

Bryan Proksch. *The Golden Age of American Bands: A Document History (1835–1935)*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2022. xix + 326 pp. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-1622776276 (Paper).

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The *Golden Age of American Bands: A Document History (1835–1935)* seeks to “tell the history of American bands from a new perspective: the original documentary sources written by influential individuals at crucial points in time on key topics of lasting importance” (xvii). Through the chronological presentation of these sources, coupled with prefatory remarks by the author, readers are provided the “opportunity to examine the philosophical and aesthetic underpinnings of the American band movement *as a whole*” instead of presuming a simple trajectory based on a few famous bands and their leaders (xviii). The result is an enjoyable read for band enthusiasts, while scholars of American music will likely find a few new gems from unexpected places. In addition, this well-conceived collection would serve as an invaluable supplement to courses ranging from high school electives up through graduate seminars.

Proksch’s document history consists of seven chapters that explore specific periods of band history from 1835 to 1935 (such as “Beginnings,” “The Gilded Age,” “World War I”) through brief excerpts from newspapers, magazines, method books, personal letters, and other archival material, all gathered from diverse locations across the United States. The author carefully copied and referenced each source so as to “preserve as much as possible the items as originally printed” (xiii). Any edits made by the author are clearly marked and justified by the editorial process outlined in the preface.

Each document begins with a short introduction placing the source within a relevant context. In lieu of a more linear historical interpretation often found in textbooks, these introductions provide a general framework for nineteenth-century band history that mitigates the disjointed nature inherent in compilations of this sort. The spacious formatting of the book, the mix of long

and short sources (some examples are extremely brief), the periodic inclusion of interesting photographs and illustrations, and Proksch's accessible writing make for an easy read. *The Golden Age of American Bands* entertains and engages the reader by quickly shifting from source to source while never losing sight of the surrounding cultural timeline.

Proksch's collection achieves its goal of serving "as broad a readership as possible ... ranging from professional historians to the graduate or undergraduate student all the way to the lay reader" (xviii). Certainly scholars new to the field of band studies (including those from fields other than musicology) will find this an effective initial source of primary support for their research. There is also an invaluable appendix encompassing all the periodicals cited in the book as well as an "overview [of] the periodicals that discuss American bands in interesting and unique ways." This annotated bibliography includes the periodicals' "content and scope, dates of publication, their rarity, and [most importantly] where to find them" (281).

There are some unfortunate lacunae, such as factory and corporate bands, the multicultural roots of New Orleans parade bands, or the use of bands on reservations to force assimilation of Indigenous tribes. The collection as a whole leans towards an art music perspective and away from the vernacular; readers would undoubtedly appreciate seeing more regional traditions and ethnic diversity to counterbalance the white concert music establishment. In Proksch's defense, such oversights are likely due to institutional biases found in archival collections and media sources that are the *raison d'être* of the volume.

That being said, it seems that *The Golden Age of American Bands* is ideally suited for courses on the history and literature of bands in America. Indeed, this volume could suffice as a textbook for adventuresome teachers in that it touches on the major musicians, instruments, ensembles, and functions expected of such a course. More importantly, Proksch is to be commended for locating documents that foreground the intersection between American band history and topics prevalent in current discourse such as gender (57–58, 67–68, 78–84), economics (70–71), music education (16–18, 75), disability studies (173), racial politics (1–8, 229–31), and popular music (142–43).

An unexpected asset of this anthology is the intimate quality found in many of the personal accounts that provide students and scholars with a bridge between past and present musicians. Individuals familiar with the joys and challenges of band rehearsals will sympathize with Herbert L. Clarke's remarks in "A Glimpse into a Sousa Band Rehearsal" (213–19), while the heated rivalry between Jules Levy and newcomer Fredrick Neil Innes in "The War of Blasters" (59–66) will certainly amuse readers familiar with oversized musical egos. In addition, those navigating the ongoing discussions around what we deem to be "popular" and "classical" music will find "'Play Time' for Gilmore and Seidl

on Coney Island” (78–83) as well as “The Tenuous Relationship of Bands and the Classical World” (142–43) fascinating glimpses into the parallel nature of popular music discourse of the late nineteenth century and the present day. For students especially, the relatable and somewhat humorous nature of some of the sources (e.g., “Dwight Laments the Rise of Bands,” 23–24; “Alto Players and Second Chairs,” 153–55) will draw them into more personalized artistic discussions.

The Golden Age of American Bands is not only fruitful from a student’s perspective but provides multiple points of interest for music educators themselves. Both private and classroom band instructors will find compelling glimpses into the history of their craft. For example, “The Dodworths Educate America” (16–18) and “Clapp’s Recommended Method Books” (75) offer gateways to further research for those interested in the evolution of early band instruction, while sources such as “The History of an Early School Band” (112–17) and “A Band-Centric Music Education Curriculum” (232–35) illuminate the formation of American bands at the grade school and college level.

Instructors will find this volume useful when approached as an anthology bursting with opportunities to inspire curiosity in their students while effectively supporting their own curricular goals. Teachers can easily supplement the collection by identifying genres or artists that were not addressed and then sending students to locate and study materials from local archives. Such assignments would dovetail with the author’s campaign to promote the value of primary sources, especially among students and young scholars. Valuable bits of history have fallen through the cracks in the age of digitization and it falls on inquisitive, responsible practitioners to seek out and bring to light these important bits of history. “Countless documents are today at risk of being forgotten, lost, or discarded,” Proksch notes in his preface (xvi). This is particularly true for the history of bands, a subject long neglected by mainstream musicology. This timely collection demonstrates the inspiring nature of discovering, understanding, and sharing the rich documentary history of one of America’s most important musical traditions.