

Boardwalk

# Boardwalk Easter Concert Revives Custom

By BILL NEUBAUER  
Sentinel Staff Writer

An oldtime Santa Cruz custom will be renewed today when a 30-piece brass band presents an Easter concert at 1 p.m. at the boardwalk.

Appropriately, the band has been brought together by two organizations which have combined efforts for some 70 years to provide special concerts for beach visitors: Santa Cruz

Musicians Local 346 of the American Federation of Musicians, and the Santa Cruz Seaside Co.

Memories of many of these past concerts will be evoked by a richly diversified program conducted by Bandmaster Vern Spaugh.

And, for some, there will be other memories as well.

For Skip Littlefield of the Seaside Co., for example, the

peals of the trumpets and the booms of the drums and the crashing of the cymbals will recall a day in 1950 when a lover of Italian Grand Opera took exception to the programming of the Santa Cruz Beach Symphonic Band, which in those days played weekends in the bandshell that used to be anchored to former Pleasure Pier at the east end of the old Plunge (indoor golf) building.

Littlefield, who was then band manager for the company, among other things, was telephoned by Deputy Sheriff Lowell Rountree and told to lock his door and admit no one to his office until contacted again.

"After a half hour of suspense," Littlefield recalls, "I was called to the county jail to identify a prisoner. I didn't know the man, who was obviously deranged. But he had been arrested at Station KSCO after telling Vernon Berlin, the station manager, that he was going to shoot me dead."

"Turned out that this man went to the beach every Sunday to listen to the concert, but the band only played German, Russian and French Grand Opera, never Italian."

"Strangely, beach concerts once again presented the great Italian composers, such as Verdi, Puccini, Rossini, Mascagni and Leoncavallo. I could see no percentage in tempting fate."

But beach concerts became a tradition in Santa Cruz long before the Santa Cruz Beach Co. was founded in 1904 (reorganized as the Seaside Co. in 1915).

In fact, one of the local musical greats of yesteryear, Professor George Hastings, came to the city in 1873, attracted by the lively interest in music in these parts.

At that time, Santa Cruz was learning music from a Madame Spornberger and listening to concerts by such bands as Emerson's, McLaren's and the Santa Cruz Cornet Band, among others.

There was more work than many a musician could handle, and Professor Hastings was a musician, a trumpet and cornet player. But besides that, the professor was a talented conductor, organizer and administrator.

By 1886 advertisements such as this were appearing in the Sentinel:

"Fifth Annual Masquerade. Fancy Dress and Character Carnival. Hastings' Brass and String Bands. \$300 Gold Coin Will Be Awarded in Prizes."

Young though he was (he was born in Bloomington, Ill. 1853), Hastings was credited with developing one of the finest bands in Central California.

Like other bandmasters of the time, he dressed his musicians in uniforms closely modeled on those worn by Union soldiers in

the Civil War.

Later, the musicians were put into gaudy uniforms reminiscent of the days of Napoleon III.

Those uniforms were recalled back in 1953 by a nonagenarian named Bob Tait, who played a valve tenor trombone for Hastings at the beach in 1883 and then went on to head the city fire department for 43 years.

Tait recalled: "These uniforms were so loud that it was always a question among the band boys as to who would step out first into the public gaze."

The great, the near-great and the less-great music was played at these concerts back in the golden Victorian age when Santa Cruz was famed far and wide as "that saucily handsome watering place by Monterey Bay."

But the crowds came for Easter and the summer, for other holidays and special occasions, and the great Professor George Hastings and his boys played for them all, and whatever music the people wanted to hear.

Hastings did more as an organizer and administrator before he traveled on to Fresno in 1907.

Concerned about the welfare of the musicians, Hastings organized the Santa Cruz Musicians Union in 1903. Records show that when the charter was awarded on Nov. 17 that year the local had but eight members.

Ironically, it was this union accomplishment that created in the past decade "the great cornet mystery" at Santa Cruz Main Library.

Back in 1894, the members of the Hastings band gave the great professor an E-flat cornet for Christmas. Names of the bandmembers were engraved on the bell, and Hastings treasured the instrument.

On his death in 1923, the instrument went to Mrs. Orene Hastings Smith, and one day, knowing of Littlefield's interest in oldtime things, she gave the cornet to him.

In turn, Littlefield presented the cornet to the Santa Cruz Musicians Union in 1953 on behalf of Mrs. Smith on the golden anniversary of the union her father had founded. A highlight of this occasion was a congratulatory telegram from James Petrillo, then president of the American Federation of Musicians.

"By this time the cornet was a

museum piece because they haven't used E-flat cornets since 1910," Littlefield said.

But the cornet went back to Littlefield for safekeeping because the musicians union office was cramped and there was no place to store it.

"Well," Littlefield recalled this week, "the old library that used to stand where the new one is had a display on early day bands and orchestras of Santa Cruz. I loaned them the cornet and that was the last I knew of its whereabouts until I read recently in the Sentinel about the E-flat cornet the library people blow on such special occasions as opening new facilities. That's the old Hastings cornet, all right."

City - County Librarian Charles Atkins agreed that Littlefield has indeed solved "the great cornet mystery," but he added: "I'm not at all embarrassed for myself or for my predecessor here to be caught redhanded with the goods, as it were. This proves the truth of what we have said all along: when things are left with the library for safekeeping they are really kept."

The Hastings band became known as the Santa Cruz Beach Band by 1912, and the organization had its ups and downs as times changed, and interests with them.

A new high was reached in 1946, however, when 40 musicians out of the San Francisco Symphony joined the band. It was promptly renamed the Santa Cruz Beach Symphonic Band by the indomitable Littlefield, who was now the company's advertising director and general entrepreneur.

As unabashed about musical mish - mashes as Atkins was when he discovered the dreadful truth about his beloved E-flat cornet, Littlefield heralded in the Sentinel and elsewhere such programs as the Andante Cantabile by Tchaikovsky, Onward Christian Soldiers, a banjo arrangement of the Rigoletto Quartette by Verdi, Siboney, I'll See You in My Dreams and the 12th Street Rag.

But the concerts were always fun for everyone, a search of the Sentinel files will prove.

And that's the purpose of the concert today, to lend further joy to Easter in a way that all the conductors and musicians, who have ever participated in the concerts since the 1870s would appreciate and applaud.



The great Professor George Hastings, seated at far right, came to Santa Cruz in 1874 to play his cornet at beach concerts and other events. He founded one of the finest bands in Central California and dressed them in Civil War type uniforms, as shown here in photo taken in

1886. Bandmasters were automatically given the title of "professor" in those days. The members of the band back before the McHugh - Bianchi building was built were, standing, left to right, Enoch Alzina, Wm. Pringle, Charles Arcane, D. C. Tait (later city fire chief

for 43 years), Charles Coolidge, Roland Case and Lou Williams. Seated are, left to right, Ellery Young, Albert Help, John Pepin, Albert Rawel and Hastings. Behind the snare drum is John Alzina. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SEASIDE COMPANY

Professor George Hastings' beloved E-flat cornet was presented by Skip Littlefield, right, to Henry Clay Landram, president of the local musicians union during the group's 50th anniversary celebration Nov. 18, 1953. The cornet was given to the pioneer bandmaster by members of the Hastings Band on Christmas Day, 1894. Names of the members are engraved on the bell of the instrument. Littlefield got the cornet from Mrs. Orene Hastings Smith, daughter of the bandleader. Hastings was a founder of the union in 1903.

