A Tradition of Excellence: The University Band Program

The American band enjoys a long and colorful history. The earliest permanent marching bands came into being with the establishment of musicians' guilds in 1280. These early marching bands consisted of musicians who roamed the European countryside during the Middle Ages. The band fared from sight somewhat at that and really did not surface to a quantifiable manner until the early 1800s. The band experienced a rebirth with the development of volunteer militia and regular military organizations. In 1855, Patrick Sandfield Gilmore, a twenty-nine-year-old Irish cornet virtuoso, formed his first band in Boston. This date conveniently marks the beginning of formalized band music in America. To be sure, there had been bands before Gilmore's, but they were usually poorly organized and of purely local importance. America's first music guild was the Musical Protective Union, founded in New York City in 1853.

It's difficult, if not impossible, to discuss the development of bands in America without discussing John Philip Sousa. Two days after Gilmore's death on September 24, 1890, Sousa gave his first concert in Plainfield, New Jersey, with his newly formed civilian band. This event signifies a new era in American band music. Gilmore had demonstrated that a band could tour with great financial success and, indeed, from about 1860 to about 1910 the band was perhaps the greatest popular musical attraction in the United States.

There were several reasons for the band's popularity. First of all, there was little competition from orchestral music and none at all from motion pictures, radio, television, or recordings. Secondly, the repertoire of the concert band was calculated to please unsophisticated tastes. This repertoire, for Gilmore and Sousa, consisted of dance music and characteristic pieces, potpourris from popular operas and operettas, cornet and trombone solos, and a scattering of standard overtures or other orchestral pieces in transcription. Neither Gilmore nor Sousa worried very much about "educating" the public, although their efforts certainly had the incidental effect of introducing many thousands of people to music and to the names of Venuti, Wagner, Rossini, and occasionally even Beethoven and Mozart. In a history of music in America, one should not entirely overlook the "educational" accomplishments of these popular bands.

A third reason for the great popularity of bands, especially Sousa's, was that he marched at the vanguard of dance music. Sousa, of course, was the greatest of all marching composers, and he was thus able to profit by a coincidence of fashions. There was hardly a town in the United States during those years that had not heard the Sousa Band.

The next period to American band music began approximately at the end of World War I, when many changes and developments took place. Both the United States and many other major and minor bands were formed at about this time. The Sousa Band continued until his death in 1932, but the heyday of the professional touring band had passed. Jazz and a new type of dance orchestra replaced the band as popular entertainment. The band no longer had an open field to itself, and it was necessary for it to find new social functions.

The most important development of the past sixty years has been the growth of band music in the schools and colleges. Many American schools had instrumental programs as well as vocal programs, but in the 1920s the growth of the instrumental programs was phenomenal, particularly in the Midwest. School bands of extraordinary proficiency were organized. Even the college football band began to develop ideas of grandeur, and we now have hundreds of "symphonic" wind bands in colleges and universities. In the professional band field, and in the finest work of university bands such as Ohio State, Michigan, and Eastman, an entirely new concept of repertoire has developed. This is largely due to the efforts of a man named Edwin Franko Goldman. Early in his career, Goldman saw that the band concert as it had existed before WWI was a thing of the past. The growth of popular orchestral concerts was beginning to reach much repertoire available in its original form. It therefore seemed to Goldman that the repertoire of the band needed the work of experienced professional composers. It was to command an interest. This interest needed also to be predictable and professional performance of the highest caliber. What has happened since the initial efforts of Goldman is, of course, band history.

The Ohio State University Band Program offers a diverse musical experience for the college instrumentalist. The core of the band program consists of the Concert Band, Symphonic Band, University Band, Marching Band, Wind Ensemble, and Athletic bands. Each band is offered for academic credit, and membership is open to all qualified and interested students.

The Band Program, currently under the direction of Craig Kirchoff, has evolved as a national leader in the collegiate wind band field. Donald McNamara, director of the Concert Band from 1952 to 1978, demonstrated that a good band program requires outstanding students, a supportive and encouraging staff, and a conductor who is a motivator, manager, and teacher. "I inherited tremendous tradition with the band," McNamara says. "And with the many outstanding students, and such a supportive faculty, it would have been difficult to be unsuccessful with the band," he adds. In addition, ensemble performances at both state and national conventions, a graduate level conducting program, and professional association with such eminent composers and conductors as Karel Husa, Verne Reynolds, Vincent Persichetti, and Michael Colgrass, have all contributed to the band's national leadership among the prominent colleges and universities of America.

Robert LeBlanc, chairman of the performance division in the School of Music, has been at Ohio State for twenty years and has seen many changes in the program. Kirchoff has done a remarkable job with this program," LeBlanc says. "Kirchoff's goal is to educate the audience as well as the students," he says. "The band experience is not unlike being part of an acting company or a dance troupe—students have the opportunity to experience the efforts, rewards, camaraderie, and the sense of personal satisfaction that are the result of creative achievement.

The OSU Marching Band

It's hard to match the thrill of a band—the steady beat of drums, the clash of cymbals, the blare of trumpets and trombones, the stirring melody of a Sousa march. What would a parade or a football half-time show be without the band?

The first band at Ohio State was organized in 1878 as a file and drum combination, but a year later it had become a military band.
In 1959 Eugene Weigel joined the faculty as professor of instrumental music. He retired in 1952, and much of the success of Ohio State's Marching Band is due to his untiring efforts for twenty-three years. This band at the time was made up of 120 players. Because of the size of the stadium with its huge seating capacity, Weigel was concerned about the volume and quality of the sound of the band. He replaced the woodwinds with a greater number of brass instruments, believing that in doing so he could prevent students from overwhelming while trying to be heard in such a large stadium. Weigel's aim was to have an all-brass instrumentation modeled after the brass bands of Britain. The change to an all-brass band was made in 1954. Under the direction of a series of legendary band instructors, the band achieved national recognition for its specialized marching and unique all-brass sound. Several new traditions were introduced during this period such as the use of a music theme to unify the halftime shows. The idea of TIDEPFL ('The Best Damn Band In The Land') all-male band was established in 1964 when Charles Spohn was director. It is now the most successful all-male band in the country.

In 1979 Paul Driess took over for Spohn. Driess was the first former band member to become the group's director. He made several changes in instrumentation and marching techniques and built the size of the band from 120 members to 192. Driess attributes the phenomenal growth of the band to his devotion to the maintenance of a delicate balance between the old and the new. "The Band has always been a unique combination of tradition and innovation. Relying only on old ideas can lead to trouble," Driess says. In 1979 the all-male tradition was broken and legislation was passed to admit cadet auditions to women. Driess passed the baton to Jon Woods in 1984. With ten years as associate director behind him, Woods was well-prepared to keep the marching tradition. And because the band practically invented the word "tradition," the transition to new management was smooth one. "Tradition is what made this band a legend, and I have great pride in that tradition," Woods says.

"The really great thing about the Ohio State band program is that it is well-recognized for the strength of all of its bands, not just the Marching Band," Woods says.

The Concert Band

Conducted by Craig Kirchhoff, The Ohio State University Concert Band is probably the most distinguished of the Ohio State symphony wind bands simply because it has been functioning the longest and has a long tradition of excellence. The band was established as an independent unit in 1923 under the direction of Eugene Wiegol. Mallory Winscomb directed the ensemble from 1933-1953, at which time Donald McGilliard became the director. The Concert Band was an all-male ensemble until the departure of many band members to military service in 1942, when women first became members. Kirchhoff speculates that in the near future the United States may see a professionalization of the wind band ensemble. Quality band programs, like Ohio State's, are turning out huge numbers of quality wind players. Combine that with the growing body of literature being written for wind band, and a professional music seems inevitable, Kirchhoff says.

In some areas the glitter and glamar of the halftime show have produced the mistaken belief that this type of entertainment is the sole reason for the band's existence. At Ohio State, however, marching and concert bands coexist happily.

The University Band

The University Band is designed for the non-music major who enjoys creating music with limited performance demands. The enthusiasm of the band has enabled its 125 members to achieve excellent musical results while taking a break from their major studies.

Director Gary Sousa is on leave from his position as associate director of bands at Baylor University. He received his M.A. from Ohio State in 1982 when he performed with the Ohio State bands. His positive experience with the bands led him back to the University to earn a Doctor of Musical Arts degree while working with the bands in a more professional capacity.

"I think we're experiencing a new day for the concert band," Sousa says, referring to the fact that a symphonic concert band that plays challenging and serious music of an orchestral nature is a fairly new idea in musical America. "Craig Kirchhoff is definitely the cream of the crop of band directors in this country. He has done a great deal to upgrade the concert band," Sousa says.

The Symphonic Band

The Symphonic Band is comprised of both major majors and talented students from other academic areas. The conductor of the Symphonic Band, Harvey Bonesteel, says that the group concentrates on providing the avid student instrumentalist with an interesting and challenging musical experience.

Bonesteel is also assistant director of bands and has been at Ohio State since 1984. "The philosophy of the band program is probororized more than performance-oriented. That is, we try to make the entire band experience exciting, not just the final performance at the end of the quarter," he says. "I think Craig and I both see our mission as providing students with a musical band experience — we try to perform new literature as well as traditional music — introduce new performance techniques, and perform concert tours when possible.

Participants in Ohio State's Band Program are improvers, uplifters, and refiners of standards. There is no reason to doubt that the musical interest of audiences will continue to rise along with the caliber of band music being written and performed. Bonesteel says that the country's band consciousness is increasing. "Ohio State's bands are at the cutting edge of a new era for the symphonic band."
University Band formed for non-music students

Talented students making music in light atmosphere

By Patrick J. Geyer
Lantern staff writer

Where do molecular biology and English majors go to make beautiful music together?
The answer is not Mirror Lake, or the Oval. The place is Hughes Hall and the reason is University Band.

University Band is only one of many bands at Ohio State, but it is unique in that it caters to the musician who is not a music major.

"It's primarily to give the non-music major an opportunity to make music," said Professor Craig Kirchhoff, Director of (OSU?) Bands. "They don't have to spend as much time each week as a music major does."

The band rehearses two evenings a week, which is less than the daily rehearsals of the Symphonic, Concert and Jazz bands.

With minimal rehearsal requirements and only one concert during each quarter, University Band is "less pressurized" than the other bands, said Bruce Moss, conductor of University Band.

"A lot of people are in the band to relieve themselves of outside pressures," Moss said. "It's a wonderful organization for that."

Sharon Matson, a freshman pharmacy major from Cross Lanes, W.Va., agrees with Moss.

"You get to play and you don't have a big commitment," she said.

The University Band was created in 1980 when a need for a band for non-music majors became apparent. It started with 39 students, and has grown to include more than 120 students.

"We really want to divide this thing up," Moss said. "If it keeps expanding like it has, then next fall we're not going to be able to fit everybody on the stage."

A new band, University Winds, will be created if University Band expands beyond its capacity. The bands will be identical and will be divided up as evenly as possible, so as not to have competing groups.

"We want everyone in the group that wants to be in it," Moss said. "We want the experience to be enjoyable."

David Schlieman, a junior majoring in audio recording from Sylvania, who has been an eight-quarter member of University Band and also a member of Symphonic Band, believes that University Band has a lighter atmosphere.

"U-Band is always a lot more relaxing," Schlieman said.

The only requirement for membership in this band is previous experience with an instrument. There is an audition at the beginning of the quarter to see what level of experience the student has reached, however, it has nothing to do with a student's membership.

The University Band will perform at 8 p.m. on Thursday, February 23, in Weigel auditorium. For more information call 292-5272.
University Band to feature trombonist

The Ohio State University School of Music will present the University Band in concert at 8 p.m. Friday in Weigel Hall, 1866 College Rd. Patrick Casey will conduct.

Graduate student William Myers will be the guest trombone soloist on Arthur Pryor’s Thoughts of Love, and student xylophonists Carrie Herman, Lisa Miller and Sue Robbins will be featured on Serenade for Picket Fences by Norman Leyden.

For more information on the free concert, call 292-5272.