

## **A Word about Finnish-American Music Activity**

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*(This is a rare article written by a Finnish American chronicler- published while many of the Finnish American bands were still functioning.)*

Finns are known to love music making together, both playing in bands and singing in choirs. An American author, writing his thoughts on Finnish American music, described their life as, notably, leisure hours at home making music, hard work in the fields, and bathing in the sauna. Then he went on to add that Finns also sing and play to guests who wander in. For guests, who arrive unannounced at the door, "they won't leave the Kantele hanging on the wall."

The earliest examples of music activity among Finnish immigrants were the brass bands. In Astoria Oregon, it is thought the first Finnish band in America was started fifty years ago (1871). Ten years later (1881) more Finnish bands were started in Wyoming and Oregon by Hämeenlinna native bandleader Rudolf Nelson. Oulu bandmaster Henry Haapanen started at Finnish band in Calumet thirty-five years ago (1886), and Helsinki musician A. Laqvist, thirty years ago (1891) started the "Wainö" Finnish brass band in Lanesville, Massachusetts, which still is playing (1921.)

A bit later came a major chance in the history of Finnish brass bands in America: in every mining town or location where there could be found a reasonable number of Finns, an effort and sacrifice was made to organize a Finnish brass band. Conductors and players were often lacking in musical skills, but still claimed to have achieved a "high class" result. In Finland, the players initially experienced band playing in the military or other amateur groups in the countryside. They came to America and were often the organizers and leaders of new bands. These new bands acquired all that was needed: handsome uniforms, brass instruments and other instruments, paying whatever it cost, and then became a functioning band, with intense rehearsals, culminating with performances in the halls in the evenings- after a hard day of work, or on holidays. The level of playing in the first year would not have been very high, but in many communities, where the bands had some years to develop, the result was commendable (award winning) and often influenced by the American band style, and attracted the best

players of all ages, with a new "generation" of playing level that was genuinely musical.

Finnish American brass bands were in many locations and were also, for the Finns, a source of pride, and- to some extent, maintained the immigrants' traditional attachment to and love of music, and, further, if the brass band played at a high level, they raised the quality of otherwise rather dry entertainments and occasions.

The Finnish brass bands are among the immigrants' may have by now developed to as many as 100 groups. The oldest of them are these: Ely Minn (started by Nikolai Miettunen in 1889), the Red Lodge Finnish Military Band started in 1890, the "*Humina*" Band in Ashtabula Harbor, Ohio (started in 1894 by John Rönnerberg), the "*Imatra*" Band of Maynard, Mass (founded in 1891, original name was Maynard National Band). Others that then developed are: "*Louhi*" Band of Monessen, Pa -directed by George Wahlstrom; the "*Pohjan Aalto*" band of Conneaut, Ohio; The Fairport Finnish Band or Fairport, Ohio, directed by J. F. Jacobson; the "*Wellamo*" band of Warren, Ohio- directed by Luoma; the "*Sointu*" Band of Wierton, W. Va., directed by Waldemar Eklund; the "Iron Belt Finnish Band" of Iron Belt Wisconsin, directed by Antti Korhonen; the "*Alku*" Finnish Brass Band of Fitchburg, Mass. directed by Juho Jalkanen; the Temperance Society Band of Waukegan, Ill., directed by Hugo Lassila and J. Kangas; the "Hibbing Finnish Band" of Hibbing, Minnesota- founded in 1896; the "Soudan Finnish Band" of Soudan, Minnesota; and, in Michigan, Finnish bands in Wakefield, Crystal Falls, Rockland, Painesdale, and South Range. Bands also were to be found in Hancock and Franklin Mine, but both have ended in the last year. The Finnish Socialist organizations in some communities also have their own bands. Many more bands were started but had short lives. Often, because the players were itinerant workers, it was hard to keep the groups together.