

Watsonville's 'family band' just keeps on rolling along

By WALLACE BAINE
Sentinel staff writer

THEY CALL themselves the "Watsonville Band." But that modest, unassuming moniker doesn't begin to tell their story.

First of all, there's more than 90 of them, all amateur musicians who come together for 16-20 performances every year, including past dates in such exotic locales as Paris, Montreal, Vienna, Budapest and Madrid.

Secondly, relatively few of them come from the Pajaro Valley. The band draws its players from a wide circle including Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey counties. It boasts players from as far north as Pleasanton and far south as Soledad. The Watsonville Band boasts more Salinas area players than Watsonville-based members.

Finally, the band has been around longer than many of the

Preview

- **WHAT:** The Watsonville Band's Spring Concert Series
- **WHERE:** Fox Theater, Main and Maple streets, Watsonville
- **WHEN:** Thursday, 8 p.m.
- **TICKETS:** Free admission
- **INFORMATION:** 800-347-6136

members have been alive. At 46 years young, the Watsonville Band pre-dates rock 'n' roll and the Space Age.

The Watsonville Band plays a free concert Thursday at the Fox Theater, Main and Maple streets in downtown Watsonville as part of its annual spring concert series.

"I can't really tell you why we've lasted this long," said Gonzalo "Bert" Viales of Salinas, who is

celebrating his 30th year as conductor of the band. "It's the camaraderie more than anything I guess. It's really more like a family than a band."

The "family" began back in 1947, when Harry Truman was president and Duke Ellington was king of the pop charts. The band started as an offshoot of the Watsonville High School band for those who wanted to play in a big concert band after graduation.

"Our repertoire then was not too different than it is now," said trumpeter Ed Pio, who joined the band in its second year of existence. "We do the potboilers, y'know the popular overtures by Wagner or Tchaikovsky, the William Tell Overture and, of course, Sousa marches."

Turnover in the band is not very high, said Pio. The band can expect to collect six-10 new members a

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Conductor Gonzalo 'Bert' Viales is celebrating his 30th year as the Watsonville Band's leader.

Band marks 46th year of performing

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year. Those interested playing in the band do not even have to audition for a spot ("If you love music and really want to play in the band, we'll find a spot for you," said Viales) except if you happen to be in high school. Students must audition for a spot in the band and prove that their participation will not interfere with their school work. "We've always had a policy of putting school first," said Pio.

The band features several music teachers as well as three whole individual bands: a German band, an English brass band and a Dixieland band. Several times in the past, the band has included three separate generations from the same family.

It plays three major events every

year: the spring concert series, summer concert season and the Christmas holiday concert series. During the summer, many of the Watsonville Band's appearances are on foot as a marching parade band.

"We try to put together a wide variety of music," said Viales, 68. "We do just about everything except maybe rock and that kind of music. We do marches, show music, movie music, overtures. The music we do now is much more difficult than what we've done in the past. But we try to play at least one piece that will satisfy everyone in the audience."

Among the band's staples are the "Gippsland" march, the "Beer Barrell Polka" and John Philip Sousa's patriotic classic "Stars and

Stripes Forever."

Thursday's show will feature a Sousa march, a Wagner piece, a military symphony and an entire

suite given over the folk music of Scotland and Ireland. Joining the Watsonville Band in "A Keltic Salute" will be the Salinas Pipe Band.