



**THOROUGHBRED
THUNDER**

*Out of the Gate Galops, Screamers
and Patriotic Marches*

MATTHEW H. PHILLIPS & HIS CIRCUS BAND

THOROUGHbred THUNDER

Few will ever experience the heart-pounding excitement of looking outdoors some quiet afternoon to see a horse and rider speeding like greased lightning over the horizon — straight for them! But who hasn't imagined it?

The warning in the nick of time. The rescue. The abduction. The triumph. The escape. When drama entered our ancestors' lives, it generally arrived on a galloping horse; when life flowed serenely on, the horse was there, too, a beloved and indispensable member of the household.

When that first prehistoric mount consented to that first prehistoric joyride, a partnership was formed that would transform the world as if by magic. In fact it has been suggested by pragmatists that the elusive unicorn, glimpsed as a silhouette in the distance by primitive man, was in fact a visitation from an advancing culture — a warrior on horseback.

The symbiotic relationship between man and horse got off to a rocky start. The horse familiar to cavemen had four toes on his front feet and three on his hind feet, was the size of a small dog, and was considered an excellent meal. But, an intelligent animal even then, the horse bulked up in self-defense, and was promoted to beast of burden.

It was with the advent of the horse-drawn chariot of war that the animal's innate nobility was recognized at last. The association of the horse with prototypical brass band instruments dates from the Bronze Age as well. In fact, once the long straight horns (originally mastodon tusks and the like) could be fashioned of flexible metal they were curved once or twice into shapes resembling today's tubas, so that they could be more easily carried by the now high and mighty horsemen.

The Romans weren't the first to use trumpet calls as signals on the field of battle, but they established the equestrian traditions that would set the Western standard for well over a thousand years.

The Romans honored the horse, awarding celebrity status to their favorites. They recognized their strength, endurance and loyalty. Roman armies had prestigious military bands. The Roman trumpet heralded the horse in funeral processions and other ceremonies of state as well as in war. They made an art of the victory parade. They invited the public to witness the skill and fleetness of horse and rider at the Circus Maximus.

Horse races were said to have been held on this site long before the birth of Romulus. At first the word "circus" (Latin for "ring") referred to the official chariot race. In the original wooden

where the horse was concerned. It was inconceivable for a young person to carve his niche in the world without the assistance of a horse.

The American Revolution, the War Between the States and the occupation of the West gave Victorian Americans their own vision of the archetypal gallant cavalryman and his noble steed. The fearless exploits of rider and horse were fireside tales for generations. The flourish of the cavalry trumpet can be heard again and again in music by men such as Frederick Jewell, Joseph Richards and Karl King, who were bandsmen and conductors as well as composers. James Brockenshire's "Cavalry Soldier March" may have been written while he was working to equip army bands for World War I, but it harks back to his first military assignment; Brockenshire was a bandsman with George Armstrong Custer's 7th Cavalry Regiment.

During the Civil War, the first genuine thoroughbred racetrack opened at Saratoga Springs, the fashionable New York spa. Several states held the first official steeplechase races in 1865, utilizing walls, shrubbery, ditches and water to simulate the virgin landscape noblemen throughout the Middle Ages traversed on horseback with their swords at the ready or their falcons on their wrists.

When the war ended, military-style bands survived. Every town had one, including the "one-horse" variety. So did fire departments and other municipal entities, countless clubs, lodges and societies, companies and corporations. An estimated 10,000 of these amateur bands were performing at the drop of a hat by the end of the century.

Circus bands went on tour with the circus, and thus belonged to everyone in a region proscribed by the fact that travel had to be accomplished by horse-drawn wagon. There were over a hundred circuses in the U.S. before the transcontinental railroad was born, each with its professional band, and when the circus came to town, there was always a parade. Perhaps King wrote the "Excelsior (Latin for 'upward') Galop" after marching with his band at the forefront of the mounted performers over a steep hill? The portability of the instruments was a factor even in these days; brass bands went where orchestras could not.

There were other professional touring bands led by top musicians who performed at fairs, expositions, carnivals, parks, racetracks and like venues. The greatest of these bands was Sousa's, and the occasion of his rise to international fame was the 1893 Columbian Exposition, a.k.a. the Chicago World's Fair. The military cadence of the selections included here, though written later, hints at the emotion felt by the 6,500 entranced spectators of all nations who listened to Sousa's

Among the attractions at amusement parks and midways were the steeplechase, the Ben Hur chariot race, and water acts such as the Diving Horse. Tunes like Fred Huffer's "Thunderbolt Galop" and Guy Holmes' "The Challenge March" were performed to build the mood of excitement. When Huffer wrote his Galop, he was still leading a band sponsored by a large plumbing equipment manufacturer. Homes cited the clacking shuttles at local woolen mills as compositional inspiration. But any association between the brass band and the workaday world was quickly coming to an end.

One is tempted to assume that Gordon Newham's "White Horse March" referenced the traditional funeral procession, despite its frisky high spirits, as it was published in 1929, the year that threatened to end the country's flirtation with fun and games, pleasure jaunts and holidays. But middle class Americans clung to the excursion, the notion of packing an entire vacation into a single day. Country folks might go to a free band concert; city folks might go out to a farm and ride the horses. Municipalities might declare it Apple Pie Day or Daffodil Day, and have a parade.

By the 40's most of the company and other amateur bands had disappeared, along with many of the lodges and clubs which proliferated during Victorian times. The horse had again become the possession of the few, though symbolically embraced by all. World War II wasn't won by the horse; nevertheless victory was celebrated by horses on parade, accompanied by marching bands playing tunes like John Taylor's "Victory Parade March" and Joseph Richards' "American Ranger March." It is impossible to picture a day when composers will fail to be moved by the image of a splendid horse running at full speed with that exuberance in being alive and on the move embodied by their music.

Many Victorians felt keenly the loss of medieval tournament and romantic pageantry; they focused on the horse, and attempted to reinvent the Age of Chivalry. In their love of pomp and ceremony, their inspired horseplay, even in their band uniforms, bright silks and gold embroidery flashing in the sun, they recalled a grandeur that was also the stuff of dreams, given free rein in their leisured pursuits, aided and abetted by their musicians. They memorialized the rough employments of their ancestors in play.

This fanciful music, full of enthusiasm and fun, rife with the rhythm of horses galloping "prestissimo" (as fast as they can!), reminiscent of bugles and hunting horns, parades, thrilling rides and the circus, is as vividly engrossing to the imagination today as when it was written.

— Sue Marra Byham

Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Temple University Band and Orchestra, and ensembles at Curtis and Juilliard.

Circus bands have often formed around a family of musicians. This one is no exception; talented parents Brian (bass drum) and Jackie Kovach (oboe) and sons Joshua (clarinet) and Gabriel (French horn) are a musical family very much in demand in the Philadelphia Tri-State area. With this phenomenal core group of players, the combination was serendipitous; this circus band has been stirring audiences with exciting Screamers and Galops since the summer of 1995.

BAND PERSONNEL

Flute/Piccolo: David DiGiacobbe • Oboe: Jackie Kovach • Clarinets: Joshua L. Kovach & Peter Heinemann • Alto Saxophone: Kathleen Mitchell • Tenor Saxophone: Marc Moroz • Bassoon: Brian Zappasodi • French Horns: Gabriel Kovach & Jennifer Stahl • Trumpets: Joseph M. McNichols, Joseph Panebianco & Michael G. Franchetti • Trombones: Peter Andrew Jensen, Peter Holmes & Brad Schoener • Tuba: Michael J. Norton • Percussion/Snare Drums: Randall Jay Rudolph & Brian E. Kovach • Double Bass: Curtis Datko

Executive Producer: Donald P. Phillips • Producer: Matthew H. Phillips • Associate Producer: Joshua Kovach
Sound Engineer: Michael E. Harmon • Assistant Sound Engineer: Ken Gregory • Recording made on January 4, 1998 at Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA • Editing: Howard M. Fievel • Mastering: Michael E. Harmon, Third Story Recording Studios, Inc., Philadelphia, PA

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