Research Grant – Spring 2009

Title: An American Phenomenon: The Band
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Unit: School of Music

Abstract:
The proposed project objective is the production of a five-part documentary video that will cover the history and practices of the American Wind Band. The documentary will be in a format that would be appropriate for broadcast on public television and arts channels, and it would be a desirable addition to the holdings of public and private libraries. The funds requested from the CVPA grant pool for this project will be used to allow me to travel to Austin, TX, for a meeting of the College Band Directors National Association for the purpose of presenting a funding proposal to the executive board of that organization (March 25-28, 2009) and to request startup funding for further committee meetings, research and procurement of the materials needed for the documentary, and for the development of the complete story board. This represents phase one of the entire project proposal. The second trip is necessary to make a funding proposal to the leadership of the American Bandmasters Association. Their national convention will be at Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, on March 5-8, 2009.

Proposal:
At the turn of the 20th century, bands were one of the most popular forms of entertainment available to the common man in America. Crowds exceeding 30,000 would often gather to hear outdoor presentations of the great professional bands of Gilmore, Pryor, Creatore and Sousa. The programming of music for these concerts often contained transcriptions of great orchestral music, thus providing many people an opportunity to hear music that would usually only be performed in a large city’s orchestral hall. Bands were the mainstay of the Chautauqua Circuit. After the introduction of radio and the record player, bands began to lose their audience. This, however, was also the same time that instrumental music education experienced a tremendous growth in public schools and universities. Today, it is difficult to find any secondary school, public or private, that does not have a band program. Virtually every college and university in America has a band. Bands play inside, outside, in all varieties of weather and are able to perform music of popular appeal as well as music of the highest artistic integrity. Almost 20 percent of the American public has had some kind of experience with a band instrument. Approximately 10 percent of every high school population is currently enrolled in band (20 percent of middle schools). The math indicates that up to 60 million persons in the United States have played a band instrument. Such a population pool would produce a significant audience for a historical recounting of the band’s development.

At this time, the only published materials in print or in some other media format are aimed at those participants who are actively involved in band music. This project has the potential to make contact with not only those who are now removed from the activity, but also with those who enjoy live music and band music in particular.