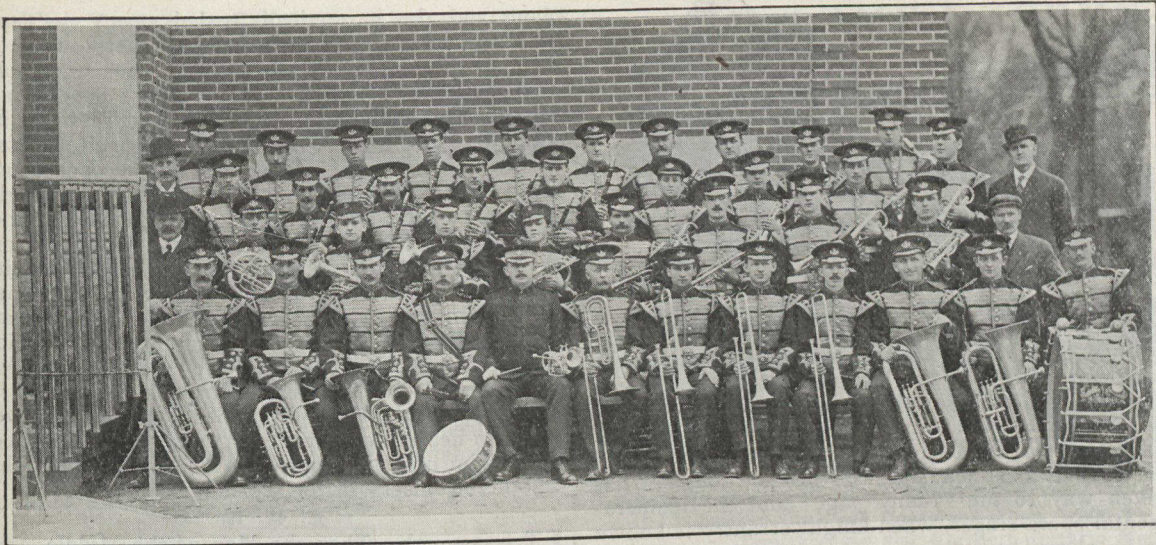




A Band in a Small Town That Plays Tschaikovsky and Wagner. Complete Line-up of the Citizens' Concert Band in the Town of Preston, Ont., Conducted by Mr. John Holland.

One Town's Good Music

By THE MUSIC EDITOR

PRESTON, ONT., has a citizens' band that plays Tschaikovsky and Wagner—and does it well. The Preston band has a history. It has also a very decided function and should have a brilliant future. The reason is—that it is a band with an idea.

Of course several hundred towns and small cities in Canada are indebted to a band for most of the music enjoyed by the public. If the history of Canadian music were to be written adequately, more credit must be given to the band than to any other institution. For it takes a good-sized city to support a choral society, and orchestras worth listening to are much fewer in number. Bands are legion. And there are all kinds of bands, good, bad and indifferent. Even the smallest band does the town or village it belongs to a great public service—provided the band is run by the citizens at large.

Now the Preston band is regarded by the citizens as a public institution deserving support—because it is the one form of native art produced in the town for the good of the people, by the citizens themselves; which is a good deal better than paying out a lot of good money once in a while to import music from outside. Besides, this band has played to many thousands of people in such places as the Canadian National Exhibition and Scarboro' Beach, Toronto—in competition with the best military bands from all over Canada.

This would not be possible if the Preston band played ragtime as its regular bill of fare. It is possible only because the band is able to play big, serious music well; and ragtime if it wants to. And to play big music well in a small town means a tremendous lot of trouble for some people. To begin with, the band must be of good size. The players must be of more than average standard. They must be under a capable leader. The instruments must be first-class and must be well kept. Uniforms must be bought, fine enough to look handsome in a park or on a concert platform. The Preston uniforms are as handsome as those of the Grenadier Guards. There must be regular and frequent rehearsals in a hall well suited to the purpose. There must be a series of concerts extending over several months. Music suitable to such a series of programmes must be got, no matter how difficult. The people must turn out to the concerts and pay their good money gladly to hear what gives them the highest form of art pleasure.

Now, all these things cost time, trouble, labour, organization and money. And Preston spends just those things on the band in order to get what the people need and want in good music. The band numbers thirty-five players, all residents of the town. A large number of the bandsmen are British. To get these men the manufacturers of Preston co-operate as far as possible to employ in their factories as many bandsmen as are needed, of just such kinds as the bandmaster specified. That is why in the big daily newspapers might frequently be seen such an advertisement as: "Wanted—Nickel-plate worker for stoves. Clarinet-player preferred. Apply — Works, Preston, Ont." That may not be the exact wording, but it expresses the idea. Preston makes stoves and furniture in large quantities. Hundreds of men are employed in Preston factories. Mainly from these men the band is kept up. A curious commentary on the case of late is

the fact that too much prosperity has been detrimental to the band. So many players have been working overtime in the factories that it is not easy to get fully attended rehearsals.

The band has a long history. Thirty years ago Preston began to have a brass band modelled after the great village bands in Yorkshire and Lancashire. For several years the band flourished and won many prizes at band tournaments. About ten years ago the band dwindled. The story of how it was reorganized to its present status is a chapter in united citizens' effort well worth the while of any town in Canada to emulate. In the words of a leading citizen—manager of a bank and player of a slide trombone—

"Preston by this time was a town of some two thousand odd inhabitants, and the people being of an enterprising and music-loving nature, called a public meeting to discuss ways and means of restoring the band to its former plane of efficiency. Several schemes were tried out, but proved ineffective, the instruments ultimately reverting to the town. A few musical enthusiasts got together and started a class of some twenty-five boys, using the old instruments, and by the spring of the year were able to turn out the nucleus of a fairly promising organization. Subscription lists were circulated and a fine set of silver-plated Besson instruments were procured. The band was placed in charge of Mr. J. A. Hallman. This gentleman devoted some time

to perfecting the musical end, but owing to the press of business duties resigned, and a professional conductor, Mr. W. Williams, of Belfast, Ireland, was engaged for three years. A capable conductor and good, all-round musician, he brought the band along rapidly.

"After four or five years Mr. Williams was offered a much better position in the West, and the band was placed in the hands of the present conductor, Mr. John Holland. This gentleman was skilled in the best tradition of the best North of England bands and soon proved himself the right man in the right place. In spite of many changes in the personnel of the organization, Preston now has a band of some thirty-five performers who, under the painstaking and skilful care of Mr. Holland, have made most satisfactory advances. The class of music shows a very marked improvement. The band is well supported by the citizens, and during the summer months gives weekly concerts in our beautiful little Central Park, where it is listened to with greatest interest and satisfaction by not only the citizens of Preston, but many from the surrounding towns. The support of this organization is an outstanding feature reflecting credit on the progressive and up-to-date character of the citizens of Preston. Many of the business firms contribute handsomely every year and are of material assistance in the way of securing work for desirable players.

"The band has been hard at work on its winter practice for next season's programme, and are rehearsing some music of a very high class in which all the members seem to take a deep interest."

"The Moon of Omar"

"**THE MOON OF OMAR**" is the name of a piano reverie fresh from the pen of the best-known Canadian composer, Clarence Lucas. Mr. Lucas has composed a large number of excellent things in many styles and moods, for piano, strings, orchestra, voice and organ. He has been twenty years away from Canada, living in New York, London and Paris. His book on "Musical Form" is one of the most popular and effective things of its kind ever written; as simple and lucid as Krehbiel's "How to Listen to Music"; both of which books should be in every well-ordered domestic library. Besides, in London some years ago, Mr. Lucas was the tutor—in theory and counterpoint, of all the Hambourg brothers.

As a composer he is the one outstanding figure from Canada. Lavallee, who might have been our best-known composer, died before he was able to achieve a life work. Mainly our musicians have been too busy to do much composing. We have lacked background and atmosphere. In other art centres Mr. Lucas has caught the inspiration to compose.

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THE VIRTUOSO OF THE OPEN STRING



New Parson (having noticed that the double-bass player uses his left hand simply to support the instrument)—"I see you don't use your fingers when you play, John?"
John—"Noa, sir; ye see there be some as twiddles their fingers when they play, an' there be some as don't, an' I be one o' they that don't."

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