

Brass Bands: a bit of history, a peek into tradition and a few facts

The brass banding tradition dates back to the early nineteenth century and England's industrial revolution. With increasing urbanization and shorter working hours, employees had more time to themselves. Employers began to finance factory bands in an attempt to decrease the political activity with which the working classes seemed preoccupied during their leisure time.

Since the founding of the brass band tradition, improved mechanical skills in the production of brass instruments and the rise in the number of music conservatories have helped fuel the expansion of the brass banding. Originally in Great Britain, coalmines, mills and factories funded bands. Many bands retain their business sponsorship to this day.

Today brass bands in Great Britain and across the world follow the tradition of being all-volunteer. Some bands have corporate, business or private sponsors but most rely on donations, fees, grants and fund-raising events.

Brass bands are popular in Japan, Australia and New Zealand; and in recent years have gained a renewed popularity in Europe. Although brass bands were an important part of nineteenth century life in America, larger concert and marching bands, and the popular drum and bugle corps superseded them. In the United States the Salvation Army was primarily responsible for maintaining the brass band tradition through the years. Lately, there has been a resurgence of interest in brass banding. Today there are dozens of brass bands developing and performing in America. In 1983 the North American Brass Band Association (NABBA) held its first brass band competition, and that annual contest continues to this day drawing bands from all over the nation.

What makes the brass band unique is the in treble clef (with the exception of the bass trombone) and the wide repertoire which ranges from orchestral works and featured solos to marches, jazz, big band, blues, novelty numbers and hymns. The instrumentation has evolved over the years to the current composition of cornets, flugelhorn, tenor horns, baritones, euphoniums, trombones, B-flat and E-flat basses plus percussion.