



The British Brass Band

Author(s): John Hall Stewart

Source: *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 5, (Apr. - May, 1951), pp. 30-32+51-53

Published by: MENC: The National Association for Music Education

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3388586>

Accessed: 25/07/2008 08:37

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=menc>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The British Brass Band

JOHN HALL STEWART

THE AUTHOR of this article, who is associate professor of history, Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, touches on two items which are common to the current agenda of music educators' "shop talk." In discussion, formal and informal, the word "contests" and its variants frequently occur. And, especially since the appearance of Chicago's Salvation Army Brass Band at the 1950 national convention of the College Band Directors National Association, there has been a much higher usage frequency of the term "brass band"—which to many people has been no more than a term loosely applied to all wind bands.

RECENTLY I attended a brass band contest at Bolton, in Lancashire, England. It was such a delightful experience that I wish to share it with all who are interested in bands and band music, and especially with bandsmen and other musicians in the U.S.A. For the brass band, as it is known in Great Britain, is something not too often heard in the United States; and the results it achieves must be heard to be appreciated—for that matter, even to be believed!

The British brass band is in actuality a *brass* band. It uses no reed or string instruments; and in contest it even omits percussion as well. Thus it becomes really a brass choir. All the instruments are made of brass, though most of them are usually silver plated. Except for the trombones, all are operated by three piston valves (seldom, if ever, any rotary valves), though I suppose that an occasional bass or euphonium may be equipped with an extra valve to extend the range. The large instruments are all of the upright, top-valve design—no deflecting bells, no helicon basses or sousaphones, no "side-valve" horns with bells pointing to the left, no double-bell instruments. All are built in either E^b or B^b, with the exception of the bass trombone, which is in G (and is so large that the slide is equipped with a little handle to enable the performer to reach the seventh position). All the instruments are built in *high* pitch, a half-tone higher than our customary "A-440," a feature which gives an added brilliancy to the tone.

Brass Band Instrumentation

At first glance, a feature of the British contest brass band which impresses an American is its small size, especially when compared with our tremendous organizations. British *military* bands, comparable with our concert bands, run to a considerable size; but the contesting brass band usually consists of only *twenty-four* members, and in competition it is limited to a maximum of twenty-five!¹

What is the instrumentation of these organizations? Let us start with the large instruments and "work down." Basses, four (two BB^b, two E^b); euphoniums, two (and with a rich, singing tone such as we seldom

hear); trombones, three (two B^b tenors, one G bass). In addition to the two euphoniums, there are two "baritones" which play a supporting part. Hence, there are eleven "large" accompaniment and solo instruments—approximately what we would have for a concert band three times the size.

Then there are three E^b alto horns (solo, first, and second), and a B^b flugel horn (though this is usually in the cornet section). Last, but most important, come the cornets. These usually include an E^b soprano, two B^b solo cornets, one repiano (or "first"), two "seconds," and two "thirds."

This totals only twenty-three. The other one or two are usually cornets—perhaps an extra "solo," an alternate "repiano," or one extra in each of the "second" and "third" divisions. The only things missing, to an American, are trumpets and French horns. The former are too thin in tone to enjoy a place in such an ensemble. The latter are not missed: their *part* is played by the alto horns; their *tonal quality* is provided (believe it or not) by the euphoniums.

Before proceeding to describe the contest itself, American bandsmen will doubtless be interested in the seating arrangement of the British brass band, and the manner in which its music is scored.

Brass Band Tradition

The traditional seating arrangement is around three sides of a hollow square. Directly facing the conductor are the three altos, and back of them the four basses (E^b to his right, BB^b to his left). Immediately to the conductor's right are the euphoniums, and, between them and the altos, the baritones. Back of the euphoniums and baritones, are the three trombones (the bass on the inside end of the row). Immediately to the conductor's left are the solo cornets and the repiano; and back of these, the E^b soprano, flugel horn, and second and third cornets. Occasionally the flugel horn may be placed at the inside end of the back row of cornets; occasionally it is even between the altos and the baritones. The only variation of this seating plan I have seen was where three of the cornets were placed at the conductor's right, with euphoniums and baritones forming a third row facing him, between altos and basses. In the long run, however, I think the traditional arrangement is adequate.

As for the scoring, the principal novelty to an American bandsman is that all instruments play music written in the treble clef—all, that is, except the G bass trom-

¹Of course, many British brass bands have more than twenty-five players. The limitation to the minimum essential number of players for contest performance, thus insuring equality in size of ensembles, probably stems from several practical factors but fundamentally it is to protect and encourage the small bands, which might be at disadvantage in comparison with larger and more sonorous groups.

The reader is referred to an interesting discussion of Salvation Army brass bands by Bernard A. Smith in the November-December and January-February issues of *The Instrumentalist*.



SALVATION ARMY CENTRAL TERRITORY HEADQUARTERS BAND, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

This band, conducted by Bernard A. Smith, presented a concert program at the December 1950 conference of the College Band Directors National Association. The instrumentation of the band is substantially the same as that of the British brass bands—and the instruments used are of the same type. Conductor Smith, whose band experience began in Canada, formerly conducted the Flint, Michigan, Salvation Army Band.

bone. He alone enjoys the distinction of playing in bass clef. I am given to understand that this unusual use of treble clef derives mainly from two circumstances. First, despite their superb technical skill and artistic performing ability, most of the members of these bands are strictly amateurs, and have received little formal musical education. They don't have a chance to learn more than one clef. Second, it enables a bandmaster to move a performer from one instrument to another (except, of course, to the trombones) with relative ease if conditions necessitate so doing. And in such cases, the principal adjustment involves the size of the mouthpiece only—fingering and clef stay the same. I fancy, as well, that those who compose and arrange for brass bands find this decidedly convenient.

Most of the British brass bands (of which I am told, on good authority, there are some 5,000) are sponsored by communities or industries. They bear the names of their sponsors, *e.g.*, "Foden's Motor Works," "Fairley Aviation Corp.," "Black Dyke Mills," and so on. Most of their members not only work for their living, but work with their hands—in mills, coal mines, factories, etc. The bands provide a means of manifesting civic pride and advertising industry. They also provide avocational interests for the average man and musical entertainment for his fellows.

Band Contests in Britain

Thanks in large measure to that indefatigable brass band enthusiast, J. Henry Iles, O.B.E., of London, England, the bands have an organization (The National Brass Band Club), several journals, plenty of arrange-

ments and original compositions, and a system of contests in which they can demonstrate their skill.

For brass band contest purposes, Great Britain is divided into "areas." Within each area there are several "sections" or categories of bands, each member of which is registered with a central bureau. At periodic intervals

While it is true that brass bands are little known except by hearsay to a great many people in the United States, citizens in a number of areas of the country will be able to corroborate through the test of their own eyes and ears Mr. Stewart's comments on the distinctiveness and effectiveness of good brass band performance. The Chicago Salvation Army Band (pictured) is an outstanding example of typical brass band instrumentation and playing skill, such as are described by Mr. Stewart. Flint, Michigan, is one of the major brass band centers, since for years it not only has been the home of one of the outstanding Salvation Army brass bands, but it also has what is said to be the only industrial brass band in this country. The latter, maintained by the A. C. Spark Plug Corporation, is directed by Arthur Wilson; the former by Max Wood.

Perhaps it is not known that all Salvation Army bands are exclusively brass and play exclusively music written for brass instrumentation—much of it produced by the Salvation Army music department, and reserved for use only by the Salvation Army bands. Among the cities which have excellent Salvation Army brass bands besides Chicago and Flint are Detroit, Michigan; Kansas City, and St. Louis, Missouri; Minneapolis, Minnesota; New York City; Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Port Huron, Michigan; Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco, California. The Journal would be glad to have information about other brass bands in the United States.

Command Performance!



COURTOIS
Paris

hand
tempered

**Courtois brasses are hand-tempered by a closely guarded method, developed by Courtois and preserved within the Courtois family for nearly 150 years. But one reason why there is no equal for Courtois tone at any price!*

custom
brasses

You have asked for the *ultimate* in trumpet performance, and here it is—the 1951 Courtois, at your command! Without equal for purity and brilliance* of tone, the Courtois' easy response, flexibility and flawless intonation will amaze you. Your dealer can obtain the new Courtois for you to try, without obligation. Ask him, or write Leblanc, Kenosha, Wis.

area contests are held for bands of one or more sections. When a band wins first place in its own class, it receives not only an award, but it may advance into the next higher class. I believe there are some seven sections in all. The top section is called "Championship." The bands in this section are the cream of the lot. The grand finale comes with the championship contest at Albert Hall, London, in the autumn. The winner of that competition receives a trophy, donated by the *Daily Herald*. To preclude the possibility of a perpetual winner, there is a rule to the effect that after a certain number of consecutive "wins," a band is barred from championship competition until an interval of one or more years has elapsed.

No bandsman may play with a contest band until he has been a registered member of the organization for a period of months prior to the contest, and a resident in the band's home community. Neither may he perform with more than one band at a contest, nor on more than one instrument. The only seeming paradox in the situation is that any band apparently may obtain the services of a professional trainer for rehearsals or a professional conductor for the contest itself. Moreover, a conductor may direct a band in more than one category—he may even direct more than one in the *same* category (I have seen this myself). But, apart from this, the only elements of professionalism are the judges ("adjudicators"), who are professional musicians, and the regular director of each band, who normally devotes most of his time to music.

Contest Setting

Now a few words about a contest in action, the one which I enjoyed recently. The hall was admirably suited to the occasion. The acoustics were good, there was plenty of room for spectators, both upstairs and down (and the place was full), and the platform was an open one, with no backdrops and wings to obscure the players and muffle the sound.

The audience was provided with programs (at sixpence each), showing in a numerical order the twenty-three "Fourth Section" and eleven "Championship Section" bands which had entered the contest—a separate page for each "Section." Just before the "Fourth Section" bands began their competition (at 11:00 a.m.), they drew lots for playing order. The results of this drawing were posted on a bulletin board in the lobby for the benefit of the spectators—for each program carried a column in which the playing sequence might be entered. As soon as the drawing was completed, one of the attendants placed a large card at the front of the hall. This carried the program number of the band (Number 18 played first). And after each band had performed, another card announced its successor. Thus the audience could know which band was playing. No announcements were made, and a notice on the program requested that there be no applause until *after* a band had played. Applause in advance obviously might indicate to the judge the identity of a popular organization. For in these contests the judge is safely shut up where he cannot see what is going on.

CONTINUED ON PAGE FIFTY-ONE

Brass Bands

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32

Contest Procedures

In the center of the hall, roped off from the audience, and guarded by an attendant, was the judge's box. This is a curious wooden structure some eight or ten feet long, perhaps six feet high, and wide enough to accommodate a man seated at a small table. The sides and roof of the "box" are made of what closely resemble the old-fashioned "swinging doors" or window shutters—fins, separated to admit light and air, but tilted at such an angle that the person inside gets no view of what is going on around him. I believe that the judge (there is only one for each section) enters the box before the draw is announced. There he stays to the bitter end, totally unaware of the identity of the bands as he hears them one after another. At the close, he is escorted by two attendants to a place of secrecy (and presumably security as well) where he can make out his report.

When the last band of the day has finished, there is a brief interval for speeches and sundry announcements; after which the judges appear, present their reports formally to an official, who announces the results. The first five bands in each section are announced, beginning with the one which attained fifth place, and concluding with the winner. The point average of each of these five is announced as well!

The limited range of the instruments in a brass band naturally restricts the repertoire. What is even more unfortunate, for many years the principal music available for them consisted of transcriptions of solo or orchestral works (even some for organ), or original works written by inferior composers. As someone has suggested, apparently composers were more willing to write music which would be played by *third-class* orchestras than music for *first-class* brass bands. Thanks to the persistent J. Henry Iles, this situation has been improved. Henry Gehl, Gustav Holst, Granville Bantock, Eric Ball, yes, even Edward Elgar (to name only a few) have contributed serious, first-class music for brass band. And at the contests the test piece must be an original composition.

At the Bolton contest the test piece for "Fourth Section" was a Fantasia, *Mayday*, by the veteran bandsman J. A. Greenwood. For the "Championship Section," it was *Festival Overture* by the old master, Henry Gehl. It is of the latter, however, that I shall speak here, partly because I wish to concentrate my remarks on the championship bands, partly because "short scores" of Mr. Gehl's composition were available for all who wished to read.

I focus attention on the championship bands principally because they were of championship quality. Even I, a rank amateur, could sit in judgment on the "Fourth Section," detecting their shortcomings and evaluating their performance as a whole. But the championship bands were of such superior quality and so evenly matched that I was willing to close my notebook, sit back, enjoy the performance to the full, and marvel that the adjudicator (in this instance Mr. Gehl himself) could balance one against another.



It takes interesting, fresh, new music to compete with the forces of *spring*. But you can get the newest music, the broadest selection, the fastest service from E. M. B.

Write for your copy of the big, new 1950 EMB GUIDE. It is the most complete listing of school music materials of all publishers available.

* Educational Music Bureau, Inc.

30 E. ADAMS ST., CHICAGO 3, ILLINOIS: Vocal music for choruses, operettas and cantatas • Text books and literature • Band and orchestra music • Instrumental solo and ensemble music • Instrumental methods • A complete stock of equipment, supplies and teaching aids for every phase of music education.

GOWNS
• Pulpit and Choir •
Headquarters for
RELIGIOUS SUPPLIES

Church Furniture • Stoles
Embroideries • Vestments
Hangings • Communion
Sets • Altar Brass Goods

CATALOG ON REQUEST

National CHURCH GOODS
SUPPLY COMPANY
821 - 23 ARCH STREET, PHILADELPHIA 7, PA.

Music Rooms and Equipment

112 pages, 81 floor plans, charts, reproductions of photographs. \$1.50 postpaid. MENC
64 E. Jackson, Chicago 4, Ill.

When writing to advertisers, please mention the MUSIC EDUCATORS JOURNAL.

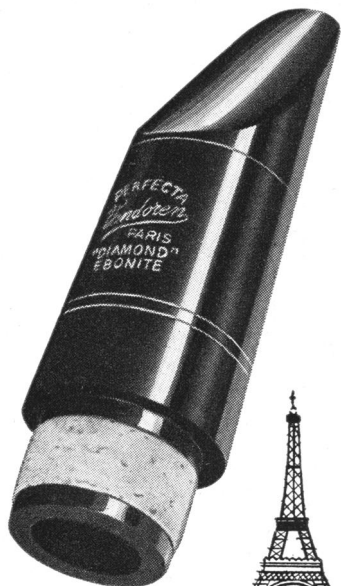
Singers • Teachers • Students

First deluxe numbered edition of MONTELL VOCAL TECHNIQUE now available—a major event in musical history—greatest book on singing of all time—unveiling a world whose existence was heretofore unsuspected—the source book and bible of the future—and of singers and teachers only who have a future. At your book store. Write for descriptive folder, mentioning Music Educators Journal.

Published by
WHO IS WHO IN MUSIC, Inc. Ltd.
Third Floor, 3177 Broadway, Chicago 14, Ill.

Control

perfect control!



Vandoren
PARIS

MOUTHPIECES

Here's a mouthpiece that's sure to give you a world of confidence . . . A mouthpiece that gives you *perfect control* in all registers! Try one and see for yourself. Learn the difference between a *handcrafted* Vandoren and run-of-the-mill, mass production mouthpieces. You'll be amazed!

Vandoren signature mouthpieces are available for saxophone as well as clarinet—in a variety of facings. Write G. Leblanc Company, Kenosha, Wisconsin for free folder.



the aristocrat
of mouthpieces



AT LEADING STORES

Comments on Performance

Most of what I have to say about the actual performance will be published shortly in Mr. Iles' *British Bandsman*. But I am sure that he will have no objection to my repeating some of it here. The test piece was not only designed for brass band; it was designed for brass band *in contest*. It demanded a high degree of technical proficiency, ensemble integration, tonal quality, dynamic shadings, sectional performance, and solo artistry. Moreover, these demands were so distributed that every section (and the solo part of nearly every section) was required to do special work. Unlike many compositions traditionally used by bands of all types, the test piece did not permit a band to "get by" with a series of brilliant cadenzas and solos by a few star performers, alternating with a sequence of robust *tuttis*, in which the shortcomings of average players were obscured.

I have played recordings of some of the better British brass bands for many American friends — bandsmen, orchestra musicians, and others. Inevitably they found it difficult to believe that individual brass players could accomplish such feats, or that such a small ensemble could produce such results. I wonder how they would respond if they could hear the bands in person. For, to me, they beggar description. The solid "organ" tone of the basses, the unaffected sweetness of horns and flugels, the masterful clarity and brilliance of the solo cornets (with the superb backing of repianos, seconds, and thirds), the rich French horn tone of the euphoniums (with substantial support from the full-throated baritones), the pleasing "shrill" of the soprano cornets, and the strident fullness of the trombones — the exactness of phrasing in both solo and sectional passages, the complete integration of sections and ensemble, the superb intonation, the startling dynamic transitions, and the truthfulness of attack, the capacity for being in tune at the start and staying there throughout, and the magnificent tonal and volume control at all times — these are but a few of the lasting impressions which these fine bands made upon me. But here words seem to lose their significance. As I said before, these bands

have to be heard in order to be fully appreciated. I think I am not exaggerating when I say that the best of our bands (even professional ones) are no better, if they are as good. In my estimation, the only advantage that American players can show is in the somewhat superior trombone tone which they produce. Ours is sweeter and fuller; the British player's tone is more strident.

American and British Bands

Within two weeks after the Bolton contest I heard a first-class "concert band," fifty or sixty strong, with expert musicians, excellent instrumentation, and authoritative direction. Any American professional bandsman would have had to admit that it could meet our own best bands on an equal basis. It played good music and played it well. But the first thing I noticed about it was the distasteful effect of the percussion. They were excellent performers, and as a former drummer myself I am naturally "on their side." But all I could think of was how wonderful those little brass bands had sounded without any drums at all. The reed section was fine, but in comparison with an all-brass aggregation, it sounded thin and mechanical. Even the brass, fine though it was, suffered by comparison. Perhaps it was because they used no cornets—instead they had a full trumpet section and four flugel horns. But then I recalled that this was no new experience for me. In the 1920's I had noticed the same contrast, for I had heard a performance by a small British brass band immediately following one given by what was at that time one of the best professional concert bands in the U.S.A. And I fear that ever since that time any band, except a first-class *brass band*, has sounded to me somewhat like an orchestra *without* benefit of strings and *with* an excess of percussion.

This may be treason but before you make the most of it, at least hear a good Victor recording of, let us say, "Foden's," and play it on a good machine. Then have your own brass section listen to it and try to achieve an equally effective result. I venture to say that you will soon have some neurotic cornet and



MENC STUDENT CHAPTER 307, NORTHERN IDAHO COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, LEWISTON.

This picture was made on the occasion of the installation of the new chapter. In the picture: Left to right at desk, Grant Mathews, head, Northern Idaho College of Education music department; Ross Woods, music director, Lewiston high school; Louise Nordness, N.I.C.E. music instructor, and sponsor and director of this chapter. Left to right—front row, Vergil Personette, Dorothy Parker, Patty Jo Johnson, Robert E. Odell, Pearl Yoder, Louise Johnston. In the second and third rows are other faculty members and the Alpha Epsilon music organization, which sponsored the installation of Chapter 307. All of the members of this Chapter are music majors, and many are already doing their student-teacher work.

euphonium players on your hands. Or, if they do not shift to some other instrument, they will at least start taking lessons again and put in more hours of practice. In the last analysis, it might be better to do as I did—simply sit back, enjoy it, and say "It can't be done."

+

The Good Old Days And Now

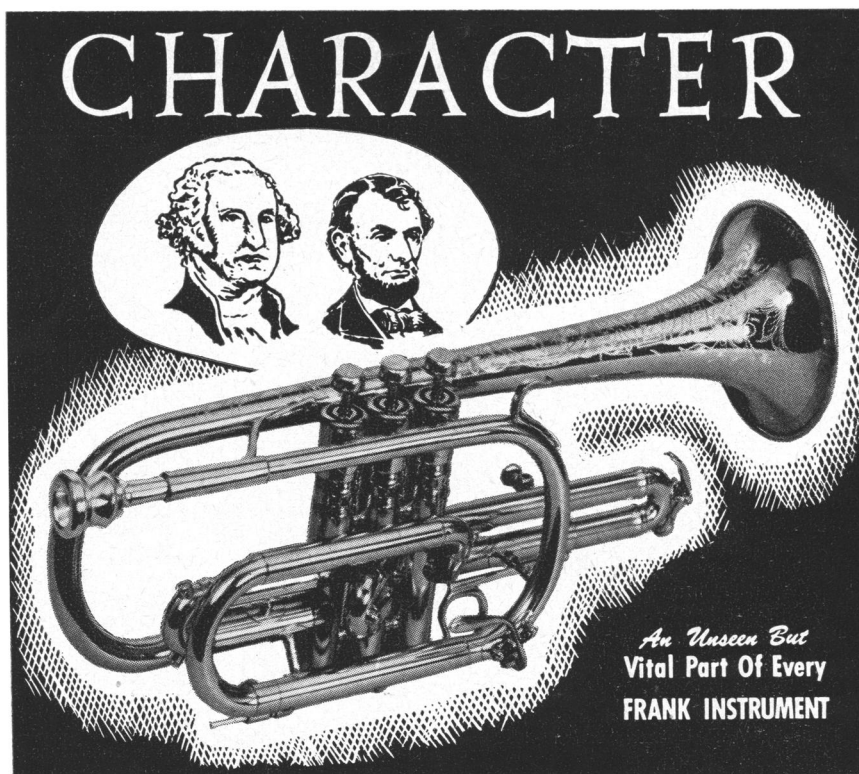
THE CONTEST procedure described by Mr. Stewart is substantially the same as that followed in band contests in the United States in the golden era of town bands. Still living are men who were members of those hardy outfits, such as the Haverhill (Mass.) band, and others in the area, which drew their players from a radius of ten to twenty-five miles. One cornetist—later a famous soloist and bandmaster—traveled twelve miles to rehearsals, on foot the entire distance when necessary. This was not uncommon in the experiences of those days which gave us some of our finest band musicians.

With the gradual demise of town bands, and the advent of school bands and "juvenile" bands, contests were again instituted about 1910. At first the participants included adult and school-age players. Again the contest procedures were similar to those outlined in Mr. Stewart's description of the British brass band contests. Increasingly there were such close decisions that the difference between the first and second place bands was often on the basis of a few percentage points—even on a fraction of a point. Ostensibly the musical factors entering into the adjudication were so equally balanced that the winner was decided in a "photo finish." Actually, the judges felt that it was unjust to the bands and to themselves to attempt to decide which of the two—or sometimes three or four—bands was "best." from an educational standpoint it was decided the ranking system for school band meets was all wrong. About 1930 an entirely new plan was adopted, whereby school groups meeting in competition festivals were adjudicated on a four- or five-grade rating scale, which gave the competition festivals more of the aspects in spirit, purpose and fact, of tests rather than contests. Under the grading plan "Division I," representing the highest rating, may be attained by more than one group; in fact, it is possible for several groups in a given classification to achieve that grade. To receive a Division II rating may be considered equivalent to a high passing mark of 87 to 94.9. Division III rating is equivalent to a mark of 80 to 86.9, and Division IV rating is equivalent to a mark of 75 to 79.9. Division V, where used is considered a below passing rating.

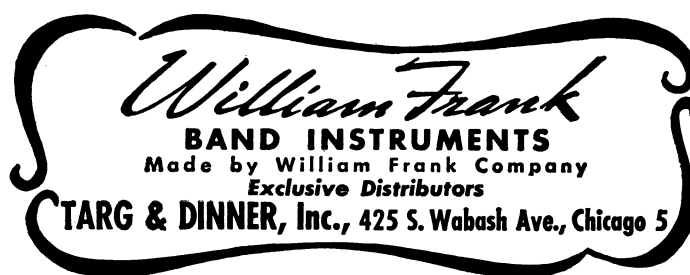
—MARK TIME

+

VICTOR ALESSANDRO, conductor of the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra, made a valuable laboratory session of the rehearsal of his orchestra for the benefit of members of the Southwestern Music Educators Conference, March 9. The Conference members were invited, literally, to "sit in" at the rehearsal, which was especially set up on the main floor of the Oklahoma City Municipal Auditorium. In order to make the session most effective from the standpoint of the visitors, conductor Alessandro suggested that auditors take positions back of the orchestra players, where it would be possible to watch the scores. (Picture on page 62.)



Just as character is reflected in the face and actions of a man, so is the intrinsic character of William Frank Band Instruments evident in the appearance and performance of every horn bearing this respected name. Essentially, it is the result of complete honesty in upholding the ideals and traditions established by the founders of the company more than 40 years ago. It reveals itself in a certain perfection of detail, an extra degree of handcraftsmanship, that gives the owner more for his money—more in looks, tone, progress, pleasure and pride. *You Can BANK on a FRANK.*



Music For Everybody

A report and pictorial review prepared by the MENC Committee on School-Community Music Relations and Activities—a cross-section view of music for and by the people of the United States. With the information supplied by the appendix, the book serves as a valuable handbook and guide for persons and organizations interested in developing and correlating local musical activities.

64 pages

• Cover in colors

• \$1.00 postpaid

Music Educators National Conference, 64 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago 4, Ill.