

Band Music Reviews (June 2011)

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Where have all the marches gone? For some reason, contemporary composers tend to avoid the genre – or at least avoid success in the genre. My theory is that a good march requires at least three catchy tunes, and that’s a tall order. Tune writing is a lost art, so we’ll have to dip into the archives to find some worthy candidates. Marches are often categorized by function: circus marches, ceremonial marches, concert marches, and for lack of a better term “marching” marches. There are also football marches, commemorative marches, dancing marches, and national marches. You name it, there’s a march for it.

Marches have a long and distinguished history. The modern form is descended from the minuet and trio of the 18th century. European marches tend to remain closer to that model, whereas American marches adopted the bold strategy of ending in the “wrong” key thanks in large part to the spectacularly gifted John Philip Sousa. Sousa’s marches are numerous and easy to find, and the quality is rock solid no matter your choice. Other “can’t miss” American march icons include Karl King and Henry Fillmore. For those on the hunt for Fillmore marches, remember that he used seven pseudonyms: Harold Bennett for easier works, Al Hayes or Will Huff for moderately easy works, and Gus Beans, Ray Hall, Harry Hartley, and/or Henrietta Moore for the rest.

Many classical composers known primarily for their orchestral music also created the occasional march. Beethoven, Berlioz, Debussy, Delibes, Donizetti, Elgar, Hanson, Hindemith, Holst, Ives, Prokofiev, Rossini, Saint-Saens, Tchaikovsky, Verdi, Wagner, and Walton are just a few. Looking for a grand march? Look to the giants of opera. Something light, festive, and dance-able? The Strauss family can fill the bill.

The golden age of march writing coincided with the flourishing of circuses and professional concert bands in the United States (c. 1880-1930). The bands of this era maintained exhausting performance schedules, and marches were a staple of every program. Consider the fact that a single

circus parade in a big city might require sixty or seventy marches! This poses several problems for the modern-day conductor. Marches were written for immediate use, and since the composer was typically the conductor, there was no score – just parts. When there was a score, it was usually “short” or condensed to provide a quick outline simply as a reminder. A related problem concerns the history of music publishing in the United States. Nearly all of the original family-run publishing houses have been absorbed by larger companies. These larger companies have since been bought by even larger companies, that have been bought by still larger companies. Thus Carl Fischer owns Fillmore, Theodore Presser owns Chappell and John Church, C.L. Barnhouse owns K. L. King, Belwin-Mills owns Mills, and Piedmont, and Schmitt, and Hal Leonard owns everybody. Okay, I’m joking about that last one (but just barely). Bottom line: the path you follow to track down a march won’t be straight or short.

Fortunately there are a few resources that can help. For the older marches, including extensive publishing and bibliographic information, the most useful source remains Norman Smith’s *March Music Notes* (Program Note Press, 1986). For the most frequently performed marches, GIA Publications’ *Teaching Music Through Performing Marches* (2003) includes some useful pedagogical material. For free downloadable audio files of excellent march performances, visit the United States Marine Band website, <http://www.marineband.usmc.mil> I’m just now listening to their recording of Sousa’s *On the Campus* (1920, grade 4), and it’s delightful.

Here are some more recommendations to whet your appetite. Since 2011 is the 150th anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil War, you might consider programming C.L. Barnhouse’s *The Battle of Shiloh*. This grade 5 march was composed in 1888 when the memory of the actual battle was still fresh. The march was re-issued in 1986 with a full score. Another march that might fit the theme would be Russel Alexander’s *The Southerner*. Composed in 1908, and re-issued with a full score in 1968, this grade 4 composition was dedicated to Alexander’s wife and became his most popular work alongside *The Colossus of Columbia* (grade 4, 1901/1980).

To add some international flair to your programs, consider these classics: Mariano San Miguel’s *La Oreja de Oro – The Golden Ear* (1966/1984, grade 4). Carl Teike’s *Alte Kameraden – Old Comrades* (1908/1973, grade 4), and *Graf Zeppelin* (1912/1980). Julius Fucik’s *Florentiner* (1906/1980, grade 4), and *Entry of the Gladiators – Thunder and Blazes* (1901/1906, grade 4). David Delle Cese’s *L’Inglesina –*

The Little English Girl (1871/2000, grade 4). Johannes Hanssen's *Valdres* (1963, grade 4). For the anglophiles, consider Kenneth Alford (aka F.J. Ricketts - not to be confused with the American Harry Alford). Among his most famous are *Colonel Bogey* (1914/1982, grade 4), *The Mad Major* (1921/1983, grade 4), and *The Vanished Army* (1918, grade 4). Another Brit is Eric Coates, whose best-known marches are *Dam Busters* (1954/1956, grade 3), and *Knightsbridge* (1933/1970, grade 4).

Some lesser-known, yet musically satisfying, American marches include E.V. Cupero's *Honey Boys on Parade* (1914/1985, grade 4), W. Paris Chambers' *Chicago Tribune* (1892/1984, grade 4), and *Boys of the Old Brigade* (1901/1981, grade 4), and Jerry Bilik's *Block M* (1955, grade 3). Younger bands will enjoy Eric Osterling's *The Nutmeggers* (1954, grade 3), and the classic *Bandology* (1964, grade 3). Finally, a handful of good old-fashioned circus marches: O. R. Farrar's *Bombasto* (1895/1953, grade 3), Al Sweet's *Ringling Bros. Grand Entry* (1911/1939, grade 3), and J.C. Heed's *In Storm and Sunshine* (1885/1980, grade 4). All are guaranteed to get your toes tapping.