

# WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME



## Walter P. English (1867-1916) Elected 1984

W. P. English was a prolific composer of marches, and a tuba player and circus bandmaster. He was a member of the Barnum and Bailey Circus Band 1897-1907 (which toured Europe at the turn of the 19th century) and was a friend of fellow composer Russell Alexander, who played euphonium in the same band. English led the Barnum and Bailey band in 1907, and was bandmaster with Sells Floto in 1911 and 1912. He and Karl King became good friends, apparently during their mutual tenures with Sells Floto in 1912 and subsequent years. English's "Royal Decree" March was dedicated to King, and King returned the favor by dedicating "Garland Entrée" March to his friend English.

### Music composed by W. P. English – how many do you know?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Aeolian Waltzes (Boos, 1897)                                | New York London and Paris March (Barnhouse, 1903) |
| Arizona Club March (York, 1909)                             | Princess Clothilde Mazurka (unpublished)          |
| Beyond the Rockies March (Barnhouse, 1905)                  | Relpetrom March (York, 1907)                      |
| Clair's Triumph March (Barnhouse, 1900)                     | Royal Decree March (Barnhouse, 1916)              |
| Culinary King March (Smith, 1917)                           | Royal Pageant March (Boos, 1895)                  |
| Floto's Grand Pageant March (Jenkins, 1915)                 | Salute to Alexander March (Barnhouse, 1902)       |
| The Girl of Eagle Ranch March (Jenkins, 1914)               | Tent City March (Fischer, 1907)                   |
| Howdy Pap March [composed with Karl King] (Barnhouse, 1913) | Under White Tents Galop (Boos, 1894)              |
| Instantaneous Rag (Jenkins, 1915)                           | Under White Tents March (Dixie Music House, 1907) |
| Jewell's Triumphal March (York, 1908)                       | The Volitant March                                |
| King Bombardon March (Basses Conquest)                      | Wild Fire Galop (Barnhouse, 1909)                 |
| Martin's Boast March (Martin, 1915)                         |   |
| Mile-a-Minute Galop (Barnhouse, 1903)                       |   |
| Neel's Fashion Plate March (Barnhouse, 1902)                |   |

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## WALTER P. ENGLISH (1984 inductee)

by Charles Conrad, WJU #1525

The history of circus music has had quite a few unforgettable characters, and one of the most colorful was Walter Paul "Woody" English, a big, bald and congenial tuba player with a mustache like a walrus and a seemingly unquenchable appetite for music, adventure and booze, not necessarily in that order. English was born 20 March 1867 in Salt Lake City, but the family moved to Dallas while he was young. He must have gotten his start in music quite early, as Carl Neel and English became friends in the 1880s in the goldfields, and Neel reported that English was playing bass, piano, and tuba in saloons and music halls, including at Silverton, CO. His first documented circus experience was with the Great New York Circus in 1891, and he spent the 1892 season with the McMahon Show in Oakland. The following year, English claimed he played with 9 different shows. One of these was the Great Western Band, a 14-piece concert band under the direction of Charles Wray. English was back in the employ of Joseph McMahon in 1894 and 1895, the first year with the Howe & Cushing Shows, and the next season with the Sands & Astley Two-Ring Circus. English was listed as both a tuba player and composer for these outfits, but his only published work from the period is the 1895 *Royal Pageant*. He split the 1896 season between two circuses, the Harris Nickel Plate Circus and the Cooper & Co.'s Great Southern United Show, which was likely another McMahon operation. He finished the 1897 season with McMahon's Harris Nickel Plate Circus. When McMahon died during the season, English moved to the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth Band under Carl Clair just in time for the five-year tour of Europe that lasted until 1902.

English wrote several circus marches during this time, including *Clair's Triumph* in honor of his bandmaster. His *Aeolian Waltzes* from 1897 are reminiscent of the waltz sets of "Waltz King" Johann Strauss, Jr., who was conducting his own orchestra in Vienna at the time. *Neel's Fashion Plate* was most likely written after the return from Europe, when English appears to have played with the Walter L. Main Fashion Plate Circus under Neel's direction after the close of the Barnum & Bailey season. The brilliant, but fiendishly difficult, clarinet and piccolo obbligato to the last strain was added after a complaint from the clarinet section that the original clarinet part was boring. He also dedicated a march entitled *Salute to Alexander* to one of his closest friends and a band mate on the European tour,

Russell Alexander. English was then associated with the largest publisher of circus band music, C. L. Barnhouse Co. of Oska-loosa, IA. Other titles included *New York, London, and Paris* and *Mile-a-Minute*, a galop.



English remained with Barnum & Bailey for the next five seasons, through 1908, serving as mail agent for part of that time. He wrote the marches *Beyond the Rockies*, *The Volitant*, and *Relpetrom* (the title of which spelled backwards gives the name of the dedicatee). English's legendary capacity for food and, especially, drink is well documented. Bill Pruyn related that Carl Clair did not allow drinking on the bandstand on the European tour, so English found a way around the problem - he fashioned a flesh-colored tube that ran through his coat collar to the corner of his mouth. It was attached at the other end to a flask of whiskey in his pocket! In 1907, when Clair's health suddenly declined, English was promoted to bandmaster of the Barnum & Bailey Circus. This was apparently his first engagement as a conductor, but his years of varying experiences must have served him well. Following the death of James A. Bailey, the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth was sold to the Ringling Brothers. The Ringlings' choice for the bandmaster of the 1908 Barnum & Bailey Circus was Fred Jewell. English stayed on with the show, again playing tuba - probably relieved to be in the back of the band again. He evidently felt no ill will toward Jewell, as he wrote a fine march entitled *Jewell's Triumphant*, in addition to *Arizona Club March* and *Wildfire Galop*, which was dedicated to Ringling Brothers bandmaster Al Sweet. English spent the 1909 season with the Norris & Rowe Circus, playing tuba in CZ Bronson's band. English became the bandmaster for the Sells-Floto Circus in 1911, and stayed in that position for two years. The 1913 season was split between different shows. English played tuba and was assistant director with the Yankee Robinson Circus and performed with the Girl of the Eagle Ranch Show. English rejoined the Sells-Floto Circus after a short stint with the Al G. Barnes Circus in 1914. English spent some time with the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Show and played in Denver with Frederick Innes' Band, considered one of the top professional concert bands. His health began to weaken early in 1916, and he died 4 June 1917, at age 50, of heart failure.