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## A Review

Jere T. Humphreys  
Arizona State University  
Tempe, Arizona

Christine Condaris: *The Band  
Business in the United States Be-  
tween the Civil War and the Great  
Depression*

PhD, Wesleyan University, 1987  
University Microfilm Order No. 8717076

### The Study

According to her introduction, Condaris investigated "three of the major band businesses between 1865 and 1929: financially independent concert bands which toured the country, circus bands, and elementary, secondary, and college school bands" (p. 8). After defining the term "band" and providing a brief overview of American bands prior to 1865, she devotes one chapter to each of these three types of bands, plus a background chapter on the "local band business," which includes municipal, industrial, and "sedentary" professional bands. The dissertation concludes with numerous copies of professional band programs from the era studied.

In the background chapter on local bands, the author describes selected nineteenth-century community, industrial, and local semi-professional bands in Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, as well as company bands sponsored by the Union Pacific Railroad. Included are two 1920 concert programs of an industrial band, the Harvey Hubbell Concert Band from Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Several turn-of-the-century groups are treated in the chapter on circus bands, including bands associated with such well-known companies as Bailey, Barnum and Bailey, and Ringling, as well as certain lesser known circus bands. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of circus band repertory.

The chapter on professional travelling bands begins with an outline of the activities of Patrick Gilmore, followed by a general discussion of professional bands after Gilmore, and concludes with brief descriptions of the John Philip Sousa and Edwin Franko Goldman bands. A major portion of the chapter is devoted to comparisons between a 1906 Sousa Band concert program and more than 200 other professional band concert programs from the period. Condaris classifies the repertory represented on the programs in the following manner: "pieces from operas and operettas transcribed for band," 33.5%; "standard and classical pieces transcribed for band," 25.4%; "original compositions for band or soloist with band accompaniment," 27.3%; "novelty arrangements," 2.7%; and "miscellaneous pieces transcribed for band," 11.1%

(pp. 59-64). She concludes that approximately one-third of the music "could possibly be categorized as 'popular' music," with the remainder being "classical" or "light classical" (p. 64), and that more than 70% of the pieces represented on the programs are transcriptions of orchestral and opera literature. She found the Sousa program to be similar musically to the other programs analyzed. Condaris also estimates that the typical professional travelling band concert represented by these programs consisted of nine or ten selections and lasted approximately two hours, not including encores.

Another finding is that directors tended to follow patterns with respect to program order. For example, Sousa — who, like Gilmore, Bohumir Kryl, and Arthur Pryor, began his concerts with overtures — typically programmed a cornet solo second and a vocal solo fourth. Before 1924, Sousa's seventh and eighth numbers were often for solo xylophone and solo harp, but after 1924, numbers seven and eight were usually for solo saxophone and solo xylophone, respectively.

In making one of the main points of her dissertation, Condaris asks the following question: "How can a business which appeals to changing popular taste play the same music for over forty years and survive?" (p. 86) She suggests that the demise of the professional concert band resulted not only from reasons usually given by historians — the advent of automobiles, radios, player pianos, motion pictures with sound, the economic depression — but from the unchanging, classical (non-popular) nature of the repertory performed. She contrasts the professional band repertory with the blatantly commercial music propagated by Tin Pan Alley, and finds the former lacking from the standpoint of popular appeal.

The final chapter deals with the school band "business," including both school and college bands. After a brief look at the contest movement and the athletic support roots of college bands, Condaris agrees with Lamar McCarrell (1971) that high school bands eventually replaced town bands, but that college bands, at least, did not contribute to the demise of professional bands.

## Critique

Condaris has done a creditable piece of work on Chapter III, the heart of the dissertation. A study of selected professional travelling bands through an analysis of their concert programs is a good idea. Her categorization of band repertory provides important information about the bands, their directors, and their audiences during the "golden age of bands."

Unfortunately, much of the remainder of the dissertation suffers from a lack of focus, caused in part by unclear definitions. Condaris fails to make a convincing case for her use of the term "band business," for example, especially as it applies to local (amateur and semi-professional), school, and

college bands. Her distinctions between municipal and industrial bands are sometimes unclear as well.

The main factor contributing to the lack of focus, however, is the scope of the dissertation. There are only 10 pages devoted to American bands through 1865; and, for the period 1865-1929, there are 20 pages on the "local band business," 11 pages on circus bands, and 14 pages on public school and college bands. Since several pages of these short chapters are filled with copies of concert programs, such scant coverage can hardly do justice to the topics, except as overview. Of course, there is nothing wrong with overviews of material preceding, paralleling, and following the particular subject studied in depth, a common practice among writers of extended historical research papers. The problem here is that Condaris has not provided overviews, but bits and pieces of information about various bands, some prominent and some obscure, selected for reasons that are not apparent. A case in point is the omission of important secondary sources of information on industrial music departments (Clark, 1929; Poland, 1976), although several primary sources on obscure local bands are cited. A related problem is the author's proclivity toward treating each aspect of a subject as if it had remained static over time, rather than tracing developments throughout the period covered.

As a result, the dissertation consists of a series of accounts, uneven in depth and scope, that provides neither an overview nor a well-selected sample of band activity during the period. In short, the author attempted to cover far too much material. She might have produced a more valuable document had she analyzed in greater detail a smaller portion of her subject material, namely, a sample of the concert programs she collected, and accompanied that analysis with overviews of related material.

Another problem has to do with the author's generalizations and conclusions. Several questionable statements follow:

*During the second half of the 19th century each municipality had its band which became a focal point of community interest. (p. 11)*

Rarely can historians use adjectives like "each," "every," and "all."

*School bands experienced continual growth in size and complexity until the 1950s. Then, like the professional bands they once used as models, they too decreased in popularity. Students found other musical outlets and the school band business waned. (p. 112)*

The author provides no evidence for the highly questionable conclusion that school bands "waned" during the 1950s.

*Had the [professional] bandleaders added more popular pieces and marches to their repertory every season, instead of playing an overwhelmingly large number of classical orchestral music*

*transcriptions for over fifty years, they may have held their public. Thus, in sharp contrast to the Tin Pan Alley businessmen, the wind bandleaders showed a poor business sense and contributed to their decline. (p. 115)*

Tin Pan Alley did produce an enormous and rapidly changing body of music, but the style of the music remained relatively constant for a period of some 50 years (Hamm, p. 601). Tin Pan Alley's longevity may have had more to do with its ready use of new media — from sheet music, to recordings, and finally to radio and film — than to an evolving musical style. Further, both Tin Pan Alley and professional bands were popular for approximately the same length of time — somewhat more than 50 years.

*As football stadiums grew in size, so did the size of college bands [in the early twentieth century]. (p. 107)*

This correlation-cited-as-a-cause ignores several factors that contributed to larger college bands during that period, among them, burgeoning college enrollments and the rapid growth of feeder high school band programs.

*Many historians suggest that another reason for the demise of the professional travelling concert band was that high school and college bands eventually took over their function. (p. 104)*

This statement, which the author rightly disputes, is not supported by citations of published, authoritative sources.

Condaris' writing is generally clear, although it is slightly awkward in places, and there are a few errors and some inconsistent use of punctuation scattered throughout the work. On the positive side, the dissertation is remarkably free from spelling and typographical errors, and the reporting of information and citing of sources seems accurate.

This reviewer agrees with the author that the programs she collected through extensive travel to various repositories provide future investigators with valuable research material. Indeed, within this dissertation lie the nuclei for several research studies. For example, the dissertation reminds us that there is a dearth of research on town and industrial bands, especially on those of the 19th century, and on circus bands from all periods. More importantly, a thorough repertory study, made through an analysis of concert programs representing performances by selected bands, professional and otherwise, would be a valuable contribution, a point made by the author herself.

Condaris has begun such a study. Future researchers should attempt to: (1) select programs for analysis from a group of bands chosen on the basis of type, region of origin, prominence, and other specific criteria; and (2) study programs from different periods to chart changes over time. Condaris' main contributions are her valuable insights into the repertory of certain profes-

sional bands, and her ideas for further research on the fascinating phenomenon known as the "golden age of bands."

Jere T. Humphreys is Associate Professor of Music Education at Arizona State University. His areas of specialization include instrumental teacher training and historical and experimental research in music education.

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