

WJU HALL OF FAME

1921: A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF A KING

by Jerrold P. Jimmerson, WJU #3118

KARL L. KING
H of F Inductee #1
1974

There has been much written about the early years of famous composer and conductor **Karl Lawrence King (1891-1971)** - everything from his birth in Paintersville, Ohio to his growing up in Xenia, Cleveland, and Canton, Ohio to playing in the local bands there and then his nine years playing Euphonium and later conducting several different circus bands. However, there is so much more to his story after Karl and his wife Ruth left their 'trouping days' behind at the close of the 1918 season which was cut short by the great Spanish flu pandemic that year.

Karl and Ruth returned to their home in Canton to settle down. King assumed the directorship of the local Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) Band for what would only be two seasons. In November, 1919, their only child, Karl Jr., was born. But there were other unforeseen events that were about to take place.

Hundreds of miles away to the West, in Fort Dodge, Iowa, the local Municipal Band was soon going to need a new conductor. Carl Quist became conductor in 1901, first of the 56th National Guard Band, then the Fort Dodge Military Band which later became the Fort Dodge Municipal Band. When Quist decided to leave in the middle of the 1920 season, the Fort Dodge group found themselves without a conductor.

The local Commercial Club began a search for a new conductor with a national reputation. As Thomas J. Hatton states in his book, **Hawkeye Glory**, this group "promised to raise \$5,000 to buy new uniforms and support the band during the 1921 season. A good share of this would go to pay the director's salary". The field of conductor choices was narrowed to two, both from Ohio, with King being the leading candidate.

Karl King was invited to Fort Dodge, arriving by train on the evening of Saturday, September 11, 1920. He met with and rehearsed the local band the next morning. The program King selected included a mixture of his own compositions ("*The Royal Scotch Highlanders March*" and "*An Autumn Romance*"), along with several classical pieces, popular works from musical theater, and vocal solos. The Monday night concert was an overwhelming success with both the band members and audience alike. *The Fort Dodge Messenger and Chronicle* reported that the open air concert "was a triumph from start to finish."

He returned to Canton right after the concert, and was offered a one-year contract, which he accepted on September 17, 1920. He would remark many years later

that "I've been working on that one-year contract all this time. Somebody forgot to fire me, I guess." That one-year contract to conduct the Municipal Band lasted for 50 years, ending only with his death 50 years ago on March 31, 1971, about 2 weeks after what was his final concert March 14th!

King's first indoor concert ... 100 years ago:

Karl King came back to Fort Dodge alone on October 1, 1920, and the band, although small in numbers at 16 players, marched in the "Greater Iowa Day" Parade on October 5th. King rented a house at 815 Forest Avenue for his wife and infant son, who would join him a month later, along with Ruth's mother. Rehearsals began immediately after the parade to recruit more players and begin practicing. The rehearsal schedule was doubled to prepare for the three upcoming indoor concerts in January, February, and March of 1921.

By the time of the Municipal Band's first indoor concert on January 21, 1921 at the Princess Theater in downtown Fort Dodge, the instrumentation had grown to 35 players. An advertisement in the local newspaper, *The Fort Dodge Messenger* for "King and His Band" stated that the "curtain rises at 8:15 Promptly [sic]. Admission 35c and 50c".

Program:

January 21, 1921

Sarasota March.....	Karl L. King
Oberon Overture.....	Carl Maria Von Weber
Cello Solos	performed by James Sutton
Scherzo.....	Von Goin
Sarabande.....	G.F. Handel
Operatic Masterpieces.....	V.F. Safranek
Melodie.....	Rudolph Friml
The Reconciliation Polka.....	Riccardo Drigo
The Booster.....	M.L. Lake
Vocal solos	performed by Willis Peterson
Enchanted Night Waltz.....	Karl L. King
Second Hungarian Fantasia..	Theodore Moses Tobani

The programming for this first concert quickly established King's style for the quality and type of music people could expect from his band. This was basically the format he followed for all the years he led the Fort Dodge Band. This programming style has been continued by the three conductors who have succeeded Karl L. King - W.B. Green (1971-77), Reginald R. Schive (1978-2002), and the current

conductor, Jerrold P. Jimmerson (2003-present). All three of these persons played under King's baton for several years, and were heavily influenced by his musical style. It was a somewhat simple format. Start with a march or two before going to a "heavy", (an overture or transcription). Follow that with a waltz or something lighter, then feature the soloist of the day. After another march, the band would usually play another "heavy" before moving on to some lighter selections – popular songs of the day or from the Broadway stage, then a rag, a galop and other lighter selections before the concluding march. Once the final note of that march was played, it was time for the National Anthem. All together, concerts would last one hour, usually no more or no less. There were no encores. King would always want to "leave the audience wanting more".



The Iowa Band Law:

When Karl King arrived in Fort Dodge, he found a city band that was struggling financially. Whether the funds to maintain a band came from local benefactors and/or civic groups, military budgets, or municipal funds, they were always subject to annual fluctuations based on inflation, available funding, and many other factors. Fort Dodge was not alone in this issue, since many other Iowa bands were having the same problem. King set out to establish a more secure and steady form of funding for the band.

In 1921, Karl King, Major George W. Landers, a military band leader in Clarinda IA, and Alonzo Leach, a music store owner in Des Moines, IA, lobbied the Iowa Legislature to pass a resolution, House File #479, which is now simply

known as the "Iowa Band Law." Major Landers wrote the actual bill, which he said would "take the bands out of the charity class". This bill was introduced into the Iowa House on February 10th, and, after much discussion and amendments, was eventually passed on a vote of 86-6 on February 25th. Next, this bill went to the Iowa Senate on March 7th, and was passed after discussion on March 16th by a vote of 34-4. Finally, the Iowa Governor signed the bill into law on St. Patrick's Day, March 17th, 1921.

This law would then give local cities the ability to hold a special election and, if passed, use a small portion of annual property tax collections to support and maintain a municipal band. In so doing, the municipal band would become part of the city government and would have a steadier, more predictable source of funding. The City of Fort Dodge enacted this bill into law on March 26th, 1923 by a vote of 2,803 in favor and 1,545 against. This funding is still the basis for the annual operating budget of the Karl L. King Municipal Band, along with those of several other Iowa cities.

That same year, 1923, when Fort Dodge adopted the Band Law, Karl King composed and published his march, "The Iowa Band Law", which was "*Dedicated to Major Geo. W. Landers, Clarinda, Iowa, founder of Iowa Band Law*". This landmark piece of legislation was eventually adopted by more than 30 states and at least 3 foreign countries.

To learn more about the Iowa Band Law, go to Rod Everhart's article published in the SEP-OCT 2018 *Circus Fanfare*.

The Corn Palace concerts:

With the passage of the Iowa Band Law and the growth in both membership and technical proficiency of the Fort Dodge band under Karl King's leadership in 1921, the financial issues were becoming less of a problem as the band's reputation and community support was quickly growing!

At the band's final indoor concert on April 28th, 1921, this item appeared at the bottom of the printed program,

"We sincerely hope your attendance here has been the means of creating a new interest in our organization and establishing confidence in our future endeavors".

The Fort Dodge Municipal Band was able to secure a booking to play the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines in August 1921, along with some other local county fairs. At the State Fair, there just happened to be two representatives from the Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota. They apparently approved of the performances the band played during the Iowa State Fair, and excitedly offered them a \$5,000 contract to play for their six day exhibition near the end of September. This exhibition was one of the most significant fall celebrations in the upper Midwest. Music was the main attraction at this event, along with elaborate murals made of ears of corn, milo, and other colorful grains. The year



The Fort Dodge Municipal Band at the Mitchell Corn Palace Auditorium in 1921, appearing as “K.L. King’s Band, Ft. Dodge, IA”

before, in 1920, John Philip Sousa’s band had played there. The featured band each year would play a series of concerts rather than just accompany a variety of acts. This new Mitchell Corn Palace Auditorium, built at a cost of \$275,000, had been completed earlier in 1921 just prior to this festival.

The Fort Dodge band played a total of 11 concerts during this six day event, from September 26th through October 1st. There was a band concert every evening and some in the afternoons as well. Each evening, over 4,000 people would fill the auditorium to hear the concert. To view each of these concert programs, you can go to the band’s website at www.karlking.us, click on the ‘Online Photo Archive’, then click on page 8. You will find this picture of the band towards the bottom of that page, with a caption underneath saying, “Listing of 1921 Corn Palace programs”.

In reviewing the Corn Palace programs, you will again notice King’s style of programming: marches, classics and transcriptions, waltzes, solo features, and popular songs of the day. Notice that King always featured some of his own compositions at each concert.

Karl King expanded the size of the Fort Dodge group to 45 players for this festival, bringing in some of the finest musicians from Chicago and Minneapolis to fill in along with the regular members from Fort Dodge. This band was truly outstanding. In Thomas J. Hatton’s book, **Hawkeye Glory**, he states that “John Magennis, who played cornet, felt that it was very probably the finest over-all band that Karl King ever led while he was in Fort Dodge.” The band was very well received, and established itself as “one of the most important organizations in the Midwest”. It would soon become known simply as “King’s Band” or “The King Band”. For this festival, King wrote “*The New Corn Palace March*” that was then published by Fillmore Bros. Co., Cincinnati Ohio, in 1923.

In Retrospect:

Why Karl King came to Fort Dodge and stayed for 50 years has never been completely determined and is still a matter of speculation. Was he encouraged by C.L. Barnhouse from Oskaloosa, IA, who had already published dozens of King’s compositions? Did he remember Fort Dodge from when the Barnum and Bailey Circus stopped there on August 20, 1913? Was he looking for a Midwestern city where he could write his own music, establish a publishing company, direct a Municipal Band, and raise his young son?

One thing is certain. Fort Dodge admired and respected Karl L. King. A state highway bridge was named in his honor – the Karl King Viaduct, one of only a handful of bridges across America named for band conductors. The Band Shell in Oleson Park that he worked so tirelessly to have built was renamed the Karl L. King Band Shell after his death. The local Municipal Band that he conducted for fifty years was renamed the Karl L. King Municipal Band of Fort Dodge, IA also after his death. A local city park downtown, formerly known as the City Square, was renamed the Karl L. King Memorial Park. There is a life-size bronze statue erected there of King in a conducting pose. Several local, district, and state awards and scholarships in Iowa bear his name. Late in his career, Karl L. King once said “I’ve sung my song. It was a rather simple one; it wasn’t too involved; I’m happy about it.” Karl King loved Fort Dodge and his adopted city and state loved him as well! The year 1921 – 100 years ago - was just the beginning of many tremendous things to come from this great and humble man who gave everyone so much more than just “**A Year in the Life of a King**”.

WJU was formed the year King died. Then in 1974, at the 2nd Convention, the WJU Hall of Fame was established and Karl L. King was honored as its first inductee. So on our 50th Anniversary month, we honor King once more.

Portions of this article have been based on the following: the book, **Karl L. King, An American Bandmaster**, by Thomas J. Hatton, published by *The Instrumentalist* in 1975, and republished by the American School Band Directors Association (ASBDA) Education Foundation, Inc., in 2011; the book, **Hawkeye Glory**, by Thomas J. Hatton, published by Golden Dragon Press in 2002, and the Karl King Band’s web site, www.karlking.us, as established and maintained by the late Duane ‘Oley’ Olson (WJU #945), his wife Nancy Olson (WJU #1905), and Alan Spohnheimer (WJU #3190).

Karl L. King Band SESAC Recordings

By Eric Beheim WJU #66

Beginning in the 1940s, Karl L. King and his band recorded marches and other band related material for SESAC, a transcription service that provided radio stations with recorded music that had been cleared for broadcast.

Like ASCAP and Broadcast Music International (BMI), SESAC collected royalties for the composers and artists whose works appeared on its records. Unlike ASCAP and BMI, however, SESAC did not offer open membership – one had to be approved to join.

Here is how SESAC described Karl L. King in 1958:

Everything about Karl King is prodigious. He is six foot four inches in height, he has written well over 200 compositions many of which have become standards in band music, he owns and operates his own publishing firm with great success and is acknowledged as one of the top band masters in the country.

At sixty-seven Karl King is a living legend. His music is played throughout the world. He has been actively writing and performing for fifty-three years, having sold his first march at the age of fourteen. His trouping days started at eighteen when he joined John Robinson's Circus in Emporia, Kansas. Soon he was band master of the combined Sells-Floto and Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. Shortly thereafter his growing reputation led him to the coveted position of director of the Bamum & Bailey Circus Band at the ripe old age of 23.

In 1918 King returned to his hometown of Canton, Ohio to "settle down" to composing. Since that time, he has virtually become an institution. In addition to writing and publishing, he is past president of the American Bandmasters' Association. He has been featured conductor in massed band festivals in nearly every state in the union.

Karl King now lives in Fort Dodge, Iowa, enjoying the fruits of a rich and full life, or to put it in his own words: "In spite of ups and downs, and there were many terrific downs, my life has been interesting and active with very few dull moments. After all, I've been places, seen people and done things. I have no regrets!"

The Karl King Band's SESAC recordings were not sold commercially in record stores, but were only made available to radio stations. Some years ago, I acquired several SESAC 33-1/3 rpm 16-inch transcription disks featuring the "Karl L. King Band." SESAC brought King to New York to record these tunes with a "pickup" band at a studio. The band included a number of top NYC players, including Jimmy Burke on cornet, Davis Shuman on trombone, and Harvey Phillips and Bill Bell on tuba.

These disks were not the "instantaneous" type used for

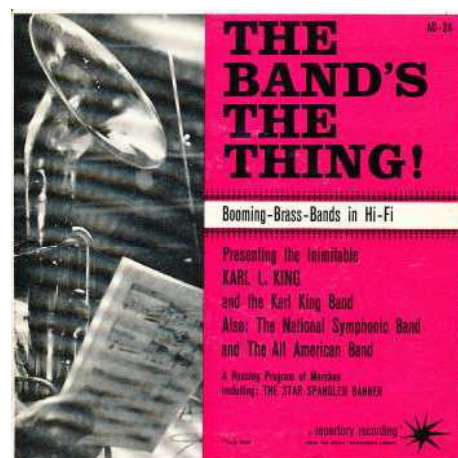
recording but had been pressed like conventional phonograph records. These platters played from the outside in and were transferred onto my computer's hard drive, where, using audio restoration software programs, most of the clicks, ticks and surface noise were removed. (Radical methods were not used in order to preserve the full-frequency content of the original recordings.)

I organized ten of the best tracks into a playlist that is as follows:

1. Trouping Days (Karl L. King)
2. Princess of India Overture [partial] (Karl L. King)
3. Michigan on Parade (Karl L. King)
4. Un Kung Foy Ya (Karl L. King)
5. The Fez (Frank A. Penella)
6. Galop "Go!" (Fred Jewell)
7. Tiger Triumph (Karl L. King)
8. In a Moonlit Garden Intermezzo (Karl L. King)
9. On the Warpath (Karl L. King)
10. King Henry (Karl L. King)

They feature the great Mr. King conducting eight of his own numbers plus two others written by his contemporaries. WJU members can listen to them at our website at MYWJU.ORG, under the [Preservation/Circus Music Recordings](#) tab.

Enjoy!



CIRCUS SNIPPETS A'LA KING

By Jerrold P. Jimmerson, WJU #3118

Karl Lawrence King (1891-1971) was a master at writing enjoyable, playable, and fun music for many different ages, abilities, and experience levels. His music, especially his circus compositions, captured the spirit and flavor of whichever act he was writing for at the time. Difficulty levels ranged from grade 2.5 (Medium Easy) to Grade 5 (Difficult).



All together, King had 294 compositions published primarily by C.L. Barnhouse Co. in Oskaloosa IA, and K.L. King Music House in Fort Dodge, IA. In addition, there were other unpublished compositions of his that he would simply give to a particular act when they moved on and left whichever show King was with at the time. King published a total of 180 marches, 27 waltzes, 20 overtures, 13 galops, 10 serenades, 6 intermezzos, and 26 others in different styles (rags, reveries, and other dance styles) under his own name for a total of 282 pieces. These were all published between the years of 1909 and 1962. Some of these same works were published for Orchestra as well.

Many composers during this time (e.g., Henry Fillmore, Fred Jewell, etc.), also published music using different pseudonyms. Karl King published under the name of 'Carl Lawrence' for an additional 5 marches, 2 waltzes, 2 overtures 1 intermezzo, and 2 other styles, for another 12 compositions.

Following are some comments about selections in each of Karl King's compositional styles.

MARCH: TMB (Karl L. King, 1909, Strassner):

In 1909, Karl King was a young 18-year old Euphonium player with the Thayer Military Band (TMB) of Canton, Ohio. Although his first compositions at the age of 14 were rejected by publishers, he persevered and had his first compositions published in 1909. This was King's very first published march and was dedicated to H. Clark Thayer, the founder and former conductor of that Military Band. It was published by King's Euphonium teacher, William Strassner of Canton. It was the Thayer Band where King sat in and played Euphonium after first playing in the Canton Marine Band.

***MARCH : TROUPE DAYS** (Karl L. King, 1925, King):

The title refers to the years that Karl King traveled or "trouped" with various circus bands throughout the United States. This march was dedicated to Fred Zalesky, who was playing solo clarinet in the Fort Dodge Military Band before King arrived in Fort Dodge in 1920. Zalesky was playing in 1910, and continued playing into the 1950s. Former King Band conductor and WJU member, the late Reginald R. Schive (WJU #488), took private lessons on clarinet from Zalesky.

***PRINCESS OF INDIA OVERTURE** (King, 1912, Barnhouse):

In 1912, King moved to one of the largest and most successful shows on the road, the Sells-Floto Circus, owned by the publisher of the *Denver Post* newspaper. King, by this time, had dozens of compositions in print. While playing Euphonium with the Sells-Floto Band, King wrote an overture that became one of his best-selling compositions. It was not only popular in the circus world, but it became a particular favorite in the fledgling school band market as well, both as a concert feature and as a contest piece.

***MARCH: MICHIGAN ON PARADE** (Karl L. King, 1938, King):

This march was dedicated to William D. Revelli and his fine University of Michigan Band at Ann Arbor. King composed and dedicated marches to all but two of the schools in the Big Ten athletic conference at that time, along with several other colleges and universities. On October 8, 1960, Karl King was asked to conduct 13,252 musicians from 188 high school bands assembled for the record breaking massed band performance at the University of Michigan Band Day. This performance was also televised nationally. To view pictures of this event, go to the band's website at www.karlking.us, find the 'Online Photo Archive', Page 31.

***WALTZ : IN OLD PORTUGAL** (Karl L. King, 1917, Barnhouse):

Karl King received a call from John Ringling two weeks before the circus season was to open in 1917, offering him the job as bandmaster of the Barnum & Bailey *Greatest Show on Earth*, the very top job in the circus world. At age 26, he would become the youngest ever to hold that position. The bandmaster was responsible not only for directing the band, but for hiring the musicians to accompany the finest circus acts in the world, a special challenge at the time because so many musicians had been drafted as a result of World War I.

One of the most famous of these acts was the death-defying aerial performance of Miss Lillian Leitzel, still considered the greatest female aerialist of all time. For her act, Karl King wrote this beautiful, lyrical waltz which Leitzel used for her accompaniment the rest of her career, including her last performance in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1931, when a brass swivel broke and she fell, sustaining injuries that resulted in her death two days later.

GALOP: CIRCUS DAYS (Karl L. King, 1944, King):

The circus galop is synonymous with excitement. It was used to accompany excitement or to create excitement! Karl King wrote only 13 of these galops, but they have an important place in the musical history of the circus. This exciting galop was dedicated to Jerry Huffman, King's friend and Sousa Band trumpeter from 1925-1930.

GALOP: THE WHIPPET RACE (Karl L. King, 1927, King):

This galop was written specifically for a dog race. It was dedicated to "Doc" Griffen, Superintendent of Speed at the Iowa State Fair. The Fort Dodge Municipal Band under King's direction was an important part of the Iowa State Fair, playing the Grandstand shows and accompanying a variety of acts each season starting in the early 1920s and continuing until their final performance at the close of the 1959 season.

SERENADE: A NIGHT IN JUNE (Karl King, 1912, Barnhouse):

This beautiful serenade exemplifies the baritone horn, which of course, was Mr. King's instrument. Dedicated to his friend Vic Graham, baritone soloist, King often performed this selection at one of the Sunday night concerts in Fort Dodge during the month of June. It was his wife Ruth's favorite composition, and her birthday was in June as well. Having played under King's baton for 11 years, I can confirm that he used to take many liberties with the tempos, especially in the Trio, and never directed it the same way twice!

***INTERMEZZO: UNG-KUNG-FOY-YA** (King, 1919, CLB):

Karl King was a master at writing music for a variety of acts during the nine years he spent trouping with different circuses. During the 1917 and 1918 seasons, he was the bandmaster of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, the most famous circus of that era. On that show was a group of Asian acrobats and jugglers. King wrote this intermezzo, using pentatonic scales and harmonies, to accompany their act. During the act's finale, the performers would suspend themselves by their braided ponytails, or queues, and would hang and rapidly spin their bodies above the center ring.

***INTERMEZZO: IN A MOONLIT GARDEN** (King, 1924, CLB):

When Karl King arrived in Fort Dodge in the fall of 1920, he found a core of fine musicians in the Band. Already a well-known composer and conductor himself, Mr. King quickly established his own style of programming with the Band. Several local citizens and band members had marches or other selections dedicated to them during the 1920s decade. This selection was dedicated to Willis Peterson, a popular vocalist with the local Municipal Band.

TWO-STEP: KENTUCKY SUNRISE (King, 1919, CLB):

When one hears the title of this selection, one might think of lush, green fields of bluegrass and rows of white fences gleaming in the morning sun. However, nothing could be further from the truth! Karl King wrote and published this piece during the ragtime era. It was named after a performing horse, **Kentucky Sunrise**, in the Barnum and Bailey Circus that could actually prance in time to this catchy ragtime beat. It was dedicated to Rhoda Royal, a horse trainer in the Sells-Floto Circus and Buffalo Bill Wild West Shows with King.

NOTE: (*) – These four songs were also part of the SESAC recording sessions in New York City conducted by Karl King during the 1940s and 1950s. These discs were then provided to radio stations for broadcast nationally. SEE PAGE 11 IN THIS *CIRCUS FANFARE*.

To view PICTURES of a 1958 session, go to the King band's website: www.karllking.us, 'Online Photo Archive', Page 30.



Want to LISTEN to King conducting his band for those SESAC sessions? Then sign on to our website at www.MYWJU.org and under the Preservations/Circus Music Tab you will find the four from this article plus six others under the King Recordings grouping: *Trouping Days*, *Princess of India Overture [partial]*, *Michigan on Parade*, and *Ung-Kung-Foy-Ya*.

Thanks to Andrew Glover (WJU #423) for providing the complete listing of the publications for Karl King. Thanks to Nancy Olson (WJU #1905), her late husband Duane 'Oley' Olson (WJU #945), and Alan Spohnheimer, (WJU #3190) for establishing and maintaining the Karl King Band's website, www.karllking.us.