

# COMBINED BANDS

## Excellent Performance By Police And Hussars

### SPLENDID CO-OPERATION

(By FR. T. F. RYAN, SJ, FOR THE S.C.M. POST)

Band music was worthily presented at the Empire Theatre on Wednesday night when the combined Bands of the Hong Kong Police and the 7th (Queen's Own) Hussars gave an excellent performance to a packed house.

The body of musicians, sixty-five in number, made a striking picture on the stage. Their uniforms were in complete contrast and there was an array of heavy brass that promised musical thunder. There was a very even distribution of the players of the two bands, and the equal partnership was further demonstrated by the alternate direction of the two conductors.

When two Bands play together it is elementary commendation to say that they played as one, for if they did not it would be better that they were not heard. But when the two bands are such as we heard on this occasion, a British Army Band with the

traditions of generations and the shades of Kneller Hall behind it, and a band of young Chinese not yet ten years in existence, it is a most remarkable achievement. It is one, too, that would never have been possible if the man who is responsible for the Hongkong Police Band, Mr W. B. Foster, had not been steeped in army traditions, and a leading conductor of a British Army Band, before he gave his services to Hongkong.

#### Well-Selected

No easy road was taken in preparing the programme for this performance. There were some stock band pieces and there were adaptations from Tchaikowsky and Wagner, and it was on the whole a well selected, well-balanced programme which was a severe test of capacity as well as being one chosen to appeal to a general audience.

There are various ways of combining instruments in a large Band, and in this case the emphasis was strongly on the brass. Only about a third of the players were woodwind, and of these there were only two flutes and one bassoon. The result was a great capacity for richness of sound, which was used to the full and excellently controlled. That is particularly well displayed in the arrangement of Handel's "Largo", which gave alternate prominence to brass and woodwind, but was conspicuous for the fine organ tone of the full brass.

#### Feeling Of Reserve

In the softer parts of the music the Band maintained that feeling of reserve of strength which is one of the great charms of band music, and in

the lighter passages, such as in the "Swan Lake" Ballet, there was none of the elephantine pirouetting which Bands sometimes give, but genuine delicacy and real feeling. From a Band, however, especially a large one such as this, what we really want is some of the majesty of music which it alone can give, and we got it in generous measure in the playing of "Finlandia," by Sibelius. One can well understand why Russia banned this work when it was trying to dominate the people whose spirit it represented, and I am sure that a Finnish audience would have applauded this performance of it. There is defiance, boldness and dignity in the music, and all of it was expressed. There was splendid precision in the playing, and particularly fine playing by the trombones. The percussion, too, were outstanding in this piece. The timpani player of the Hussars, and the Police Band performer on the side drum, each gave a fine performance, while in between them was the big drum player of the Police Band, who all through the evening combined an obvious enjoyment of his part with split-second precision in manipulation of the drum and cymbals.

#### Charming Interlude

As a charming interlude in each half of the programme there was a group of Chinese songs by Miss Barbara Fei, with piano accompaniment. They were well chosen and well sung, and they greatly pleased the audience.

From every point of view this was a most worthy performance. It was a union of forces that showed excellent co-operation, and it was a performance which could not have reached such a good level without painstaking rehearsal—an object-lesson from which all who presume to appear before the public may well learn. Great credit is due to the two conductors, Mr G. Horabin, of the Hussars, and Mr W. B. Foster, of the Police Band, whose different styles of conducting gave added interest to the performance. They have given a splendid example of co-operation and of careful work which deserves the highest praise. If they could have appeared together—with Harry Odell between them, who made the performance possible—they would have got the biggest ovation of the evening.