

MUSIC FOR THE COLONIAL BAND

Played by the Colonial Band of Boston

David McKay, Bandmaster



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(Opera, Oratorio, Anthem)

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- 11: CONCERTO in C MAJOR (Op. 2, #4)***
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 - a) Andante (1:02)
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 - a) Largo (1:00)
 - b) Allegro (2:21)
 - c) Andante (1:35)
 - d) Jig (1:05)

**Love in A Village* was the most popular comic opera of the
Colonial period.

***Jonah* was "premiered" in Boston in 1789.

***Felton's C Major was Colonial America's most popular concerto.

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Title page engraved by John Norman for Billings' *Psalm-Singer's Amusement*. From *William Billings of Boston*.

General Background

The Colonial Band, a musical phenomenon that emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century, constitutes one of the most interesting yet one of the least known aspects of early American music. Indeed neither its repertoire nor its performers are much remembered today except by a small group of specialists. Hopefully the listener can now judge for himself what a rich heritage was embraced in the tradition.

One eyewitness account of an eighteenth century band concert -- this one as seen through the eyes of a young boy from rural New England -- perhaps captures the excitement the band "concert" created as effectively as any description available. He begins: "It was reported all around the country for weeks beforehand that the Boston Band was to be at muster" -- muster ground, incidentally "was in an adjoining town, and five miles distance." The account continues with such vivid prose that a paraphrase would do it injustice:

All now were impatient for the arrival At length, "coming! coming!" was vociferated from a hundred tongues.

. . . When they had arrived within half a mile of the parade ground, they slackened pace, and the music struck up Washington's March. My stars! how did my little heart bump on hearing the exhilarating notes! I shall never forget it. An army of boys of us dashed ahead, to get a better view and better hearing; in doing which I lost one of my shoes, tore my new otter trowsers, and had a whole sheet of gingerbread smashed to atoms! . . . The march was continued until the company came in front of the public house, when it halted, and Capt. Taylor gave orders for Yankee Doodle. This fairly bewitched the crowd, and they rent the air with huzzas.

The longings of thousands to see the Boston Band were now gratified. Here stood the veterans in propriis personis, giving both ocular and auricular demonstra-

tion of their presence This was very pleasant to every one; but there was one man in particular, in the very centre of a dense group, that, the very instant they commenced it, sat to dancing like a Dandy Jack, and kept it up until the tune was ended, to the no small amusement of all around.

(THE BOSTON MUSICAL GAZETTE, Vol. 1, #7, 51-2.)

So much for the unabated public enthusiasm. But beyond this fact, basic data on the Colonial Band tradition is frustratingly illusive. Its size is a matter of dispute, as is the instrumental disposition; indeed its very origins are hard to pin down. Returning to our eyewitness account, however, we do find suggestive insights as he remarks about the Boston Band:

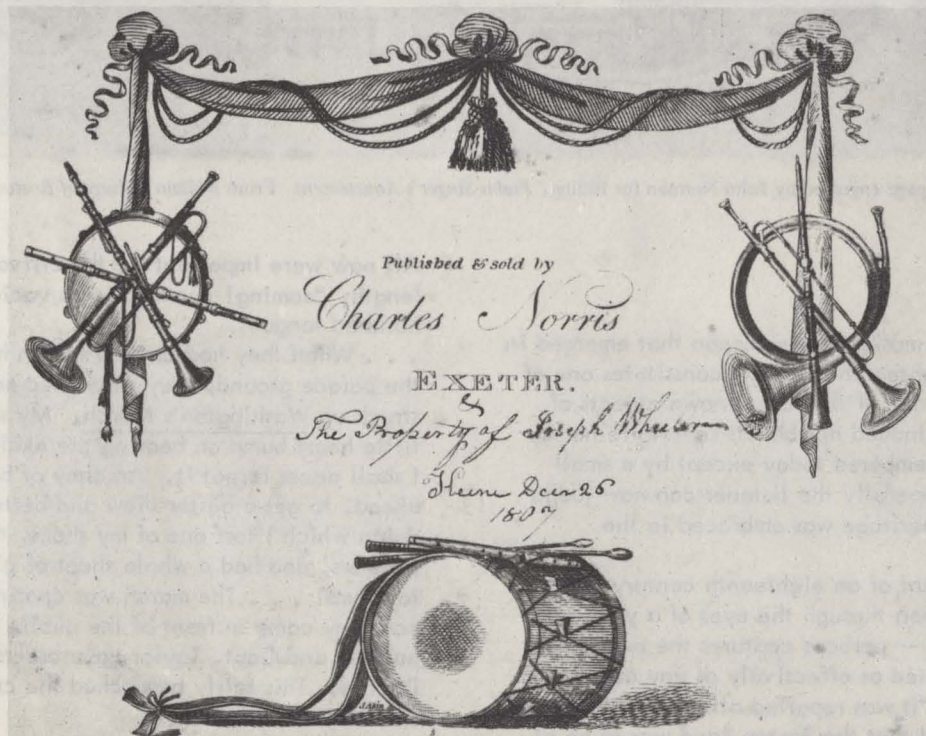
Their number was only four. Belsted upon the Hatuboy, Granger (father of the late violinist) upon the Clarinet; the famous Peter Schminch, the French Horn; and old Dr. Faegmol, the Bassoon. It was said that Belsted played a fine violin. The first and two last belonged to Burgoyne's band, and were taken with him at Saratoga. I believe these musicians found constant employ in their vocation. They have gratified their thousands; they have had their day, and have gone down with the generations. Such was once the Boston Band.

The present ensemble (named the Colonial Band of Boston), modeled on its eighteenth century predecessor, includes thus the oboe, clarinet, French Horn, and bassoon. The flute, later commonly found with the Colonial band, is also included, giving a total of five instruments. Many bands, much larger in number, can be identified in this period, but

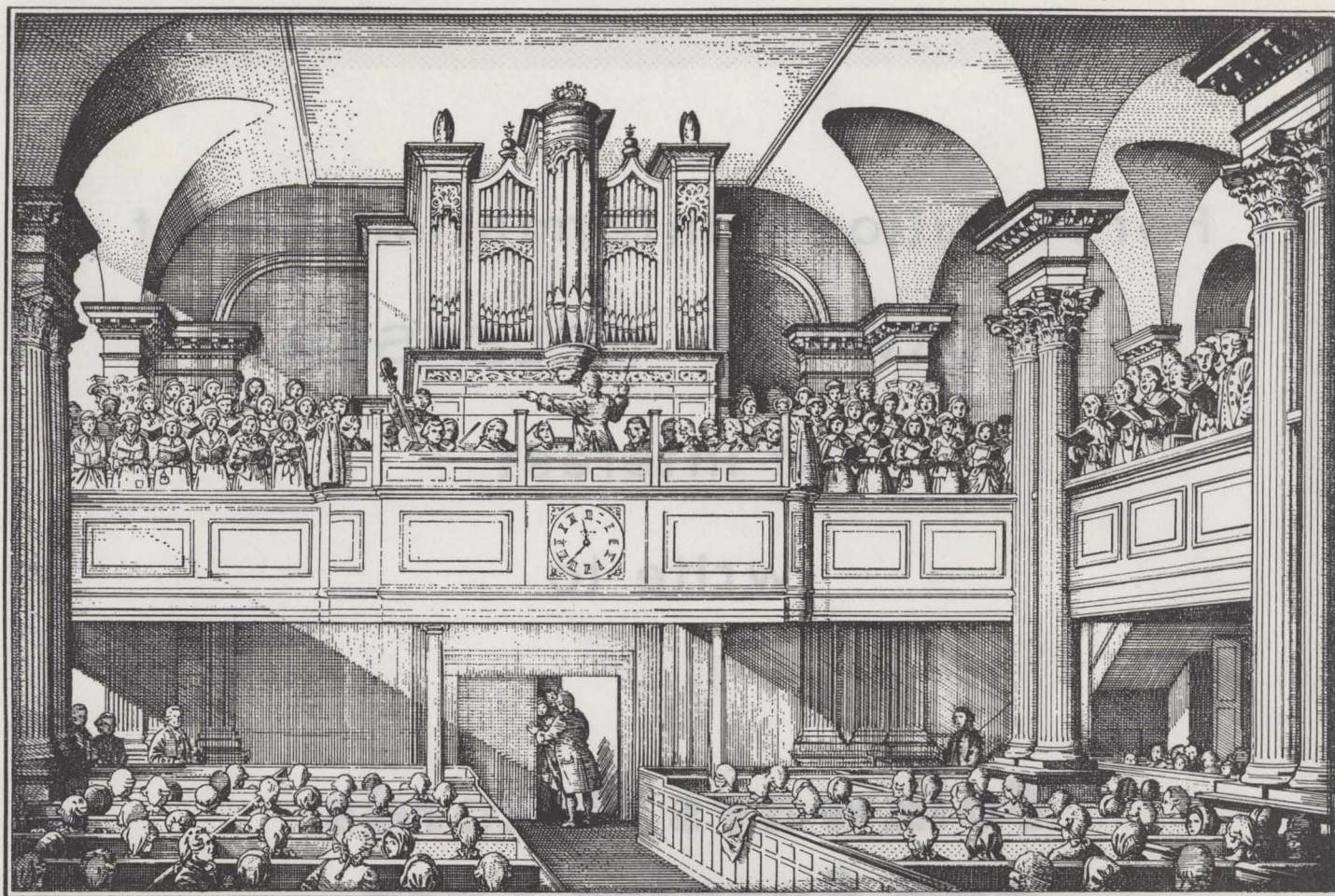
the core of the band is constituted by these five instruments with additional performers often doubling the parts. Returning to the eyewitness account, it is interesting to note that the oboist reputedly "played a fine violin"; and doubtless string instruments, when available, were allowed to function within the group. Indeed there is suggestive evidence that the cello (or bass viol) preceded the bassoon in many such organizations.

Of particular importance is the fact that three of the men "belonged to Burgoyne's band, and were taken with him at Saratoga," thus underscoring the close relationship the Colonial musicians had with those in the British military bands. Indeed the Colonial band tradition seems to have directly emerged, in large measure, from its English predecessors. Concurrently with this development, however, was the deep interest in music that native Americans had long nourished -- particularly in New England, where singing schools, promoting musical literacy, abounded (as early as the 1720's) and where, in the 1780's, the influential Congregational churches, until this time hostile to instrumental music in their services, completely reversed themselves and allowed pipe organs (or their less-expensive "native" counterparts -- the Colonial band, euphemistically known as the "gallery orchestra.") The end result was that the band now embraces a two-fold tradition -- one emerging from the (English) military background, and the other growing out of its (native) usage -- certainly in New England -- in religious worship.

And it goes without saying that on any special occasion, be it a holiday or a large gathering in a tavern, the band could be found quite willing to give public performances -- in addition to its affiliation with either the church or the militia.



This frontispiece from Samuel Holyoke's *THE INSTRUMENTAL ASSISTANT*, Vol. II (Norris & Sawyer, Exeter, (1807)) shows the instruments as they probably appeared in the composer's life-time. The percussion instruments reflect the influence (felt in both Europe and America) of the Janizaries, or the Turkish standing army band.



Courtesy of King's Chapel Archives, Boston.

William Selby conducting a concert in King's Chapel in the year 1786.

This engraving, though undated and certainly done after the 18th century, does show Selby conducting at King's Chapel in 1786, and it effectively shows the large scale productions he seemed to do so effectively in Boston.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The repertoire of **MUSIC FOR THE COLONIAL BAND** is presented in four broad categories: (1) New England Band Music, (2) Colonial Band and Vocal Music, (3) Patriotic Music, and (4) Colonial Band and the "larger" forms.

NEW ENGLAND BAND MUSIC: Musical activity, quite varied, was wide-spread throughout Colonial America; and standards of performance were often surprisingly high. However, no geographic area could clearly lay claim to its musical heritage being superior to another's, though many sections might cite unique contributions. But there is no disrupting the fact that the leadership in American music publication first emerged in the New England area. For from the 1698 publication of **BAY PSALM BOOK** (9th edition), which contained music, through the six William Billings volumes of music (beginning in 1770), down to the 1786 printing of Isaiah Thomas' landmark choral anthology, **WORCESTER COLLECTION**, New England was the unquestioned center of music publishing in America; and quite understandably, native composers from this area were among the earliest to receive broad recognition. Hence they warrant our particular attention.

Josiah Flagg (1738-1794) is a key figure in the emergence of band music within Colonial New England. For this Massachusetts-born jeweler found time enough not only to

publish two important volumes of music -- **COLLECTION OF BEST PSALM TUNES** (1764), containing "Trumpet Tune," and **COLLECTION OF . . . ANTHEMS** (1766) -- but he also was cited (*Boston Evening Post*, October 18, 1773) as "the first-founder and having at great expense of time, trouble etc., instructed a band of music to perform . . . in this town (Boston)." His concert notices frequently appear in the Boston press of the late 1760's and the early 1770's.

Flagg's "Trumpet Tune" is a simple psalm tune (dated 1764); and the fugal section, adapted from his 1766 **COLLECTION**, reflects a style of simple imitative composition that Colonial composers enjoyed, wherein they used minor English composers, such as William Tans'ur and A. Williams, as their models.

William Selby (1738-1798), an English-trained composer and recitalist who held the organist's position at Boston's King's Chapel for almost a quarter of a century, did much, particularly after the Revolutionary War, to raise the standards of music performances in Boston -- particularly giving large scale public concerts of orchestral, band and choral music. His "band from Boston" toured, certainly as far away as Salem, Massachusetts (cf. *Salem Gazette* 16 November, 1790), and doubtless performed in other communities. His **A LESSON** was published, probably in Boston, but unfortunately the title page remains lost so precise information about dating, etc., is difficult to obtain, though 1791 seems an accurate guess.

Selby had been organist at London's St. Sepulchre Church in the 1760's (where young Mozart had performed), and his sophisticated musical capabilities, evidenced in the rococo subtlety of the Andante or the brilliance of the Jig, are in sharp contrast to the "primitive" charm of Flagg's music.

Samuel Holyoke (1762-1820), a Massachusetts native, graduated from Harvard College in 1789 and studied music under the Boston composer, Hans Gram. His rising musical star was duly noted by William Bentley, the brilliant Salem minister, who noted in his diary (11 February 1791):

Mr. Holyok's Music lately published was introduced. This Gentleman is the first Son of Harvard of whom I have heard, that has published an original collection of Music from his own compositions. He is the Son of a Minister in Boxford, (Mass.).

His INSTRUMENTAL ASSISTANT (1800), which contains the "Masonic Processional March No. 1," was an extremely important source of early American band music. The direct functional use of this Processional is underscored by the following Masonic information found in the Salem Gazette (14 June 1803):

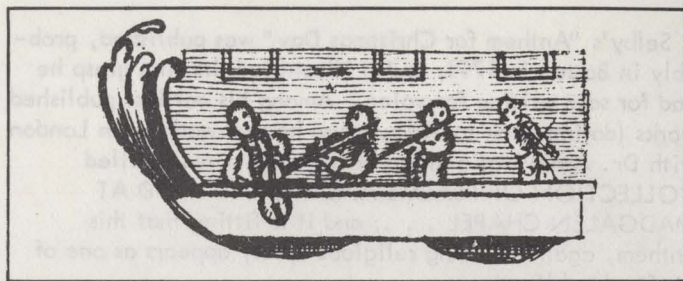
On Thursday last, Merrimack lodge was constituted and installed in ample form, Haverhill -- The Music was appropriate, and composed . . . by Mr. Holyoke.

Holyoke's Processional would have been an equally appropriate response to the burgeoning band expansion in Massachusetts, stimulated by the Acts of 1799 (Commonwealth of Massachusetts), Section 14, which authorized "a band of Musick in each brigade."

The music is quite straightforward, being presented in a tri-sectional form with a middle section in the minor mode, distinguishing it from the other two major mode divisions. Repetition of each section is indicated, allowing the work to be lengthened as "processional" needs might require.

William Billings (1746-1800), a Boston-born, essentially self-taught composer is generally considered the most important American composer of the eighteenth century. His flamboyant personality, however, polarized contemporary reactions to himself; and he was seen on the one hand as a genius to be compared with Handel, and on the other as a tanner-composer with distasteful, boorish manners who wrote dull music.

William Billings' six volumes of music are all choral selections, which only call upon instrumental accompaniment rarely. But it is quite proper to render this charming music as an instrumental work, which is precisely what a late-eighteenth century Gallery Orchestra might have done. "Judea" is a Christmas carol he wrote (1778), and "Jargon" was the first "dissonant" composition published in America (1778). Billings doubtless meant it as a joke-piece, though the considerable attention it aroused suggests it was taken as something more. Billings' performance instructions are of interest: "Let it (Jargon) be performed in the following manner, viz. Let an Ass bray the Bass, let the fileing of a saw carry the Tenor, let a hog who is extream (with) hunger squeel the Counter, and let a cart-wheel . . . squeek the Treble."



The frontispiece of William Billings' PSALM SINGER'S AMUSEMENT (1781) contains, in each corner, an engraving depicting some scene associated with Colonial music. Of particular interest is the upper right corner scene--of four musicians in a Colonial band, obviously enjoying themselves tremendously. Note the mixture of winds and strings, in this case two flutists with a cellist and a violinist.

SECTION II: COLONIAL BAND AND VOCAL MUSIC (Opera, Oratorio, Anthem)

Opera in Colonial America had an uneven start, colored, in part, by the mixed public reaction to its moral effects. Even LOVE IN A VILLAGE, whose libretto was bland compared to most, was castigated as late as 1794 by the NEW YORK MAGAZINE because "its two best drawn characters are a disgustful exhibition of folly and vice." But this same work, a comic pasticcio, laying claim to music by at least 13 different composers, was doubtless the most important opera in America in the decade before the Revolutionary War, receiving repeated performances from Boston as far as Charleston, South Carolina. And the critic for the PENNSYLVANIA GAZETTE (January, 1767) aptly gave a balanced judgment when writing "the pleasing LOVE IN A VILLAGE . . . must give real delight to every person void of ill-nature."

Two ayres from this charming opera (both using tenor and Colonial Band) substantiate the attraction this work had for Colonial listeners: "O! had I been by fate decreed," tells of the delicious agony the hero (Young Meadows) suffered in his attempt to win the love of the opera's heroine; and "My Dolly was the fairest thing" offers the reflective judgments of a wistful rationalist named Hawthorne, who suggests (quite mildly) the intellectual focus of the opera.

Oratorio in America achieved popularity several decades after opera, in part, because it had from the beginning only a limited following. One primary reason for its broad public acceptance has to be the pioneering concert efforts of William Selby at Boston's King's Chapel. Selby was neither the first nor the most prolific conductor of public concerts in America; but his determined efforts to present large-scale musical works (including the oratorio), performed by skillful musicians under his own careful leadership is a most important step in American music. One measure of his accomplishments is the distinguished Boston Handel and Haydn Society, which could hardly have emerged without Selby's groundwork among Boston music-lovers.

The SALEM MERCURY carried a notice for a 19 October 1789 concert directed by Selby in Boston's King's Chapel featuring the "Oratorio of JONAH . . . never performed in America." It further states: "instrumental parts by a Society of Gentlemen with the Band of his Most Christian Majesty's Fleet." The ayre "Save Me O Lord" occurs as the second of five for tenor in the oratorio.

Selby's "Anthem for Christmas Day" was published, probably in Boston in 1791; and it illustrated the fine grasp he had for solo writing for voice. Among his earliest published works (dating back to 1765, when he was working in London with Dr. Arne) was a group of religious ayres entitled **COLLECTION OF PSALMS AND HYMNS USE'D AT MADGALEN CHAPEL . . .**; and it is fitting that this anthem, again utilizing religious ayres, appears as one of his final publications.

SECTION III: PATRIOTIC MUSIC

The chequered history of the music for Francis Scott Key's "Star-Spangled Banner" is a lengthy one of limited interest. Suffice it to be noted that the first account of its origin appeared in the 21 September 1814 **BALTIMORE AMERICAN**, where the text (with no music) appeared, but included the observation "Tune: Anacreon in Heaven." The composer was one John Stafford Smith (1750-1836) of Gloucester (England) and the "original" tune is probably a 178? publication. It was the "constitutional song" of a group of nobelmen and gentlemen who met periodically in London, as what was termed the "Anacreontic Society." And though its text was trite, concluding with the couplet: "And long may the Sons of Anacreon intwine/The myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's vine," one should not lightly dismiss this group which included such notables of the day as the great master Haydn, who was "guest of honor" at their 12 January 1791 meeting.

Smith later (ca. 1785) issued a mildly contrapuntal version of his work in his **FIFTH BOOK OF CANZONETS**; and Thomas Paine appropriated the tune (in 1798) to use with a text exploiting the patriotic prowess of John Adams.

One can trace a certain lightness and playfulness that Smith underscores in his conzona setting of the tune. And the more serious, somewhat pompous aspect of the tune is grasped by Paine's setting. The tune's adaptation to Key's text continues in the more "serious" version that Paine seems to have anticipated.

SECTION IV: COLONIAL BAND AND THE 'LARGER' FORMS

The Colonial Band, perhaps with a mixture of brashness and fearlessness, ventured far afield in its search for material, not hesitating even to embrace the "larger" forms for its repertoire. Two concertos will illustrate: The Concerto in C (Op. 2 #4) by William Felton (1715-1769) and the Concerto in D by John Stanley (1713-1786).

Felton was a composer whose music (five sets of concertos and two of lessons) had an immediate charm, even if perhaps real substance, at times, was lacking. And Colonial Americans seized upon this brilliant, flashy music eagerly. Indeed the final movement (the Theme and Variations) of Felton's C Major was the most widely performed concerto movement in 18th century America. There is no question that Americans revered Handel as the master-composer of the century, but it was the Handel of the opera overtures (and the **MESSIAH**) that found his way consistently into the instrumental repertoire; whereas Felton's organ concertos, ironically modelled on Handel's, were to find a much larger public reception than those of the German master (which

unfortunately presented technical difficulties for many would-be performers.)

One anecdote, assigned by Burney to Handel, grows out of Felton's desire to have Handel listed as a subscriber for the second set of Felton organ concertos. The German master abruptly refused as follows: "go to der 'Teiffel' - a barson make **CONCERTO!** shy he no make sarmon?" Felton could take comfort, at least, in that his concertos did find a willing audience in the colonies.

The Concerto in D by John Stanley (1713-1786) presents one of the most widely performed 18th century composers in the colonies. In part the appeal of his music lay in Stanley's facility for writing works that could easily be transcribed for varying instrumental dispositions. Hence the present work was issued (apparently by Stanley) not only in a fully orchestrated version, but also in a keyboard version suitable for one (or more) instrumental soloists. And it was thus easily adaptable by the Colonial Band. Josiah Flagg, in addition to his accomplishments as composer and conductor, was also an organ recitalist, with enough competence to concertize as far afield as Providence, Rhode Island. And, it as fitting that this distinguished musician should be the one to introduce to the Boston public (in the early 1770's) the charming Concerto in D, by the brilliant, blind London organist, John Stanley.

The contrast (near the beginning) of the full ensemble counterbalanced by the smaller instrumental groupings is typical of the baroque concerto; and the lyrical quality of the Andante evidences sustained charm, quite vital even today. The Jig Finale, a typical concluding section of a mid-eighteenth century instrumental composition, can be seen as foreshadowing the later allegro finale, common to the emerging classical symphony.

ABOUT THE COLONIAL BAND OF BOSTON

Bandmaster: David McKay
Horn: David Hoose
Flute: Chris Krueger
Clarinet: Richard MacDowell
Bassoon: Arra MacKinnon
Oboe: Pat Morehead
Tenor Soloist: Ken Raynor

The Colonial Band of Boston is a present-day re-creation of its 18th century predecessor, The (Colonial) Band of Boston, which in turn emerged from General Burgoyne's 18th century British Military Band.

The bandmaster, David McKay, is the co-author of **WILLIAM BILLINGS OF BOSTON** (Princeton University Press, 1975) and has edited for some half dozen publishing houses instrumental and choral works from the Colonial repertoire ranging all the way from simple psalm tunes and fusing tunes up to the "larger" works of the period including symphonies and concertos.

The members of the band are all gifted recitalists in their own right, with concert appearances both in America and Europe. Three are on the faculties of distinguished New England colleges; and all, appropriately enough, reside in the greater Boston area.

Mr. Raynor, a student of Elinor Steber's, has performed many times in New York and New England.

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