

The Sousa Kids

I recently had the pleasure of conducting one piece at the Crete high school band's NMEA performance. My son Eric, the director, had asked me to conduct a march. I was honored to do so, even though it had been a few years since I last worked with high school band students. I was very pleased with the performance those young musicians gave, and delighted to have so many friends visit with me following the concert.

A few days later, with the echoes of the Karl King march still invading my thoughts, I recalled a comment made by several directors. They said that it was great that I had even made a march sound musical. This was a compliment that I really appreciated - particularly since it came from a few retired directors that I have always respected. But then I thought, of *course* I wanted to have the march played musically. A march is a

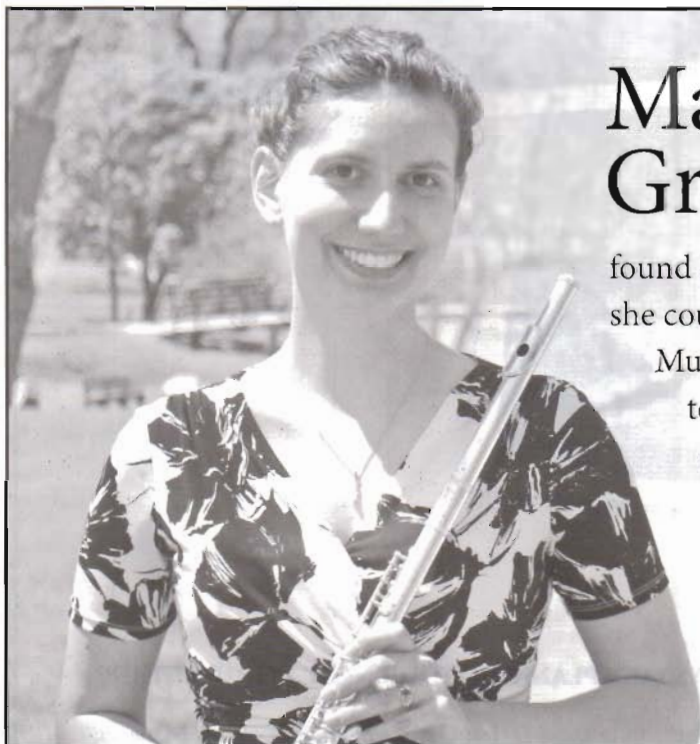
composition as worthy of perfection as any overture. A march is just a particular style of instrumental music. Right?

As I tossed this about in my mind for several days, I finally realized that every director doesn't regard these traditional marches with the same esteem as I do. I also realized that my generation of band directors are the last of what I call the Sousa Kids. Sousa Kids usually took music lessons from directors who had grown up during the peak days of the marches popularity. Sousa Kids like me may have played in a municipal band, with older musicians who knew how to play Sousa, Fillmore, King, and many others. I was a junior when Duane Schultz, our new band director at Nebraska City High School, asked me to come to city band practice because they needed another trombone player. I was honored, and showed up for what was to be the first of

many great times.

The city band library was full of wonderful traditional band literature. I loved all the marches, because most of them really tested your mettle. If you reached the final stinger of Karl King's "Barnum and Bailey's Favorite" unscathed, you had really accomplished something. It was a great feeling. And those dramatic Italian overtures like von Suppes' "Poet and Peasant"! They were both demanding and exciting and a great amount of fun to play.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, my junior high and high school years, most public schools didn't have much of a band budget. Uniforms were pre-WW2 and smelled of moth balls. Music for bands was also limited to the traditional literature that dated back a decade or more. File cabinets mostly contained a mixture of overtures, orchestral tran-



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scriptions, suites, an occasional novelty song, and of course - marches. Every concert contained at least two marches because that was what the audiences loved and expected.

Marches were probably taken more seriously back then. They were regarded as a legitimate music style, and quite often pretty demanding. Sousa, for one, was famous for scoring very difficult woodwind parts. If a clarinetist couldn't handle it, then she or he was simply not good enough to play his music! And marches were scored pretty deeply. There were usually parts for Eb clarinets, Eb mellophones and alto horns, both cornets and trumpets, Eb sousaphones, bass saxophones, and other now forgotten instruments.

Most marches at that time were printed in what was called quickstep size - the size that you could clip in your instrument's lyre for marching. I don't recall many concert marches from those days.

I do recall the eyestrain from trying to decipher those tiny little sixteenth notes on those small pages. Especially in the key of Ab or Db with accidentals. The standard pattern for marches was a brief, catchy introduction, a lively first strain, a more complex second strain, a softer first strain of the trio in a new key, added embellishments on the repeat, then a strong final strain that built in complexity to either a driving or a grandioso final strain and stinger.

There were a host of effects to master in most cases. Sudden dynamic changes, key changes, and unexpected accents kept the best marches alive from beginning to end. Staccato beat patterns often provided a driving energy beneath a legato counter-melody. Soaring runs, woodwind frills and trills, and a host of accidentals kept every clarinetist and flutist thoroughly occupied. Percussion parts were more basic than many in today's literature.

There was one bass drummer who kept a straight, simple beat pattern to hold all of the competing elements together. A pair of crash cymbals was used to punch up accents and provide color. Two or three snare drummers performed crisp rudimentary rhythms that added excitement and precision to the performance.

The traditional marches of the United States and Europe were originally written for military bands. Their goal was often that of instilling one of the Three P's in the spectators: Pride, Patriotism, or Pageantry. When these bands began to provide concerts for the public, marches remained a big part of their repertoire. They remained popular with the general public largely because they usually made the listener feel good.

I retain fond memories of my years as a member of the Nebraska City Municipal

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Louie Eckhardt
gained real-world experience while earning his Bachelor of Music in music education and trumpet performance at Hastings College. Hastings' music professors personally invested in helping him take his trumpet skills to new levels of excellence.

Now a candidate for his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in trumpet performance, Louie looks forward to mentoring the next generation of musicians.

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even charges and powers the iPad at the same time. The *iTrack Studio* (\$199) is a complete recording package for iPad, Mac, and PC. This is a great low-cost solution for school labs. It includes iTrack Solo audio interface, CM25s, studio condenser mic/cable, HP6s stereo headphones, 1.2m device link cable, USB cable, and recording/mixing software.

M-Audio introduced the *Deltabolt 1212 Thunderbolt 12-channel interface* (\$499). It comes with Octane X preamps, audio performance up to 32-bit, 192-kHz, full duplex 12-input/12-output simultaneous recording in a compact desktop form.

Honorable Mention

Here's something your students will greatly enjoy: Korg introduced the new *Little Bit Synth Kit* (\$159). It's a build-you-own synthesizer kit that comes complete power adapter, oscillator, keyboard,

micro-sequencer, envelope generator, filter, delay, mix, split, speaker, battery and cable and instructions (download). How fun is this?

Mike Klinger is the owner of The Synthesis Midi Workshop (www.midishop.com), which specializes in educational sales and training in music technology. He offers music technology courses online and at his Retreat Center in Carson, Washington, in the Columbia River Gorge.

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Band. In addition to being a lot of fun, it provided me with an invaluable knowledge of band literature from those golden years. It eventually pointed me toward a

career in instrumental music. My heroes were bandmasters like Art Schrepel and Bud Johnson. Of course, I changed with the times and the music. I would never begin to compare the very basic marching bands we had when I went to high school with the more sophisticated ones of today. There is just no comparison. But I still have a soft spot for a good old traditional march. They were special.

I hope that each of you will consider including one of the old "warhorse" marches by Sousa, King, Fillmore, or others of the old bandmasters in upcoming concerts but only play them if you give them due respect. A march is never "just a march".

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