasion of a Royal visit in 1912.

⁶¹² It should be noted that the Tenor sounds an octave lower than the Treble concertina and the Bass an octave lower than the Tenor.

⁶¹³ Ash, James “The Ashton-under-Lyne Concertina Band” *CN* 17, pp.25-7.

⁶¹⁴ Wood, *The Keighly Concertina Band*, p.13.

⁶¹⁵ Pickles, *The Mexborough...*

The Life and Times of the Concertina

Many concertina bands undertook engagements outwith their home areas and, as result, helped stimulate interest in the instrument, diffuse repertory and set standards of playing among amateurs. The Heckmondwike band from Yorkshire received offers of engagements from Lancashire, Wales and Belgium. The competition circuit was also a major site of concertina band activity.

Concertina Band Contests

As in the brass world, contests were a central element of band life. Brass band contests had a long history⁶¹⁶ and had evolved their own rules and conventions throughout the emergence of “the movement”. Competitions were held for concertina ensembles intermittently from the 1880s in a variety of locations where bands flourished. In the early 1900s, major contests were held at Crystal Palace, London⁶¹⁷ and, from 1905, were held at the Zoological Gardens, Belle Vue, Manchester, at the same time as the brass band contests. The introduction of concertina band contests at Manchester was regarded as an important breakthrough in gaining recognition for the concertina band, but must also be seen as the organisers’ attempt to add variety to the day’s programme by including another attraction in the “big day out”. By then, the event also included side shows and fair grounds. Concertina competitions also helped fill a gap, as entries to the brass sections were declining. The Manchester concertina band competitions ran until the outbreak of war and resumed between 1922 and 1925. The lists of prizewinners⁶¹⁸ suggests a Yorkshire/Lancashire origin for the leading bands, although this may also have been a reflection of the expense of travel for bands from further afield. Travel to London was even more of a problem, particularly when the Manchester and London contests were held within two weeks of each other. As a result, only four or five bands appeared at the Crystal Palace on several occasions early in the century. The cost of instruments was also a constant problem for, as manufacturers began to produce their best quality instruments in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, wealthier bands could gain a definite advantage in terms of sound and facility.

The competition test pieces were invariably arrangements of nineteenth-century popular opera which had been previously used in brass contests. A list of the Manchester test- pieces comprises:

1905	Selection of their own choice ⁶¹⁹	
1906	Don Sebastiano ⁶²⁰	Donizetti
1907	Händsel and Gretel ⁶²¹	Humperdinck

⁶¹⁶ Bevan, Clifford “Brass Band Contests: Art or Sport?” in Herbert, *Bands...*, pp.102-119.

⁶¹⁷ Russell, *Popular Music...*, p.195.

⁶¹⁸ Handbill for “The Great Band Contest” 1926, Neil Wayne Collection.

⁶¹⁹ Won by Heckmondwike Concertina Band playing “Memories of the Opera”.

⁶²⁰ A selection arranged for brass band was first used as a test piece at Belle Vue in 1894.

⁶²¹ Opera first produced in Weimar in 1893 with a selection from it being used as brass test piece at

The Life and Times of the Concertina

1908	Rigoletto ⁶²²	Verdi
1909	Semiramide ⁶²³	Rossini
1910	Zampa ⁶²⁴	Hérold
1911	Les Huguenots ⁶²⁵	Meyerbeer

One exception to the borrowing of music from the brass competitions was “La Belle Sauvage” produced by William Rimmer for the 1908 Crystal Palace contest.⁶²⁶ After 1922, the same music was used for both brass and concertina sections at the contest:

1923	Bohemian Girl	Balfe
1924	Merry Wives of Windsor	Nicolai
1925	Eugene Onegin	Chiakovsky

Concertina bands were therefore judged according to the high standards of brass bands of the time.

Prizes were modest. A hand bill⁶²⁷ (Figure 8.1) advertising the Eleventh Annual Concertina Band Contest held at the Zoological Gardens, Belle Vue, Manchester, on Saturday 14 July 1923, offered prizes of £10, £5, £3 and £2 to the first four bands and a silver medal for the bandmaster of each prize winning band. An additional cash prize was offered to the winners by Wheatstone and Co. and Lachenal and Co. offered one of their instruments to the band placed second. The Uniform Clothing and Equipment Co. Limited of London offered a set of band books to the third. Bands were limited to 24 players and the test piece was a selection from Balfe’s “Bohemian Girl” arranged by Charles Godfrey (1839-1919), a former bandmaster of the Royal Horse Guards who adjudicated at Belle Vue on several occasions.

As with brass, the concertina bands exploited the communal competitive spirit of small communities. Judges’ decisions were often the subject of great controversy and stimulated correspondence in the band press, but contests were also a form of entertainment in themselves and set musical standards for the player and listener alike. The band structure and hierarchy also saw internal competition between players. This too had an effect on playing standards.

Belle Vue two years later in 1895.

⁶²² Selection first used as brass test piece at Belle Vue 1898.

⁶²³ Selection used in Belle Vue brass competition 1904.

⁶²⁴ Overture, an established favourite with brass bands, was first used as a championship test piece at Belle Vue in 1860.

⁶²⁵ First used as a brass test piece at Belle Vue in 1906 and at Crystal Palace brass competitions in 1911.

⁶²⁶ Russell, *Popular Music...*, p.195.

⁶²⁷ Manchester Public Libraries.

2d. Zoological Gardens, Belle Vue,
MANCHESTER.

**THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL
CONCERTINA BAND CONTEST**

(OPEN TO ALL AMATEUR BANDS)

WILL TAKE PLACE ON

Saturday, July 14th, 1923.

PRIZES:

First, £10; Second, £5; Third, £3; Fourth, £2.

And a SILVER MEDAL to the Bandmaster of each of the Prize Bands.

Extra Prizes:

Messrs. WHEATSTONE & CO., the celebrated Inventors, Patentees, and Manufacturers of Concertinas and Aeolus, of 15, West Street, Charing Cross Road, London, W.C. 2., will present in addition to the First Prize a prize to the Value of £5 5s.

Messrs. LACHENAL & CO., the old-established and original makers of Concertinas and the Edeophone, of 4, Little James Street, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1., will present in addition to the Second Prize one of their "Standard Model" 48-Keyed Edeophone Trebles.

THE UNIFORM CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT CO. LIMITED, 5, Clerkenwell Green, Farringdon Road, London, E.C. 1., will present in addition to the Third Prize a Set of Band Books.

GENERAL REGULATIONS.

The Contest is open to all Amateur Concertina Bands.

The number of Players in each Band, including Conductor if a player, must not exceed 24.

Each Band must play the Selection of Music (chosen for the Contest) from Balfe's Opera, "BOHEMIAN GIRL," selected and arranged by Charles Godfrey.

No member of a Band will be allowed to play any solo other than is allotted to the instrument entered opposite his name on the Form of Entry.

A Professional Musician may be engaged as Conductor. He may also play with one Band which he conducts.

No objection will be entertained as to a performer being a professional, or upon any other ground whatever (except in connection with the playing of the Music on the day), unless full particulars are forwarded at least one week previous to the Contest.

Mr. Jennison's decision will be final in all cases of dispute.

The Prizes will be awarded according to the decision of the Judge or Judges, and no appeal will be allowed therefrom, except where a Band is disqualified for an infringement of the Rules. Where a Prize is withheld for a breach of the Rules, such prize will be given to the next in order of merit.

JUDGE:

Figure 8.1 Handbill.

Source: Manchester Public Libraries.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

Bands also acted as a focus for concertina playing within a community and helped forge links with musicians in other locations. While working in England, Willie Smith of Glasgow would visit local concertina bands and play informally with them:

I played with bands in England and oh they used to think it was great - a Scotsman playing an English, an English concertina , you see? You've got to say "English concertina".⁶²⁸

Concertina Bands in Scotland

Evidence of concertina bands in Scotland is limited. Although there is, as yet, no published or academic study of the brass band movement in Scotland, it can be said with confidence that the country shared in the tendencies which prevailed in England and Wales.⁶²⁹ However, the emergence of organised working class music in Scotland had followed a different path. The pipe bands, flute bands and strathspey and reel fiddle orchestras, which were more closely tied to native tradition and allowed expression of national sentiment, were alternative attractions to the amateur instrumentalist and may have limited the formation of concertina ensembles in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, I have found evidence of three bands playing in Scotland.

There is a report of the new Sterlina Concertina Band performing at Stirling in 1895 which reinforces my earlier comments on band sound: The effect was striking, and withal pleasing, and certainly seems capable of further development. When we think of such masters as Bridgeman [sic] and Carson, we can hardly accommodate ourselves to the quiet movements of this band, which thereby lost volume in tone, and were otherwise productive of a certain monotony of sound peculiar to the concertina. The movements of Messrs Bridgeman [sic] and Carson were a rhythmic singing of the instrument in harmony with the air being performed, producing a fullness which stationary action cannot emulate.⁶³⁰

Bands existed in Clydebank and Glasgow between the wars. Danny Toner remembers the Clydebank band as it included members of his own family:

⁶²⁸ Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A14.

⁶²⁹ According to Cook, Kenneth The Bandsman's Everything Within (London, 1950), pp.150-151, The Scottish Amateur Band Association was founded in 1895 and had a membership of 92 bands in 1950. Bevan, "Brass Band Contests...", p.109, has noted how at the time of the Association's foundation "Lowland Scotland was home to so many flourishing bands".

⁶³⁰ The Stirling Journal and Advertiser (26 April 1895), p.4.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

D.T.: There used to be bands all over the place, years ago. I don't know the different names but Clydebank were the tops in those days.

S.E.: And did they march and wear uniforms?

D.T.: Aye, they played in all the parks. They usually, more or less played in all the park domes. I think they had a contract with the City of Glasgow, the City of Edinburgh, Rutherglen, any places. You know, all the parks.⁶³¹

More is known about The Glasgow English Concertina Band which flourished at the same period. David Galloway, a former player in the band, has been a valuable source of information regarding its activities.⁶³² Born in Springburn in north Glasgow in 1915, he started playing as a youth on a cheap, wooden-ended English concertina after hearing a player in the music hall:

D.G.: I just, eh, I just, eh, heard somebody playing it and I thought it was great, you know. A man in the halls, you know... It was in the theatre I heard them. I thought it was great, you know. He played "Old Comrades", that's my march.⁶³³

He also recalled the influence of Walter Dale the Glasgow music hall artist discussed in Chapter 8.0 and fondly remembered his performance of "Blaze Away":

D.G.: When I heard that march the man came out wi'. The concertina, I thought it was great.⁶³⁴

He was later given a metal-ended Wheatstone English model by his father which he used in the band. David worked in the British Locomotive Company works at Springburn and came into contact with the band through colleagues who invited him to audition.⁶³⁵

⁶³¹ Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.A2.

⁶³² Interviewed at his home in Shettleston, Glasgow in March 1986. (Eydmann 86.01.A1-27).

⁶³³ David Galloway: Eydmann 86.01.A7. "Alte Kameraden" by the German military band leader Carl Tieke 1911. Tieke was also noted for his march "Der Graff Zeppelin".

⁶³⁴ David Galloway: Eydmann 86.01.A7. "Blaze Away" was recorded on a 78 rpm disc by the concertina duet Messrs. Mitchell and Shepherd.

⁶³⁵ A father and son called Macken.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

D.G.: Well, I worked beside two men that started the band... They took me to the band hall in George Street and then I'd to play a tune, you know.⁶³⁶

David was around 20 years old when he joined the band as “second cornet” but was not the youngest member, there being several teenage players. He later worked at the Yarrow shipbuilding yard on the Clyde and recalls that other band players worked there also. At the time of interview he still played occasionally at home and at a local evangelical church.

The band met in premises in George Street before obtaining its own “big hut” in Sword Street, Denniston in the East End of the city. There were 24 players drawn from all over Glasgow. Concertinas by Wheatstone and Co. were preferred and according to David Galloway:

Yes. Yes, they'd uniforms. It was silver and red arrows. Arrows. They had big arrows on them. I've no' got a photograph, you know. They were getting new uniforms. I seen some of them, you know, and they were getting them just before it broke up, you know. They sent to London for them. I think it was eh... Beavers they sent it to, you know. Eh, it was the jacket type, you know. Just the jackets, nice and the cap and a' that. The one we had were the zip fastener up them, you know.⁶³⁷

The band played the brass ensemble repertory of “marches and overtures” with music from Balfe's “The Bohemian Girl”, Hérold's “Zampa”, “Morning, Noon and Night” and “Poet and Peasant” as popular favourites. Band parts were ordered from London but occasionally the band master wrote out the tunes himself.

The band performed regularly in the city's parks and played for “socials”. Occasional tours were undertaken as far away as Whitley Bay, Berwick upon Tweed and Newcastle in North East England and Dundee in East Central Scotland. The band did not compete. It disbanded at the time of the 1939-45 war.

Decline

The fortunes of the concertina band were ultimately dependent on those of the brass band movement which it mirrored, on changes in popular musical taste and on the

⁶³⁶ David Galloway: Eydmann 86.01.A6.

⁶³⁷ David Galloway: Eydmann 86.01.A15. There is a photograph of the band in the collection of Steve Sutcliffe, Glasgow.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

fortunes of the concertina itself. As a relatively recent, minor adjunct to the brass band world it was particularly vulnerable to social and musical change. A downturn in the fortunes of the brass band was noted as early as 1918.⁶³⁸ By the 1930s, the brass band and its associated infrastructure had lost its powerful position in popular musical culture but it was able to respond to change to such a degree that it retained a role. The concertina band, however, remained conservative and became increasingly marginalised. The brass band repertory was expanded through the contributions of a small number of contemporary composers but the concertina bands did not benefit from this. War had a devastating effect on both brass and concertina bands, although the broader appeal of the former allowed post-war re-establishment which never occurred with the concertina ensembles.

Status was important too. The concertina band, for which there was no pedigree, was always something of a curiosity outwith the areas in which it flourished.

At a time when popular music was opening up to a variety of influences from home and abroad, adherence to a repertory rooted in the Victorian era and the textural limitations of a band comprised solely of concertinas, had drastic consequences. The concertina band, with its unwieldy instruments, seated players and musical limitations could not match the imagery, sentimental appeal and functional versatility of the brass band (or pipe band in Scotland), particularly in public and ceremonial performances.

As a result, the majority of the bands collapsed during the inter-war period. A few survived into the 1950s⁶³⁹ or continued as “clubs”. The Northumberland and Durham Concertina Club continued playing until 1977 when they lost the use of the rooms in the public house in which they practiced.⁶⁴⁰ With the revival of interest in the instrument under the auspices of the International Concertina Association (discussed in Chapter 11.2), there was some attempt to re-establish bands and form new ones but these met with no lasting success.⁶⁴¹

Discussion

Concertina banding was just one of several areas which offered the working-class amateur access to collective performance and the “art” music repertory. The bands’ public performances diffused interest in the instrument and its music across a wide geographical area and helped modernise attitudes to music, including formal

⁶³⁸ Russell, *Popular Music...*, p.76.

⁶³⁹ The early newsletters of the International Concertina Association (1952-53) refer to surviving bands at Mexborough, Bootle, Northumberland and Durham and South Shields.

⁶⁴⁰ Personal communication from John Gall, Beamish, 1993.

⁶⁴¹ *NICA* (2 March 1953), p.2, noted that the Manchester band was revived in 1953 but it was lamented that its membership was drawn from the 40-65 years old age group only. In the first edition of *NICA* (August 1952) a prospective member, George W. Douglas, wrote from Scotland: “I welcome this new Association, in that, my wish for a concertina band in Edinburgh may shortly materialise”.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

organisation, the centrality of sight reading, harmony and part playing. Along with choirs and educational institutions, bands were a major force in the transformation of proletarian traditions of music making by which different, and in many ways alien musical values, “elite and middle-class in origin were promulgated and gained ascendancy”.⁶⁴²

Although part of a larger process of musical modernisation, band music was relatively self contained and less ambitious than the “artistic” styles of concertina playing discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. Joe Haynes, an outstanding Bradford concertina player, for example, left a local band after only one rehearsal because there was too much “one finger stuff”.⁶⁴³ But, as in the brass band, membership offered a kind of musical apprenticeship and many outstanding performers grew out of this background. Harry Dunn of Salford (1906-1986), for example, was the principal soloist of Manchester Concertina Band at the age of 14, at the same time as his father was the principal Baritone concertina player. Through the band, he had expert tuition in solo cadenzas from a bandmaster and cornet soloist from a local brass band.⁶⁴⁴ Tom Jukes (1904-1986) of Spennymoor, was a member of the South Shields Concertina Band, playing “second violin” parts, who became an influential soloist and member of the International Concertina Association during the mid-twentieth century.⁶⁴⁵ Walter Cheetham, co-founder of the Heywood Band, was also a noted player on the Manx Pleasure steamers and music hall.⁶⁴⁶ The music hall concertinist, Tommy Elliot, grew up in the concertina band environment, his father having been conductor of the South Shields Concertina band for a time.

Bands offered concertina manufacturers and retailers great opportunities for promoting their products and contributed greatly to the twentieth-century adoption of the English concertina as an instrument of the working classes. The great advantage to the musician adopting the concertina within the band environment was that the instrument could also be used in a variety of settings outwith the band hall and concert platform.

⁶⁴² Gammon and Gammon, “From ‘Repeat and Twiddle...’”, p.125.

⁶⁴³ Russell, *Popular Music...*, p.195.

⁶⁴⁴ Senior, R.C. “Obituary: Harry Dunn 1906-1986” *NICA* 339 (September 1986), p.7.

⁶⁴⁵ See Chapter 11.

⁶⁴⁶ *NICA* 7 (July/August 1955).

The Life and Times of the Concertina