

“WILL THE LEADER OF THE MARINE BAND PLEASE SEE MRS. LINCOLN TODAY?”

Before there was a United States capital in Washington, DC, there was a Marine Band...and before *Semper Fidelis*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Stars and Stripes Forever*, there was the *Union March*...and before there was Sousa, there was Francis Maria Scala.

It's been a long time since Francis Scala was a household name. But it's safe to say that without him, we might not have a Marine Band today; and without him, we probably wouldn't have had John Philip Sousa OR *The Stars and Stripes Forever*. He never composed a symphony, or directed a great orchestra. But he took a musical organization which was little more than a collection of fifes and drums, built it into a wind band of thirty-five players, and introduced it to the great age of wind instruments. Under Scala, the Marine Band became a fixture in the nation's capital, playing for White House social events, outdoor concerts on Capitol Hill and on the White House grounds, and played its most historic role by providing the music which accompanied Abraham Lincoln to his the dedication of the national cemetery at Gettysburg in November of 1863. There, Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address, the most famous speech in American history; and there was Francis Maria Scala and the United States Marine Band, marching at the head of Lincoln's procession.

However, Francis Scala never set out to be a great bandmaster. He was born in Naples, in Italy, in 1820, took up the clarinet (an instrument which had only recently moved into regular orchestral use), and was playing odd-jobs in pit-orchestras for opera theaters for a living in 1841, when the U.S. frigate *Brandywine* made a port call. The captain of the *Brandywine*, hearing Scala play and having the additional benefit of speaking fluent Italian, offered him a job with the *Brandywine*'s shipboard band. Scala happily signed up, and within a month, had been made the band's director; by 1842, Scala was being wooed to jump ship to the three-decker ship-of-the-line, USS *Pennsylvania*. But Scala discovered that he had a weakness for which the Navy had no cure: seasickness. He was discharged from the Navy when the *Brandywine* returned to Norfolk in July of 1842. But rather than returning to Italy, he began looking for work in the Washington area, and, soon signed up for service in the U.S. Marine Band.

The Marine Band wasn't much of a band in 1842. "It wasn't much of an organization then," Scala told a newspaper interviewer half-a-century later, "Congress had made no provision for the band, so that the ten or twelve members were enlisted as fifers and drummers." For ceremonial occasion, the band could muster only one flute, one clarinet, one French horn, 2 trombones, a keyed bugle, a bass drum, a snare drum and cymbals.[*Band members file onstage during this paragraph*] And this is what they sounded like:

Henry B. Dodworth, "America"

But within a year, Scala had become fife-major of the Marine Band – *fife-major* meaning that he was the officer in charge of the band’s direction when performing in concert, while the *drum-major* led it on the march in a parade – but Scala went to work over the following eight years, and succeeded in building-up a wind band of thirty to thirty-five players, with a varied instrumentation which reflected the newest developments in wind instruments: a piccolo, four Eb soprano clarinets, seven Bb clarinets, two French horns, an alto horn, two Eb cornets, two Bb cornets, an Eb trumpet, a keyed bugle, two baritone horns, three trombones, a tuba and a bass drum and snare drum. [*More band members file onstage during this paragraph*].

And Scala knew what to do with them, too. Take a listen to *President Grant’s Inaugural March*, which Scala wrote for the inaugural ceremonies for Ulysses S. Grant as the 18th President in 1869.

Francis Scala , “President Grant’s Inaugural March”

Of course, that may not be the tune everyone walks away humming. Original composition was, alas! Not Francis Maria Scala’s long suit. Still, what Americans wanted to hear in the 1850s was not daring and original experiments in wind band music; they wanted opera. Italian opera made its first big beachhead in America in 1825, when New York’s Park Theatre gave the American debuts of Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville* and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* in a season that had to be extended five times by popular demand. For the next four decades, Italian opera was the rage of America’s urban concert-goers, and Scala, who knew the Italian opera literature from playing in Italian pit orchestras, was only too happy to oblige with opera overtures by Giacomo Meyerbeer, Saverio Mercadante, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, and this overture to Daniel Auber’s *Fra Diavolo*, from 1830, about the career of a notorious Neapolitan criminal:

Daniel Auber, Overture to *Fra Diavolo*

The problem which the demand for opera posed for Scala was that operas are *sung*, except for bits like the overtures; *bands* play instruments. Scala’s solution was to take hit tunes from popular operas, and work up his own arrangements of them for the Marine Band – frequently featuring himself as clarinet soloist – or performing show-stopper arrangements by others...something which Staff Sgt. Gina Guhl can give us a sample of in this arrangement of tunes from Guiseppe Verdi’s opera *Rigoletto*, made in 1863 by Luigi Bassi, the principal clarinetist of the La Scala opera orchestra in Milan, the *Concert Fantasia on Motifs from Verdi’s Rigoletto*:

Luigi Bassi, *Concert Fantasia on Motifs from Verdi’s Rigoletto* SSgt. Gina Guhl, soloist

If opera was food for American musical high-brows, then musical middle-brows wanted something lighter – which, in the 1850s, meant polkas, waltzes and marches, played in parks, hotels, sporting events, grand openings, fairs, militia musters, and even funerals. Much of this music was provided by a peculiarly American kind of ensemble, the brass band. Until the dawn of the 19th century brass instruments were really little

more than brass tubes of varying lengths, coiled, bent or twisted to make them more comfortable to handle. Hitting any variety of notes depended on how skilful a player was at lipping up, or down, to hit them. But in 1810, Joseph Halliday discovered that by cutting holes in the tubes and covering them with keys which could open or close the hole, a performer could play every note in any scale. By the 1850s, keys on brass instruments were being replaced with valves, which allowed much greater accuracy and ease of playing. And the result was that brass instruments suddenly became easy to handle and easy to learn – and easy to assemble into bands. Brass bands, after all, made more noise than woodwind instruments like clarinets or flutes, so a brass band needed fewer players (the Brass Band of Glenville, New York, could get by with just ten members, and it cost only \$220 to fit them all out with brass instruments)...the brass instruments performed better out-of-doors...and, let's face it, it was much more exciting to watch a swaggering keyed-bugle virtuoso like Ned Kendall at work than a clarinetist like Scala. "Brass bands," complained one writer in *Harper's Weekly*, "were conspicuous features in public parades and processional events. The majority of those who belonged to the brass bands of that period were self-taught, and the prevailing idea among people was that the superiority of a band largely depended upon the amount of noise it could make."

But Scala was determined to keep the Marine Band an authentic, European-style, and sonically-balanced wind band. And Washington loved it: "We in Washington," boasted one newspaper, "flatter ourselves that this favorite band is an institution not to be beat anywhere." And to keep pace with the competition, Scala churned out his polkas, or arrangements of popular waltzes, or marches based on opera melodies. He didn't just play waltzes – he played Johann Strauss. He didn't just write new polkas – he wrote *The Lady's Polka* for a White House reception in 1859 and shrewdly dedicated it to the wife of congressman. And he didn't just improvise quicksteps – he offered up an arrangement of tunes from Jacques Offenbach's *Genevieve de Brabant* which, just incidentally, managed to contain the tune by which everybody (and I do mean *everybody*) knows that the Marines have landed.

So here, just before breaking for intermission, is Francis Scala's best argument for a wind band – his own *The Lady's Polka*, Strauss's *Wine, Women and Song*, and a quickstep on themes from Offenbach's *Genevieve de Brabant* (which none of you thinks they will recognize...just wait).

Francis Scala, "The Lady's Polka"
Johann Strauss, "Wine, Women and Song"
Jacques Offenbach (arr. Scala), "Quickstep from *Genevieve de Brabant*"

INTERMISSION

Just how much success Francis Maria Scala's empire-building with the US Marine Band enjoyed can be measured in a number of ways. First: in 1855, the band's drum-major, Raphael Triay, retired. By this time, Scala was ambitious for complete control of the Band, and in 1861, his original rank of fife-major was abolished and Scala became the Band's "principal musician" – which, in effect, made him the first 'Leader' of

the Marine Band. Second: Scala labored like a lobbyist to get official recognition and increased funding for the Band. From the time of the Marine Band's organization, it had always been something of a step-child of the U.S. Marine Corps. The bandsmen were enlisted as 'musicians,' but their expenses had to be contributed by the officers of the Corps, and the Band itself had no officially recognized status. This began to change under Scala. When the Marine Band marched in front of newly-elected President Zachary Taylor at his inauguration in 1849, Taylor was so enthused by the Band's performance that he promised Scala, on the spot, to authorize expansion of the Band. In 1854, President Franklin Pierce offered additional pay from the federal budget for the Band's concerts at the Capitol and the White House. Finally, in July of 1861, the new 16th president, Abraham Lincoln, signed legislation creating an official establishment for the Marine Band.

This indicated more than just a passing interest on Lincoln's part. Abraham Lincoln arrived in Washington to take up the presidency as a political novice. Washington considered itself very much a Southern town in 1861, and it made no effort to conceal its Southern sympathies as the clouds of civil war gathered. Polite Washington society considered Lincoln a awkward, shuffling buffoon, a political accident, and a county courthouse lawyer. It was true that Lincoln was awkward, and it was true that he had won the presidential election largely because the other candidates had cancelled each other out; but there was a good deal more to the man than met the eye. He made his living by the law, but his mind was curious, restless, and perceptive, and he cultivated hobbies in geology and philosophy. And he liked music. Although his tastes ran in the direction of "old airs, songs, and ballads" like the mournful *Twenty Years Ago*, Lincoln's attachment to music "was something passionate."

He also liked Francis Scala, who had been calculating enough to have the Marine Band on hand to greet Lincoln with *Hail to the Chief* when he arrived at Willard's Hotel in Washington for his inauguration. "You will be pleased to direct the leader of the Marine Band to report every morning during the week at the executive mansion for such directions with regards to the band as the President may wish to give," ran one 1860 directive to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, "The band will be at the disposal of the President as long as he may want its services." It certainly was: and Francis Scala wrote his first big presidential march for Lincoln, the *Union March*, for Lincoln's inauguration on March 4, 1861.

Francis Scala, "Union March (Lincoln's Inaugural March)"

From that point, Scala and the Marine Band had more jobs to perform than the wheezy old commanding General of the U.S. Army, Winfield Scott. The Soldiers' Aid Society needed music to accompany a fund-raiser for wounded soldiers, and it was decided that "it would materially add to the attractions of this gathering if a proper selection from the Marine Band could be present." The Commissioner of Public Buildings, Benjamin B. French, concluded that it would help rally wartime spirits for "the Marine Band to give weekly concerts in the public park west of the Capitol." And when Prince Jerome Napoleon, the cousin of the French emperor, Napoleon III, paid a state visit to Washington in August, 1861, complete with a 1200-ton yacht and a retinue of 150 people, Scala and the Marine Band were playing on the south lawn of the White House to

serenade them. What they played for these occasions depended largely on the occasion itself. To stir up the fires of wartime patriotism, Scala had an arrangement of *Yankee Doodle*; to salute a French prince, he had yet another of the *Marseillaise*:

**Yankee Doodle
La Marseillaise**

For the Lincolns, however, Scala reserved the gems of his performance collection – his Italian opera excerpts. In June, 1861, the First Lady, Mary Todd Lincoln, hosted a grand “Entertainment” at the White House, with Scala and “the superb Marine Band” offering an ambitious bill of operatic ditties in the East Room – the *Union March* again, followed by arrangements of the sextet from Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the terzetto from Verdi’s *Un Ballo in Maschera*, and the overture to Daniel Auber’s *Masaniello*. This last item was perhaps not the best choice in the midst of a civil war, since Auber’s opera is about an Italian revolutionary, and its premiere in Brussels sparked nationalist riots which led to the division of Belgium and Holland. Division into two countries was what Lincoln was, at that moment, trying to prevent. But you be the judge – does this sound *too* revolutionary?

Daniel Auber, Overture to *Masaniello*

One person whom Scala’s concert lineup certainly did not please was the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles. In the summer of 1863, Welles had finally had it with Scala’s Italian operas; the times called for something more inspiring, more rugged. As Navy Secretary, Welles handed the Commandant of the Marine Corps an ultimatum: when the Band is “performing on public days...give us more martial and national music.” This, in turn, displeased Lincoln’s chief of staff in the White House, the German-born John G. Nicolay, who “wanted more finished music to cultivate and refine the popular taste, -German and Italian airs, etc.” Welles was happy to admit that he was no “proficient” in music, but he was unmoved by Nicolay’s grievance: “His refined music entertained the few effeminate and the refined...it was insipid to most of our fighting men.” And so, tasteful or not, the leader of the Marine Band went into the business of morale-boosting:

Francis Scala, “Medley of Patriotic Airs”

But Scala turned out to have an even harsher ruler than either Welles or Nicolay, and that was Mary Todd Lincoln. In February, 1862, Mary Lincoln began planning for the biggest entertainment she had ever thrown in Washington, with a particular eye to staring down the Washington *grande dames* who had treated her socially as a sort of backwoods Westerner. Scala would obviously play a major role in these plans, and on February 4th, the president sent a brief note, summoning Scala to Mary’s assistance: “Will the leader of the Marine Band, please call and see Mrs. L.? today.” The program Mary Lincoln selected – or had selected for her by Scala -- consisted of the “most enchanting operatic gems,” as well as yet another round of the *Union March* and a new Scala composition, thoughtfully titled, “Mrs. Lincoln’s Polka.” But the great entertainment

came at just the same moment that the Lincolns' son, Willie, fell ill with typhoid fever. The entertainment could not be cancelled, and so Mary was forced to alternate anxiously between her smiling guests downstairs in the White House and visits to her boy's sickroom upstairs. What should have been an evening of delights turned into an evening of misery, and the cheerful piping of the Marine Band, playing Scala's favorites from *Il Trovatore*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Verdi's *Sicilian Vespers*, only seemed to make the atmosphere more macabre. "The reception was a large and brilliant one," wrote Mary's friend, Elizabeth Keckley, "and the rich notes of the Marine Band in the apartments below came to the sick-room in soft, subdued murmurs, like the wild, faint sobbing of far-off spirits." Two weeks later, Willie died, and Mary went into a tantrum of grief that included banning Scala and the Marine Band from any further performances in the White House or on the White House grounds.

Aaron Copland, "Long Time Ago," from *Old American Songs*
GySgt Kevin Bennear, soloist

After more than a year of banishment, even Gideon Welles thought that enough was enough, and that it was time for the Marine Band to resume its White House south lawn concerts. Welles accosted the president "regarding the weekly performances of the Marine Band," and warned him that "the public will not sympathize in sorrows which are obtrusive and assigned as a reason for depriving them of enjoyments to which they have been accustomed, and it is a mistake to persist in it." Lincoln compromised: have the Band resume its weekly White House concert schedule, but have them play in Lafayette Square, across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House. And so, the next Saturday Welles wrote in his diary, "we had music from the Marine Band to-day in Lafayette Square. The people are greatly pleased."

Mary Lincoln never quite recovered her emotional balance after Willie Lincoln's death. But if she was no longer interested in Scala, Scala was quite willing to look elsewhere for powerful sponsors, starting with Kate Chase, the beautiful daughter of Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase. Kate Chase was Mary Lincoln's principal social rival in Washington and her wedding to Rhode Island governor William Sprague was the social event of 1863 in the capital. And Scala, without batting an eye, produced yet another of his custom-tailored little pieces, *Mrs. Sprague's Bridal Polka and Waltz*:

Francis Scala , "Mrs. Sprague's Bridal Polka and Waltz"

But Scala's biggest moment – although he may not have realized it at the time – was the trip he and the Band made along with President Lincoln to Gettysburg in November, 1863, to dedicate the new national cemetery there. The Marine Band was actually one of four bands that participated in the dedication ceremony – that included the 2nd U.S. Artillery band, the 5th New York Artillery band, and Adolph Birgfield's German Band from Philadelphia – and on the evening before the cemetery dedication, all of them planted their music stands on the center 'diamond' of the town of Gettysburg and staged their own 'battle of the bands,' playing patriotic airs and solemn hymns. The next morning, November 19th, the Marine Band held pride of place, at the head of the line of march to the new cemetery, and when they arrived at the speakers' stand in the cemetery,

they and the other three bands took up positions in front of the speakers' platform and took turns playing while the immense crowd slowly filled the cemetery grounds. Scala's chief task was to provide the accompaniment for the singing of the Doxology – the 'Old Hundredth' Psalm – by the crowd of over 10,000, using an arrangement by Walter Dignam, and by all reports, it could not have been done better: "Never before," wrote one observer, "had we heard anything so grand....":

Old Hundred

Unhappily for Scala, the crowd had not come to hear the Marine Band. Even more unhappily, even the best that Scala could do was easily overshadowed when Abraham Lincoln stood up and delivered a speech of just 272 words that resonates to this day in the hearts of Americans. "The President in a firm free way, with more grace than is his wont, said his half dozen lines of consecration," wrote Presidential secretary John Hay, "and the music wailed and we went home through crowded and cheering streets."

Scala

Tramp, Tramp, Tramp!

2.00

For a man who lived, professionally, by public opinion, Abraham Lincoln had remarkably little need to be flattered, and if he had to choose between flattery and music, he would always choose music. Francis Carpenter, who painted a famous depiction of Lincoln reading the Emancipation Proclamation, worked for several months on the painting in the White House in 1864. The Marine Band's south lawn concerts had finally resumed, and one afternoon as they played, Lincoln stepped out onto the south portico of the White House to hear a little more clearly. "Instantly there was a clapping of hands and clamor for a speech," Carpenter said. "Bowing his thanks, and excusing himself, Lincoln stepped back into the retirement of the circular parlor, remarking to me, with a disappointed air, as he reclined upon the sofa, "I wish they would let me sit out there quietly, and enjoy the music."

The music Lincoln enjoyed was still mostly the dime ballads. But he knew genius when he heard it, and especially when Scala kept relentlessly promoting it in the form of his beloved operatic excerpts. Lincoln had attended the American premiere of Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* in New York in 1861, and although he preferred straightforward drama – Shakespeare, above all -- he took a fancy to the operas Scala loved so much, even to the point of directing Scala to play the 'Soldier's Chorus' from Charles Gounod's *Faust* at the annual President's New Year's Day reception at the White House.

Charles Gounod, "Soldier's Chorus" from *Faust*

But it was a comedy, and not an opera, which brought Lincoln's to a stage for the last time -- *Our American Cousin*, a British comedy of manners, which Mary had talked him into attending at Ford's Theater, on April 14th, 1865. The Civil War was almost over...the greatest of the rebel armies had surrendered only five days before...and a comedy seemed the right substitute for all the tragedies Lincoln had endured. But there was one more tragedy waiting inside the comedy, courtesy of an actor, John Wilkes Booth, who shot Lincoln there in the theater. The president lived, without regaining

consciousness, only until the next morning. Scala's last service for the president who was the first to make the Marine Band really 'The President's Own' was to play dirges at Lincoln's funeral.

J.C. Barnard, *March Funebre*

Scala stayed at the helm of the Marine Band for only six more years, stepping down at the end of 1871. He had taken a skeletal musical organization which few took seriously and over the course of thirty years and a bloody Civil War, built it into one of the premier musical ensembles in the United States. He had brought it prestige, political favor, increased numbers and funding, and an up-scale European repertoire. And the Civil War brought American popular music a 'second wind' of memorable music – *When Johnny Comes Marching Home...Tenting To-Night on the Old Camp Ground...Dixie...The Battle-Cry of Freedom...The Bonnie Blue Flag...Marching Through Georgia* – tunes which we have been singing ever since. And there, at the center of it all, was the Marine Band – and waving his baton (and sometimes his beloved clarinet) was the band's first Leader, Francis Maria Scala. And his band goes marching on!

Peter Wilhousky, arr., *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*

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