Brass Band Association of New Zealand (BBANZ) is a not-for-profit charitable organisation that works on behalf of 51 community brass bands and their 1800 members. Band members range in age from eight to 90 years of age. More than 30% of band members are under the age of 23 years. Each year the Band Association organises the National Brass Band Championships, community education workshops, the publication of The Mouthpiece journal, the National Secondary Schools’ Brass Band training camp and the National Youth Band training camp and concert tour. Periodically a National Band is formed to perform concerts in New Zealand and overseas or compete in international contests.

1”New Zealand’s first band was established in Wellington less than three years after the arrival of the first British settlers in 1840. The band comprised ten amateur musicians who took a prominent part in public events. Christchurch had a band as early as 1857. On August 25 that year, it headed a procession in honour of Superintendent Fitzgerald, who was returning to England. About this time an attempt was made to form a band in Nelson. A fete was held to raise funds to import a set of instruments from England. However, the outcome is not known.

“A significant event of the period was the establishment in February 1858 of New Zealand’s first Volunteer Corps of Militia in New Plymouth. Although nearly 300 settlers responded to the call, the corps was disbanded six months later. Given the rapidly-deteriorating situation between the Maori and European settlers, a committee was elected the following September to organise another corps subject to the permission of the authorities. The Taranaki Militia and Rifles held its first drill on March 14 1859, and at the end of the month, it was announced that the corps intended to establish a band. This was New Zealand’s first brass band, and it is still active today as The Devon Hotel New Plymouth Brass.

“During the 1870s and 80s, the colony’s volunteers forces delighted in staging spectacular reviews in conjunction with their Easter camps. Bands were an important feature. They received high-ranking officers musically and thundered out a verse of the national anthem the moment the troops presented arms. They also headed the march past and the all-important street parade. It followed that the volunteer regiments boasted of the merits of their respective bands and friendly arguments developed. In 1879, it was decided that the honour should be contested at the next Easter camp in Christchurch.

“On March 27 1880, a Grand Military Concert was staged with six bands competing. “Every band had its admirers, “reported the Press, “and all played excellently.” Unfortunately, “through an oversight”, no judge was appointed. It was, however, generally agreed that the Invercargill Garrison Band had given the best performance. This is accredited as our first national contest.

“The year 1891 marked two of the most important developments in New Zealand contesting, the first contest to be staged on a national scale and the formal registration of the United Brass (and Military) Bands Association of New Zealand, under whose auspices the contest was run. However, the separate North Island and South Island Associations continued to run competitions as well.

“The formation of the present-day Brass Band Association of New Zealand (BBANZ) in 1931 heralded the beginning of a new era in the history of the brass band movement. Under the then leadership of Mr Ernest Palliser, the association quickly established itself as a highly effective administrative body.”

Members elected to the current Management Committee of BBANZ strive to maintain this reputation and to support our member bands.

**1 Extracts from “*Challenging Brass: 100 years of brass band contests in New Zealand 1880-1980*” By S.P Newcomb**