

# Brass v. Silver Bands

*Gavin Holman, 28 October 2025*

There is no difference between a “brass band” and a “silver band” as far as the instruments are concerned, merely the colour of the finish, and whether the brass metal has been electro-plated with silver. The presence of a plating (or even a lacquer) on a brass instrument might affect the tone, but this is negligible compared to all the other aspects of the instrument’s composition and design.

Silver plating was an expensive process when it first became available for instruments, and “silver bands” were very proud of their new instruments, which indicated that the band was financially strong, and also possibly had been successful in contests, winning cash prizes. The earliest silver-plated instruments were often offered as prizes at brass band contests – to the winning conductor or for a solo instrumental competition.

The first known silver band, named as such, was Stephenson’s Operatic Silver Band in 1872. Tyler’s Family Band designated itself as a “silver band” during the 1870s, Corbett’s Family Silver Band was active around 1880, the Universe Works Silver Band in 1881, and Rushden Temperance Silver Band in January 1884.

The first commercial electroplating process was patented by George Elkington, who began in 1841 with one factory in Newhall St. in the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham, and, by 1880, employed 1,000 people and had 6 other factories. Electro silver-plated Instruments were available by 1860 from manufacturers such as Besson.