

George Wilson Records Thoughts on the ABA for Don Gillis

American Bandmasters' Association Research Center, Special Collections in Performing Arts,
University of Maryland, College Park

Transcription by Christina Taylor Gibson

George Wilson: Don, I am going to record some information about the American Bandmasters Association. I'll leave space in some areas and you can use your scissors and do what you want to with this. You asked for some historical background and some of the more recent activities too of the ABA. So here we go.

The American Bandmasters' Association was formally organized in 1929. As a result of his many years' study of the problems confronting American bands, and encouraged by a group of prominent bandmasters, including the late John Philip Sousa, Dr. Edwin Franko Goldman invited a selected number of band directors from the United States and Canada to be his guests at a luncheon and conference at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City on July 5, 1929. It was at this meeting that the American Bandmasters' Association was formally organized. The objects of the association were defined as, and I quote, "Mutual helpfulness and the promotion of better music through the instrumentality of the band, to secure the universal adoption of a band instrumentation so that band publications of all countries will be interchangeable. To induce prominent composers of all countries to write for the band. To establish for the concert band a higher standard of artistic excellence than has generally been maintained. And to do all possible to raise the standards of bands and band music."

John Philip Sousa was elected first honorary life president. Dr. Goldman was elected second honorary life president in 1933, after retiring from the active presidency of the association, an office he held for three years. Dr. Albert Austin Harding was elected third honorary life president in 1956, and Dr. Frank Simon was elected fourth honorary life president and holds that office today.

On March 13, 1930, the American Bandmasters' Association was incorporated under the laws of the State of New York. The incorporators were Edwin Franko Goldman, Victor J. Gabel, A. Austin Harding, Frank Simon, and William H. Stannard. The first annual convention was held in Middletown, Ohio with Dr. Frank Simon and the American Rolling Mills as hosts. Places for other conventions of the ABA through the years have been, Boston, Massachusetts; Washington, D.C.; Chicago, Illinois; Toronto, Canada; Cincinnati, Ohio; Interlochen, Michigan; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; University of Illinois; Fort Dodge, Iowa; Hagerstown, Maryland; The University of Wisconsin; Elkhart, Indiana; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Charlotte, South Carolina; The University of Michigan; Ohio State University; The University of Miami, Florida; The United States Military Academy at West Point; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Long Beach, California; Perdue University; Greensborough, North Carolina; San Antonio, Texas; and Chicago, Illinois.

The presidents of the ABA through the years have included some of the following men: Edwin Frank Goldman, Charles O'Neill, Herbert L. Clarke, Frank Simon, Albert Austin Harding, Karl L. King, Peter Buys, Captain R.B. Hayward, Henry Fillmore, Glenn Cliff Baiman, Col. H.C. Bronson, J.J. Richards. Col. H.B. Bachman, Col. Earl D. Irons, Dr. William D. Revelli, Col. William Santelman, Cmdr. Charles Brendler, John C. Harper, Col. George S. Howard, Mark H. Hindsley, Herbert M. Johnston, Dr. Raymond F. Dvorak, Carleton L. Stewart, Otto J. P____, Dr. Earl A. Slocum, Dr. Paul Yoder, Col. Chester Whiting.

The charter members of the association were Captain Charles O'Neill, Dr. Harding, Dr. Frank Simon, Captain Hayward, Lieutenant G____, Lieutenant Charles Bentner, Victor J. Grabel, Arthur Pryor, and Dr. Edwin Frank Goldman.

The American Bandmasters' Association has made its importance felt in the world of music and through its influence has brought Bandmasters into closer contact with each other for their mutual benefit. Many problems have been discussed and solved. Much progress has been recorded. Many original aims realized. Prominent composers have written works for the Association. Many of these excellent and enduring compositions have received their premieres at concerts given during the Association's conventions. A definite instrumentation for American bands has been evolved. Publishers have taken cognizance of this achievement of the Association and have cooperated to the fullest extent in bringing about its universal acceptance. Better editions and arrangements for band have become general, as has the practice of providing a fuller, if not a complete, conductor's score. Nearly all of the publishers and instrument manufacturers of the country are associate members of the Association and have lent it valuable moral support.

Currently, the American Bandmasters' Association is vitally interested and involved in a number of projects of great importance to bands and band music. The John Philip Sousa Memorial project was inaugurated and has been sponsored by members of the American Bandmasters' Association. This project is to be a magnificent band shell known as the Sousa Band Shell and located in the new John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, now under construction in Washington, D.C. For the past ten years the Ostwald Band Composition Award has been given through the American Bandmasters' Association. The sponsor of this award has made material contributions to the literature for the concert band through the many fine compositions that have been submitted for this competition.

The American Bandmasters' Association Research Center, located at the University of Maryland was established in 1963. The Research Center is intended to serve as the depository for all materials relating to the history and literature of the wind band. The Center already contains impressive holdings of scores, recordings, books, pamphlets, programs, photographs, theses, dissertations, periodicals, and other material pertaining to the band.

In recent years the American Bandmasters' Association has been awarding memorial citations to outstanding men in the musical field who have made unusual contributions to band activities, not as band conductors, but as composers, or other interested musicians who have contributed to the development of bands. These awards have been given to men like Meredith Wilson.

Some of these awards that have been granted have been given to Meredith Wilson, Robert Russell Bennett, C.V. Buttleman, William F. Ludwig, Sr., and C.M. Tremaine.

There is also great interest among the ABA membership to bring about more radio exposure to concert band music. It is the belief of the ABA that the inspiration and personal satisfaction band music gives to so many people should be made available to radio audiences across our country. So the American Bandmasters' Association continues its role of leadership in band activities to do everything within the powers of its membership to bring increased stature, greater depth and breadth to the band in all its endeavors.

Now Don, if this isn't what you want or you want some different kind of thing let me know. I'll be glad to try again. Good luck.