



## *Sound the Trumpet, Beat the Drums: Horse-Mounted Bands of the U.S. Army, 1820–1940* by Bruce P. Gleason.

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As modern military historians increasingly shift their focus from the battlefield to the surrounding culture of warfare, it seems logical that music, a preeminent and defining part of any culture, should receive more attention. In *Sound the Trumpets, Beat the Drums*, Bruce Gleason (Univ. of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN) takes a welcome step in that direction. His objective is straightforward: to document the evolution of mounted bands in the US Army from ca. 1812 up to World War II. He details the size, repertoires, and duties of these bands, as well as the instruments they used and the training they underwent. The book's eleven chapters proceed chronologically, each devoted to a specific war: for example, "Civil War and the 1860s," "Spanish-American War Era," and "Mexican Expedition, World War I, and the 1920s."

Unlike other military ensembles, mounted bands' distinctive mode of transportation influenced both their function and their reception by civilians and soldiers alike.

Stemming from utilitarian music of the colonial period, cavalry music in the United States developed over the turn of the nineteenth century to full mounted bands emulating those of Britain and the European Continent by the middle of the century.... Mounted bands, as they had for centuries in Europe, could not help but attract attention—and mixing the visual with aural aspects made them favorites with the general public as well as with the military. (37)

Yet Gleason clearly distinguishes the European tradition of mounted music from the newer, more pragmatic attitudes found in the US Cavalry. He argues that "American forces were birthed out of necessity and task rather than of ancient tradition" (26), since they lacked the time and infrastructure needed to implement mounted bands. For Gleason, this explains why American mounted bands disappeared in the age of mechanized war, while their counterparts elsewhere in the world still exist today.

Himself a former army bandsman, Gleason is an active conductor, euphonium and trombone player, and professor of music. *Sound the Trumpet* is the fruit of three decades of scrupulous research in libraries and archives throughout the United States and overseas. This meticulous research is a primary strength of the book. Gleason has tracked down rare accounts by cavalry musicians from the Mexican American War (1846–48) to the Mexican Expedition of 1916–17; he adduces evidence from military manuals, government publications, and other contemporary sources, as well as interviews he himself conducted with bandsmen who were active in the 1930s and 1940s.

This abundance of research at times makes for a dense prose style, especially when the author tries to compress too much background musical information into a short exposition. But any thorough study of military music must bridge the fields of military history and musicology, each with its own technical vocabulary and base of received knowledge. As a result, certain discussions, indispensable in a book on mounted bands (e.g., of the evolution of brass and percussion instruments), will fascinate some readers but exhaust others.

Gleason wisely eschews forcing his topics into predetermined categories or overemphasizing high-profile wars at the expense of less glamorous conflicts. This approach yields a number of intriguing, sometimes unpredictable, points. For example, most readers will know that many highly visible cavalry bands were active during the Civil War; indeed, one could hardly walk across a camp or battlefield without stumbling over a musician. But Gleason demonstrates that the postbellum period saw no decline in mounted bands; as the Army turned westward, mounted bands found new life on the frontier as a prominent part of the military presence in forts across the territories. Gleason also pays close attention to developments beyond the regular army. As the latter was curtailing its cavalry units and bands in the early twentieth century, state militias and National Guard units were doing quite the opposite.

In his concluding chapter, Gleason touches on some issues that should have received fuller treatment earlier on. He mentions, for instance, the intrinsic link between mounted bands and social class, observing that the cost of securing and maintaining a horse ensured that cavalry units were respected as “socially elevated above infantry units” (196). But we do not learn just how this special status affected the bands’ reception by urban civilians, rural recruits, enlisted soldiers, or highbrow officers. One is left to wonder whether infantrymen were less enamored of the mounted musicians than was the general public. Gleason notes that the visual appearance of military bands was often as significant as the music they played—another subject he could have scrutinized to good effect throughout the work. Were there notable differences in the repertoires played by mounted bands and their infantry counterparts? Did they diverge over time? Did the visual spectacle influence audiences’ opinions of the music performed by these bands?

Such questions stray into the socio-musical functions of mounted bands and their music and so fall outside the book’s purview. Though the author has compiled enough information to fill more than one monograph, his stated intent is “to single out the tradition of horse-mounted bands [and] leave broad-based conversations to others” (199). Still, one hopes he will take part in those discussions.

Bruce Gleason has provided us with a salutary, well-documented introduction to a neglected subject. Packed with engrossing details, lively anecdotes, and rare images, *Sound the Trumpet, Beat the Drum* will enlighten and entertain all readers interested in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century music, military history, and American studies in general.