

ISSUE TWO, 2022

# WASBE WORLD

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR  
SYMPHONIC BANDS AND ENSEMBLES



# BOOK REVIEW



The History of the Wind Band in Belgium, Part I (Up to 1900) by Francis Pieters, free PDF download on the website of the “Friends of the Royal Band of the Belgian Guides” (<https://www.amrg-vkmg.be/publications/?lang=en>), Language: English, 501 pages

This has got to be the book bargain of the year, if not the decade. This is a first class history of the wind band in Belgium as a free PDF download by former WASBE President and noted band researcher Francis Pieters. The book traces the history of wind music in the part of Europe that now includes the country of Belgium from prehistoric times to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Although much of the material included in the first ninety pages tracing the development of wind music from the ancient Celts through Roman times, the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque periods can be found in other sources, the concise presentation here brings the material nicely together in one location. Among the subjects discussed are the instruments used in the various periods, life, wages and uniforms of court, town, and military musicians, and the repertoire performed.

There is a very fine section on the beginnings of community bands in Belgium in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. There is informative material on their instrumentation, organization, and place in their communities. Of special interest is the material on the repertoire of the bands of this period. Not only is there a nice discussion of the marches written for the bands, but several Belgian composers and their music for wind band are introduced, including Amand

Vanderhaeghen (1753-1822), Othon Vandenbroeke (1759-1832), Jan Ancot (1779-1848), and Jean Hubert Joseph Ansiaux (1781-1826).

As one might expect, the weight of the material in the book is on the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is a long and excellent discussion of contests and festivals, including rules and regulations, and an interesting section on composition contests. One learns that Adolphe Sax was not the only noted Belgian wind instrument maker of the period, with a very enlightening section on the development of wind instruments in Belgium and the influence of not only Sax but also of Charles Mahillon and François-Joseph Van Engelen. There is also a nice discussion of music publishing and musical periodicals in Belgium in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The book includes extensive information on fanfare bands, including their beginnings in Belgium, instrumentation, repertoire, and place in society. One reads, for example, that when cycling became popular in Belgium in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, cycling clubs had their own “mounted” cycling fanfare bands.

In 1981 Pieters published an excellent book in Flemish on Belgium military bands. Now much of this material has been incorporated into this book, which traces the development of military bands in Belgium from the founding of the kingdom in 1830 until the end of the century. There is a wealth of information on the instrumentation and uniforms of the military bands, their repertoire via numerous concert programs, and the bandmasters and their compositions.

Just how ubiquitous bands were in Belgium in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century can be ascertained from the fact that in this small country in 1890 there were 1,455 bands, including town bands, fire brigade bands, railway bands, customs and postal service bands, industrial bands, school and orphanage bands, and political party bands. Here also is vast amount of information on the bands' organization, instrumentation, repertoire, uniforms, flags, and conductors, as well as their performances at concerts, contests, carnivals, religious processions, political rallies, etc. Because of its importance in the cultural life of Brussels, there is a long discourse on that city's famous Société Royale de la Grande Harmonie.

In 1996 Pieters published a fine book in Flemish on noted Belgium composers and their compositions for wind band. Now much of this information on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century composers is finally available in English in this book as well as information on Belgium's lesser known wind band composers.

Pieters scholarship is certainly familiar to all WASBE members through his excellent articles in this magazine. Equally as carefully researched and documented is this first volume of *The History of the Wind Band in Belgium*, which includes 332 wonderful illustrations, an eighteen-page, treasure-trove bibliography of source material, and a very helpful name index. Download this book today and start enjoying some great reading!

*Leon J. Bly*