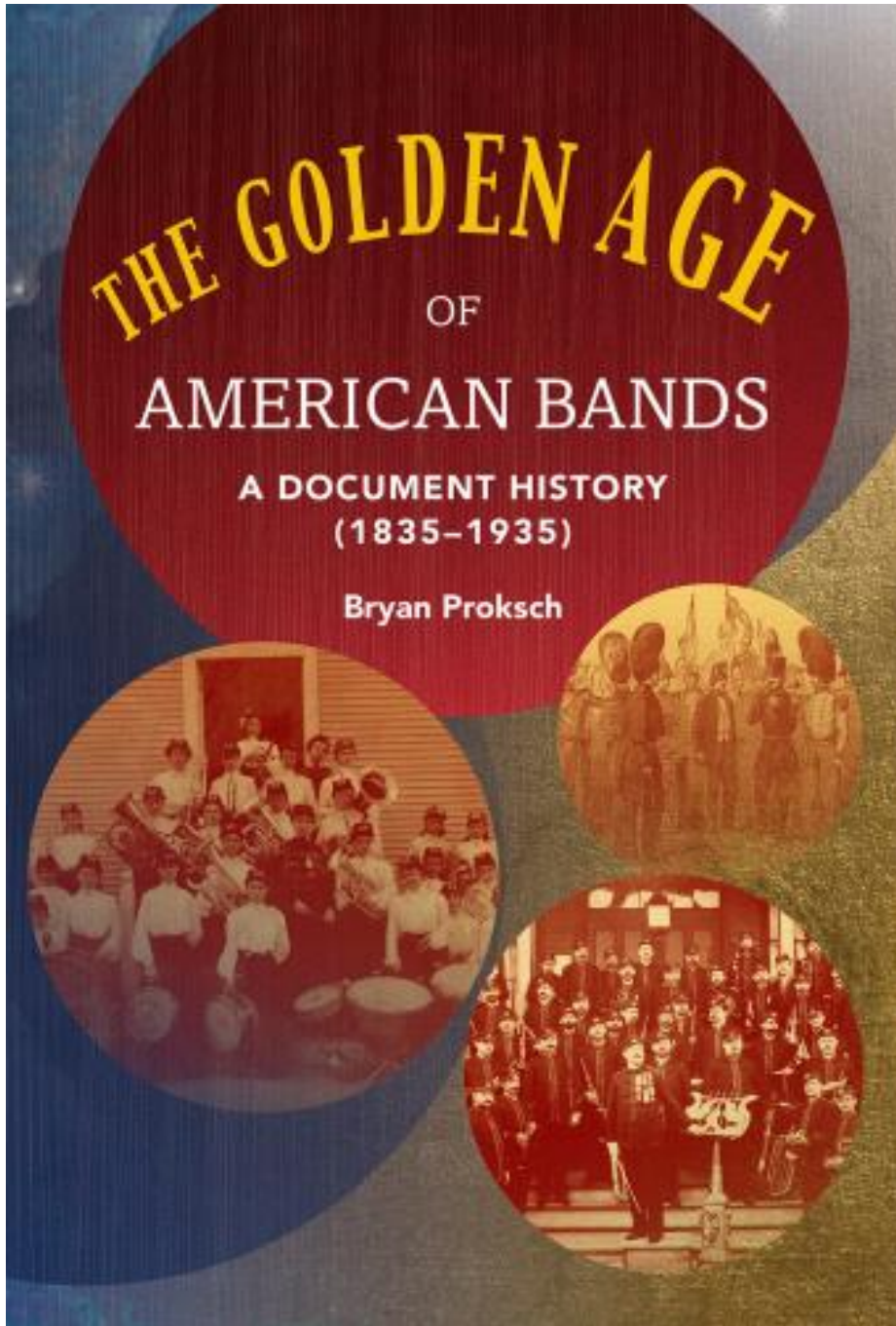


Sample Addenda to

Bryan Proksch, *The Golden Age of American Bands: A Document History (1835-1935)* (Chicago: GIA, 2022), 346 pages, \$39.99



Introductory Note

So many wonderful documents about American bands and band history survive that at times I found it difficult to choose what to include in *The Golden Age of American Bands* and which to leave out. The below items did not quite “make the cut” for one reason or another but are still valuable and insightful in their own right. I am pleased that GIA was willing to make a few additional sources available online as a “free sample” of the types of things included in the full text.

It is my hope that after reading them you will see the value of exploring things further by doing your part to preserve, discuss, and investigate the great history of American bands further. Naturally I also hope they arouse your curiosity enough that you consider [purchasing the actual book on GIA’s website](#) or from another bookseller of your choosing. The full *Golden Age* includes the texts of some 100 of what I consider to be the most important and influential writings in the history of American bands. Each individually offers a snapshot into a time, a place, and a different way of thinking about bands. Taken as a whole they tell the story of how bands transformed from a woodwind-based military ensemble into one of the most distinctive, dominant, and long-lived musical ensembles in the history of popular music.

If you enjoy this sampling and the *Golden Age* I would also encourage you to consider purchasing its more specific companion, my [A Sousa Reader: Essays, Interviews, and Clippings \(GIA, 2016\)](#) (also available from [Amazon](#) and various book stores). Like *The Golden Age of American Bands*, the *Sousa Reader* provides the full texts of over fifty key documents from the life and times of the “March King.”

Bryan Proksch

1896

Liberati's Management Contract

Most high-profile bandsmen had a business manager and at least one contract to endorse an instrument maker, uniform manufacturer, or publisher. C. G. Conn, the largest and most aggressive manufacturer, not only signed artists to endorsement contracts (which stipulated certain verbiage enter their public letters), but also managed a few marquee performers directly. While published endorsement letters are easy enough to find in advertisements, actual contracts are far rarer. Here Alessandro Liberati, already famous as both a cornet virtuoso and bandmaster, signed it all away to Conn. Their business affiliation proved successful and would continue in various forms well into the 1920s.

“Agreement,” April 1, 1896. Alessandro and Speranza Liberati papers, 1880-1947, Library of Congress.

THIS AGREEMENT made and entered into this First day of April, 1896, by and between Signor Alessandro Liberati, of the City and State of New York, and Charles G. Conn, of the City of Washington, District of Columbia.^[1]

WITNESSETH; That the said Alessandro Liberati agrees to give his whole time and attention to the prosecution and advancement of the business, or businesses, of Charles G. Conn, and to test instruments and to faithfully use, and recommend their use and sale, in accordance with instructions to be given him by the said Conn, or his authorized agents from time to time, at the pleasure of the said Conn. And the said Alessandro Liberati further agrees and obligates himself, to hold himself, at all times, and all hours, subject to the exclusive control and direction, of the said Charles G. Conn, and to faithfully perform all the duties of every sort, whatsoever that may be required of him by the said Conn at all times during the continuance of this contract and to do every thing in his power to advance the business interests, and all other interests, personal, private, financial or otherwise of the said Charles G. Conn.

It is further agreed that the place or places of employment or operations shall be fixed by the said Charles G. Conn, and the said

Alessandro Liberati shall hold himself in readiness to discharge all of the duties that may be required of him at any point, that he may be directed to operate or go to, by the said Conn, or his authorized agents, and also to hold himself in readiness to play engagements, at such reasonable prices, not less than \$25.00 per day as he may be employed to play, by outside parties, with the consent of said Conn, expressed in writing, for him to accept such engagements; or if required by said Conn to play said outside engagements, he shall do so at any time. The amount received in payment for said outside engagements to play shall be equally divided between himself and Charles G. Conn.

The intent of the parties hereto being that the said Alessandro Liberati shall give all his time, and attention, and faithful endeavor, and best effort, to the interest and the business of the said Charles G. Conn, and faithfully do as the said Conn shall direct or require and hold himself at all times subject to the exclusive control of said Conn and not go outside thereof.

It is further agreed that this contract shall extend through and cover a period of five years from the first day of June, 1896.

The said Charles G. Conn agrees on his part, in consideration of the faithful performance of all the provisions of this contract, on the part of the said Alessandro Liberati, to pay him wages the sum of Sixty (60.00) Dollars, per week, said payment to be made at such times and places as may be mutually agreed upon between them.

It is further agreed that when said Alessandro Liberati is sent away from New York or Elkhart, Ind., as occasion may demand, or said Conn may require, that his reasonable and necessary traveling expenses shall be paid by the said Charles G. Conn.

Witness the hands and seals of the parties hereto, at the City of Washington, District of Columbia, this First day of April, A. D. 1896.



Figure 1: The cover of Liberati's *Potlatch March* (1913). Note the text at bottom left: "Can be secured at C. G. Conn, Elkhart, Indiana" and "The Cornet used by Mr. Liberati and all instruments of his band [are] manufactured by C. G. Conn." Allesandro and Speranza Liberati papers, 1880-1947, Box 1, Library of Congress.

1900**Sousa's "Unmusical War" in the Press**

Sousa's feisty interviews while at the Paris Exposition Universelle (see Sousa Reader p. 30–38) provoked at least one printed response from an American in attendance. Dissecting that criticism point by point, Sousa shows the aggressive side to his personality, one that only came out most strongly when he felt misrepresented or unfairly quoted. He here employs striking ad hominin attacks and willful mis-readings of "Musician's" letter, and recurring musings about "Musician's" true citizenship. His responses hint at his larger frustration with the biases faced by his American band in the eyes of a Parisian audience accustomed to European bands lavishly subsidized by national governments.

"Unmusical War Between Musicians," *New York Herald* (Paris Edition, July 28, 1900).

MR. JOHN PHILIP SOUSA REPLIES TO
CRITICISM MADE UPON HIS INTERVIEW.

ARGUMENT MISUNDERSTOOD.

NO ATTEMPT TO INSTRUCT, BUT CRITICISM OF THE SUBSIDIZING OF
MUSICAL ART.

To the editor of *The Herald*:—

In the halcyon days, when I trudged the mountain paths of the wild and woolly West in quest of deer, or popped over the toothsome quail in the stubble below, it was my wont to sit around the campfire at night and listen to the words of wisdom from the cowboys and mountaineers, my companions in the chase. At these nocturnal debates regarding religion, politics, war, or art, it was generally conceded that when a fellow departed from the subject matter on tap, he was indulging in conversation through the medium of his chapeau. And, speaking of "talk and headgear," I cannot forbear pointing out the application of this truth to the letter published in *The Herald* of July 20, and signed "Musician," which has sadly shocked, not to say mournfully mystified me.^[2]

The writer takes pains to claim that he is an American, but I am a little sceptical on that point, for in his letter of half a column he reiterates the statement of his nativity (methinks he doth protest too much), a thing

most unusual with the genuine “blown in the bottle” native of our country. The usual way, you may have observed, is to announce that fact to the world once, and it is known forever after.

(Vide Washington at Yorktown, Jackson at New Orleans, Taylor in Mexico, Dewey at Manila, etc., etc., etc.)

I would like to inform “Musician,” before taking up his letter “seriatim” that vituperation is not argument, and unglittering generalities are not conclusive. “Musician” pays no attention to the points advanced by me in the recent interview in your columns relative to French bands, their masters and their music, but in a soggy sort of way endeavors to show foreign superiority over all things American in music.

To quote “Musician”:

Exhibit A.

“It is very kind of Mr. Sousa to come over from America in order to instruct Americans and others in Europe about military bands, but are we quite as ignorant as we seem? In carrying his coals to Newcastle, would it not perhaps be more becoming to put ourselves in the rear instead of in front of European military bands?”^[3]

In my interview there was no effort at instruction, but only criticism of what appears to me to be the deplorable condition of musical art when under the patronage of the State. I maintain that the individual initiative is lost or weakened through Governmental subsidy, and “Musician” does not attempt to refute what I say by argument, but tells what he thinks was my reason for coming to Europe. Bless his confiding nature, he is “way off.” My purpose in coming to Europe was twofold. Firstly, I felt reasonably certain that an organization that for years had won the plaudits of the American public would have an excellent chance of duplicating that success here; and, secondly, I believed I could pick up a good collection of the Continental coin of the realms. In both surmises I was correct, for I have won both, the plaudits and the shekels!

Exhibit B.

“Does Mr. Sousa perhaps remember that when the citizens of Boston raised a large sum and lost \$200,000 in importing all the best bands in Europe, that the French band took the palm, and Gilmore’s band “wasn’t in it?”

The German band also was marvelous. Does Mr. Sousa not know that there are no wood[wind] instruments in the world like the French?

and such a flutist as [Paul] Taffanel (now leader of the concerts at the [Paris] Conservatoire) was has never yet been heard in America?

Mr. Higginson, who has inaugurated the Boston Symphony Concerts, pays any price for a French oboist or other wood[wind] instrumentalist, and finds it almost impossible to secure them no matter what price he is willing to pay."^[4]

No, Mr. Sousa does not remember, nor does anyone else, for "Musician's" statement is but the "baseless fabrication of a dream."^[5] Possibly the absent-minded, beg-pardon gentleman has heard somewhere during his sojourn in Europe that there was given nearly thirty years ago in Boston a "Peace Jubilee," under the direction of "Pat" Gilmore, and among the many attractions taking part were three foreign bands—English, French, and German. There was no band competition or contest at the Boston Jubilee, and each and every organization had its admirers for the excellent work performed. Certainly, I have never heard of any Frenchman, German or Englishman, who was in Boston at that time decry the merits of the band of his own country, or call attention to the fact that American musicians were the best on earth, or even assert that "Billy McGoogan, of Bitter Creek, was the finest bass drummer in four counties, and is now of the Boston Conservatory, which forever deprives Europe of the opportunity of hearing such a great artist." En passant, it is not inapropos to remark here that Europe gave us the tallow candle, but, like grateful children, we sent in return the electric light; Europe gave us the primitive handpower printing press of Gutenberg, and in our simple hearted way we show her the Goss perfecting press; Europe placed the goosequill in our hands, and we have added the typewriter to her resources; Europe put the bare needle in the fingers of our housewives, and we reciprocate with the modern sewing machine—but why enumerate?

Exhibit C.

"The literature of music for military bands is as limited as the music for male chorus. Composers who have written for male chorus have done so in their off moments—because the limit of about an octave and a half is too small. Only with the addition of female voices can a good chorus be secured.

It is the same with military music. Stirring and inspiring as it is played at the head of a regiment, especially returning from a war or at dress parade, it falls flat when a military band endeavors to interpret music for which strings are as necessary as female voices in a chorus."

What under the sun a male quartette or its literature has to do with a brass band is beyond me, although “Musician,” with characteristic inaccuracy, is in error as to the compass of the male voice, for in God’s country we have baritones and tenors who can sing two octaves or more. Of course, a chorus is better for the addition of the “ladies—God bless ’em,” and the more there are around the better.

Exhibit D.

“Colonne’s orchestra can transcribe and play music with effect, which Mr. Sousa’s band cannot transcribe and cannot play with effect, at least, not to a musical ear.”

As I am ignorant of the proportion of “Musician’s” “musical ear,” I am unable to properly contest the point that military music falls flat on that part of his anatomy, but if it is as generally inaccurate as his statements, he must be suffering from chronic auricular astigmatism.

Exhibit E.

“As an American I have not the faintest desire to detract from Mr. Sousa’s efforts to come over here and impress Americans and others with his band, and no doubt it will give him a great réclame on the other side and add to his laurels when he returns.”

Here “Musician” again reiterates his claim to American citizenship, but the word “réclame” makes the statement sound fishy, for real Americans say advertising! I have travelled from the Straits of Northumberland to the Rio Grande, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but I have never heard an American speak of “réclame.”

Exhibit F.

“I should have remained silent if Mr. Sousa had not told us in your columns what to my mind had better been left unsaid, and if his avowed purpose in coming over here had been to learn rather than to teach.

I am only prejudiced in his favor and not against him, and I admire his energy, but when it comes to questions of art I must protest against our assuming an attitude which to some minds may make us appear ridiculous.”

For the life of me, I cannot tell under what banner the gentleman is living! My opinions were not addressed to Americans, but, on the contrary, to the wide, wide world. If anything I have said will make the gentleman appear ridiculous, I humbly crave his pardon, but I rather suspect he was an accessory before the fact.^[6] This self-constituted

champion of French music and musicians reckons without his host, for many French artists coincide with the views expressed in my interview.

Far be it from me to belittle the great achievements of Frenchmen in music's realm. Many of them escape the Government appropriation and win international fame. Their number would be increased were there no subsidies from the State, and therefore greater chance for genius to soar. A people who have produced a Berlioz, a Saint-Saëns, a Massenet, a Bizet, an Auber, and a constellation of musical brilliants have not lived in vain. But these geniuses being untrammelled by governmental aid and official considerations, went forth into God's sunlight of freedom and gave to the world their best efforts.

To sum up: My sin, if it be a sin, in the eyes of "Musician," was in criticizing the system that I believe detrimental to the best interest of art! My sin, if it be a sin in the eyes of "Musician," lies in my not accepting everything in Europe, including the people, customs and arts, as superior to what we have at home. Gentle stranger, do not decry the McCormick reaper^[7] because they use a sickle in the grain fields of Europe; do not decry the Morse telegraph because the donkey post still obtains in some places of the Old World; do not decry the Washington monument because the Luxor obelisk happens to be in the Place de la Concorde; do not decry a Hudson River steamer because it would not have room to turn in the Seine! Be big hearted; be without prejudice; see good in all things, even if they are American, and let us get together in friendship and amity, and be fair, even to Americans. And then

"The night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day
Will fold their tents like the Arabs
And as silently steal away."

[Henry Wadsworth Longfellow]

John Philip Sousa
Stuttgart, July 25, 1900



Figure 2: The Sousa Band playing the *Stars and Stripes Forever* in Paris for the 1900 Exposition Universelle. From a widely reproduced stereoview.

1919

The “Hell Fighters” after Europe’s Death

Educated at Tuskegee, F. Eugene Mikell (1880–1932) worked as James Reese Europe’s partner—if largely in his shadow—during World War I.⁸ After Europe’s murder in May 1919 it fell to him to keep the “Harlem Hell Fighters” Band going. He met with less success than Europe, no doubt because he was stretched too thin by his “day job”: founding and leading some five New York City area school and orphanage bands for boys. Nevertheless, Mikell kept the band afloat until 1926. Beyond his direction and activities, the below item offers great insights into the respect and successes earned by the band as well as how up-to-date their repertoire and playing style remained.

“Continue Their Activities: ‘Hell Fighters Band,’ Directed by F. E. Mikell, Now More in Demand than Ever,” *Music Trades* 58/16 (October 18, 1919): 56

Under the direction of that capable musician, F. Eugene Mikell, the “Hell Fighters” Band, which earned such an enviable reputation during the War, seems more in demand than ever. It is usual for this famous aggregation of colored musicians to appear every night of the week before enthusiastic audiences of 3,000 persons and more. This was the case recently at the Manhattan Casino in New York and upon numerous other occasions.



Figure 3: The photo of Mikell printed in the original article.

Mr. Mikell prides himself upon original rendition and arrangement of the favorite melodies of the day, classic and popular. When you listen to the “Hell Fighters” Band playing [S. R. Henry, and D. Onivas’s 1917] “Indianola” or [S. R. Henry’s 1918] “Kentucky Dream” you find new charm in the various strains. There is either a new form of syncopation, counter melody or obligato brought out that is most appealing to the ear so that the simplest tunes, the popular favorites of our everyday existence, seem to have a new meaning when interpreted by this aggregation of artists.

For instance, [George J. Bennett’s 1919] “You Didn’t Want Me When You Had Me,” “Honeymoon,” [Charles McCarron, Carey Morgan, Arthur Swanstone’s 1919] “Blues, My Naughty Sweetie Gives to Me,” seem to acquire an entirely new musical setting and sound not only catchy, but fully as musicianly as the best tunes of Broadway productions when rendered by the “Hell Fighters” Band. Naturally it is the filling in and the Ad Lib work of the band itself that bring about this transformation of the numbers. The war history of the “Hell Fighters” Band is already very well known [but] a few of the principal points in connection with their record will stand repetition. They were the first colored fighting regiment to go over. The first to go to the Rhine (of the Allied forces). They were 190 days under fire. They were the first band to welcome the men at Aix les Bains, where they gave special concerts. At one of these concerts not only did E. H. Sothorn recite by request, but he was delighted with their rendition of the songs that the soldiers loved best, including the well known “Ida (Sweet as Apple Cider)” [by Eddie Leonard, 1903]. Of all the colored regiments, theirs encountered the heaviest casualties. Only 800 men out of the original 2,800 were in the “Welcome Home” parade and almost every one of them at some time or other, was either injured or gassed. It is no wonder that great throngs turned out to hear this gallant colored band render their tunes over here.

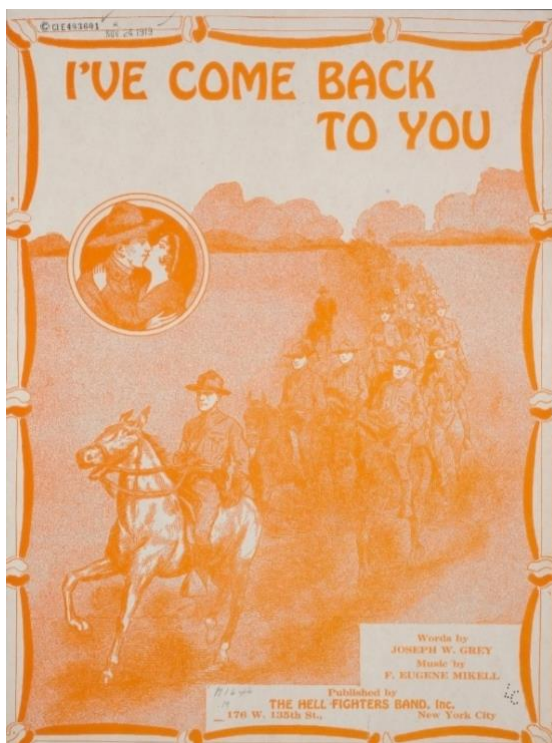


Figure 4: The cover of F. Eugene Mikell's 1919 "I've Come Back to You" as published by his own band. From the [Library of Congress](#)

¹ The contract consistently misspells his first name throughout (it appears variously as "Alissander" or "Alessander") all here corrected. His first name has caused enough confusion that as of 2022 Wikipedia, the Library of Congress, and *New Grove* offer three different spellings. I have chosen to use the normalized spelling offered by Raoul Camus's entry in *Grove*. It would seem Conn's typist simply made up a spelling given that he went by "Signor Liberati" in the press and consistently signed his name "A. Liberati." Additional handwritten corrections (mostly commas) have been included without annotation. Conn normally resided in Elkhart, Indiana (where he served as mayor in the 1880s, but in 1896 he was lingering in Washington, D. C. after completing a term in congress.

² Sousa regularly employed alliteration (and especially complex verbiage as seen later in the essay) when arguing in the press.

³ "Carrying his coals to Newcastle" was slang indicating a waste of time. Newcastle was famous as a shipper of coal and thus needed none.

⁴ "Musician's" sentence on the Boston Symphony does not appear in Sousa's response, the only missing sentence from the original letter. It has been added here for the sake of completeness. This sentence is a direct jab at Sousa, who frequently boasted about his willingness to "pay any price" to recruit the best musicians from anywhere in the world regardless of nationality.

⁵ Sousa here apparently quotes from James Rice and Walter Besant's 1876 *The Case of Mr. Lucraft*, a popular short story.

⁶ Note that the original interview mentioned a “friend” of the *Herald* writer asking a question of Sousa at one point. Sousa now seems to imply that this same “friend” at the interview was actually “Musician” now purposely stirring up trouble. In fact, the music critics for the *New York Herald* were famous for generating publicity through conflict, as they had done in the 1880 “War of Blasters” (see *Golden Age*, 59–66).

⁷ Robert and his son Cyrus McCormick’s reaper was a horse-drawn harvesting machine. Their business eventually folded into International Harvester. Chicago’s McCormick Place is named after one of their descendants.

⁸ Further on Mikell see Peter M. Lefferts, “A Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of Eugene Mikell: Materials for a Biography,” University of Nebraska–Lincoln Digital Commons, 2016 ([available online](#)).