"I Always Think There’s A Band, Kid:” Queer Music Education Lost

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Keynote Address

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I always think there’s a band

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If Philip Brett’s (2006) assertion that “all musicians ... are faggots” (p. 17-18) is accurate, band musicians are the queerest of them all, with bands the queerest of ensembles in music and music education. Not only were bands initially organized by men for men, they flourished in the most masculine, male (and otherwise perhaps least musical) of institutions: the military. Unlike today’s highly valued symphony orchestra, developed by and for the middle and upper classes as a means of aesthetic and artistic expression, the band has traditionally represented a decidedly more proletarian and quotidian impulse. It has led troops into battle, sounded the watch, accompanied a variety of sacred and secular ceremonies and functions, and in smaller ensembles entertained people on the street and guests at court. Predating the orchestra by centuries, various groupings of wind instruments with and without percussion have been integral to the civic, if not artistic, life of large and small communities across North America—until the last 50 years or so.

Both bands and orchestras have struggled with Western society’s long-standing association of music with women and femininity that conflates misogyny and homophobia. For ensembles explicitly intent upon maintaining both masculinity and heterosexuality; which is to say, bands and until very recently, the Vienna Philharmonic, this tension is particularly salient. Indeed, Brett situates the “deviance ... of the constructed role of musician in our society” (p. 17) in relationship to heterosexual societal norms, and argues that all musicians “play the deviant role in such a way that those norms are tacitly reinforced, ... serv[ing] the function of keeping the rest of society in a state of decorum and restraint” (p. 17). For band musicians, with their musically and educationally ambivalent positionalities in the music and music education professions, coupled with the sexually ambivalent positionality of music in society, this requirement continues to be exquisitely difficult to fulfill.

Even today members of the five premiere U.S. military concert bands (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard) are overwhelmingly men while their principal conductors are exclusively men. No principal conductor of a major U.S. military concert band ever has been a woman, even as women band musicians currently constitute 37% of the U.S. Air Force Band (http://www.usafband.af.mil/ensembles/BandEnsemble.asp?EnsembleID=60); 32% of the U.S. Army Band: “Pershing’s Own” (http://www.usarmyband.com/concert_band/the-us-army_concert_band_roster.html); 28% of “The President’s Own” U.S. Marine Band (http://www.marineband.usmc.mil/who_we_are/members/index.htm#); 24% of the U.S. Navy Concert/Ceremonial Band (http://www.navyband.navy.mil?CBroster.shtml); and 34% of the U.S. Coast Guard Band (http://www.uscg.mil/band/personnel.asp). Accessed 16 April 16, 2010.
My own largely delightful experience of and with bands, however, indicates that band subcultures are more complex than this analysis would suggest. It is because of my small town Midwest school band program that I became a musician—not the piano lessons Mother required of all her children (and I detested) or the guitar lessons I pursued on my own as an adolescent. Music became an imperative in the life of this queer girl through playing saxophone in the band, specifically my junior and senior high school concert and marching bands where I actualized a passion incited by Meredith Willson's movie, *The Music Man*.

Nonetheless, music education generally remains particularly inhospitable for LGBT2Q persons, what Louis Bergonzi (2009) delineates so compellingly, as it was historically conceived and carried out in terms of rationalist forms of social control that discipline citizens for heteronormative democratic society. Not surprisingly, queer scholarship in music education is very limited. While some work highlights the so-called stigma of homosexuality for boys and men in choral music education, feminist researchers have mostly eschewed compensatory work related to “the liberal tradition of equal opportunities” (Lamb, Dolloff, and Howe, 2002, p. 655) that are so central to projects that in this case add-queers-and-stir. Instead, feminist work questions assumptions about gender and sexualities in music education, placing LGBT2Q studies in sociopolitical contexts. Roberta Lamb began developing and opening this conceptual ground twenty years ago, articulated perhaps most notably with her performance piece, “Dorothy Troubles Musicland” (1997). Rather than identity expressed as who we are, sexualities are conceived in terms of how we are in music education; how we experience it; how sexualities create lived realities of music education. Weaving autobiographical narrative with a feminist queer reading of *The Music Man*, I argue here that school bands during the first two-thirds of the 20th century constituted a queer moment in music education that has been lost, but might still be reclaimed. Queering nostalgia as well, this reading calls not for a return, but a re-membering of bands—and music education—still becoming.

**Theoretical Framing**

The concepts of *cultural carelessness* (Van Leer, 1995; 1999) and *gay sensibility* (Bronski, 1984) provide theoretical framing for my reading. *Cultural carelessness* refers to complacency that dominant cultures exhibit in relationship to discriminatory stereotypes that appear to go unchallenged in texts such as *The Music Man*. So confident of and consequently complacent about apparently unassailable cultural norms and values, these texts treat casually and enforce carelessly deeply held assumptions related to gender,

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2 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, two-spirit, queer.
3 Sexualities are part of the professional conversation of musicology due in part to the high-profile roles taken by queer musicologists Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Lydia Hamessley, and of course, Nadine Hubbs at the early Feminist Theory and Music (FTM) conferences in which music educators have always participated. Gender Research in Music Education-International (GRIME) was founded in 1991 by Roberta Lamb at FTM1, hosted at the University of Minnesota. I hosted FTM6 in 2001 at Boise State University. FTM11 will be co-hosted in 2011 by Sabine Feisst and music educator Jill Sullivan at Arizona State University.
5 See, for example, Ashley (2006); Hall (2005); and of course, Koza (1993).
sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class. This very carelessness, however, opens spaces through which oppositional perspectives may be presented. Complacent about whiteness, race and immigration (Oja, 2009),6 The Music Man’s characters—except for the Irish Paroo family and “Nithulanian” Djilas family, whose only visible member is the “hoodlum” son, Tommy—and setting are coded resident (non-immigrant) and white. Racial complacency is most notable, however, in the music and musical ensembles: the barbershop quartet, (Averill, 2003), piano finger exercises, the imperialist “Columbia, Gem of the Ocean” (Oja, 2009), and of course, the band. My reading, cognizant of the interaction of gender, race, class and ethnicity, starts from and is refracted through a feminist lens that focuses on the heterosexual complacency of The Music Man regarding the obligatory love story (Altman, 1987) between Harold and Marian in light of gender and sexual ambiguities exhibited by each of them. Delimiting my reading to heterosexual complacency underscores the non-equivalence of sexualities with other sources of difference (Warner, 1993).

Gay sensibility refers to a specifically urban, white, affluent, gay male subculture7 which emerged in the U.K. and U.S. over the last 200 years, but with the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City, became visible, militant, and political. In general terms, gay sensibility, as opposed to lesbian subculture, is concerned with acceptance and acceptability, including “an appreciation and involvement with high culture” as a way to “cash in” on its respectability, and achieve “upward mobility” (Bronski, 1984, p. 12). Like lesbian subculture, it participates in social criticism through which both deploy “a plethora of signs and codes” (p. 9) to communicate and create “culture[s] … based upon their own analyses, experiences, and perceptions” (p. 13). Of the five characteristics of gay sensibility,8 the most relevant to my reading are imagination as fantasy and dispossession as resistance. Reading across nostalgia, I look for what is unexpected, unusual, and in particular what counters, subverts, or destabilizes traditional gender and sexual norms; which is to say, what is queer.

A highly contested and exceedingly unstable term,9 I use “queer” in a way that is political and sexual. In the first instance, queer is “an effect of how we do politics … to make [the] ‘familiar’ strange, or even to allow that which has been overlooked … to dance with renewed life” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 177). It is a hopeful politics of critique that asks about our responses to lives of resistance through “commitment to … what counts as a life worth living” (p. 178). In the second instance, queer is necessarily “a refusal to inherit” (p. 178) all that compulsory heterosexuality bequeaths in terms of what is assumed without question.

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6 Two other insightful critical readings are Harriet Malinowitz’s (1999) argument that The Music Man’s “charm and humor are undergirded by a parodic stance toward American values as rooted in turn-of-the-century discourses of literacy, education, and morality and in the simultaneous burgeoning national obsession with buying and selling” (p. 58); and Michael Schwartz’s (2008) argument that salesmen Harold Hill of The Music Man and Theodore Hickman of The Iceman Cometh share a “dark” kinship that “at least partially accounts for [The Music Man’s] success, and is also important in understanding the failure of the highly anticipated Disney TV production in 2003” (p. 157).

7 Bronski (1984) is unusual among gay male commentators in his highlighting feminist and lesbian contributions to the gay liberation movement, and emphasizing that lesbians are “invisible” and “ignored,” with their subculture “unclaimed either by a mainstream or a gay male tradition” (p. 11).

8 The remaining three characteristics are beauty, male friendship, and the dandy.

9 Alexander Doty (1993) describes in detail rhetorical struggles with the concept of queer that to this day remain largely unresolved.
or even (a) thought, and the effects of this legacy “on those who refuse to be compelled” (p. 172). Queer readings start from and with “lives and loves [that] appear oblique, strange, and out of place” (p. 179), and “attempt to account for the existence and expression of a wide range” (Doty, 1993, p. 3) of these subject positions through (political) refusal of compulsory heterosexuality in all of its guises and effects. Rather than excessive or “‘alternative’ readings, wishful or willful misreadings” (p. 16), reading queer calls attention to the queerness always already existing with/in cultural texts. Musical theatre, with it combination of theatricality and musicality, is perhaps the queest art of all, where queerness “is less a fixed attribute of a given text or performance than a transient disturbance produced between and among text, actor, director, and spectator” (Savran, 2003, p. 59).

The Music Man

An icon of early twentieth century Americana, The Music Man tells the story of traveling salesman cum band leader, Harold Hill, who arrives in fictional River City, Iowa the morning of the fourth of July, 1912. His purpose is to con the townspeople into buying band instruments, lessons, and uniforms for a band that will save their boys from the “terrible, terrible trouble” occasioned by a public pool table. Harold is abetted in this impossible endeavour, given he is apparently musically illiterate, by an old friend and partner, Marcellus Washburn, who has settled down in River City and calls him by his real name, “Gregory.” The scam fails when Harold falls for the local librarian and piano teacher, Marian Paroo. Sole support of her introverted, lisping, and much younger brother, Winthrop, and their widowed mother, Marian uncovered Harold’s scheme shortly after his arrival, but protects him when her brother and town are transformed by Harold’s charisma and charm—and music.

“Professor” Hill peddled his boys band at the height of the amateur band movement when approximately 10,000 bands were active almost everywhere in the U.S. and Canada (Hazen and Hazen, 1987). Organized in virtually every segment of society, including town bands, circus, industrial and institutional bands, women’s, children’s and family bands, it would not be until after the first World War that school bands became widespread. The first important and currently largest university band program flourished at the University of Illinois due to the efforts of Albert Austin Harding who began conducting the band in

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10 Beyond sexuality, heteronormativity dictates the narratives and socioeconomic relations by which we live and understand our lives For instance, kinship relations, property and housing rights, employment compensation packages, and public washrooms

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12 The impetus for this included returning military musicians seeking employment, and instrument manufacturers marketing their products directly to schools in response to the gradual decline of professional touring bands during the 1920s and ‘30s (Whitehill, 1969). Today the University of Illinois today is of “the world’s largest college band program” (University of Illinois, 2010, n.p.).
1905 while still an engineering student (McCarrrell, 1971), and eventually led it to pre-eminence in the highly respected Midwest band tradition. Because town bands were so widespread early in the century it is a bit curious that a small town in Iowa was bereft of one, but this paucity might explain in part the willingness of the local folks to invest in a fast-talking stranger.

I first saw *The Music Man* in 1962 when I was eight years old, and I cannot remember when I did not love it, when I did not know the story and music by heart, when it was not always already part of me—or bands were part of my family. One of my older brothers played clarinet in the high school band and would soon become drum major. In a family of six children, Robb was the charismatic, handsome middle son who thought about girls and the band. I would soon take up the tenor saxophone, and play the first or only tenor sax part in the top concert band of every school I ever attended. As the intense middle daughter who inherited mother’s looks but without her glamour, I grew up thinking about one best girl friend—and the band.

Like any Iowa child, I loved to play circus and hated to practice the piano. I hung around the bandstand in the summertime and practically passed out when they played “Custer’s Last Stand” with the red fire and everything. Naturally, I wanted to play in the band someday, and that got me to dreaming about Sousa’s band and show business. (Meredith Willson, 1949/1975, p. 16)

**Fantasy**

That the band in *The Music Man* was a boys band was of absolutely no import to me. Like everyone in the story and Broadway audience that spontaneously jumped to its feet during the curtain calls opening night and every subsequent performance, clapping to the beat of Willson’s Sousa-esque march “Seventy-Six Trombones,” I believed completely in Harold’s fantasy. Among the children on screen, we see only Winthrop’s crisis of confidence upon learning of Harold’s dishonesty. He runs pell-mell through town, finally ending up in Harold’s grasp. After struggling a bit, Harold calms him and declares, “You’re a wonderful kid. I thought so from the first. That’s why I wanted you in the band, so you’d [stop] mopin’ around feeling sorry for yourself!” (Willson, 1958, p.

Mustering all the sarcasm a child can, Winthrop retorts, “What band?”

Hesitating, Harold buys adjusts Winthrop’s tie and smooths his lapel. Finally he allows quietly, “I always think there’s a band, kid,” revealing again that he believes the fantasy of the band. Previously, at the footbridge where he air-conducts a band with a tree branch while anticipating Marian’s arrival “about,” he estimates, “twenty-six years late”

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13 During his 43-year tenure as the university’s “first official Director of Bands” (University of Illinois, 2010, n.p.), Harding (1880–1958) increased the band’s overall instrumentation, expanded its repertoire to include arrangements of orchestral pieces, and raised its playing level to that of professional bands (McCarrell, 1971; Camus, 1986).

14 My older sister and I often sing the songs together when we see each other.

15 The Paris Selmer saxophone my mother had purchased from a musician when she was singing professionally.
(Willson, 1958, p. 138), he offers a glimpse of how important it is to him, and how difficult it is to maintain. He embodies the fantasy when he leaps out of the Wells Fargo wagon to present a cornet to an ecstatic Winthrop, and when he marches an air-band of boys as well as girls—and most of the town—out of the high school. Perhaps most notably, he demonstrates his belief in and possibility of the fantasy when using nascent musical abilities to teach the school board members to sing as a barbershop quartet, and when teaching the band to “audiate” Beethoven’s *Minuet in G*. And this is a fantasy that Robert Preston embraces with all the theatricality required of it.\(^\text{16}\)

Nearly every reviewer and commentator notes the aplomb and abandon with which Preston portrayed Harold on both the stage and screen (see, for instance, Atkinson, 1957; Schumach, 1957; Kerr, 1958; *Time Magazine*, 1958; Mordden, 1983; Miller, 2000; Benshoff and Griffin, 2004; Staniunas, 2009). Inhabiting the role of Harold Hill “effortlessly” (Miller, 2000), Preston’s influence and impact are so pervasive that he seems to “haunt” it (Staniunas, 2009) as a function of the “cultural memory” created by subsequent audiences’ reflexive association of Harold with Preston (Carlson, 2001). Describing him as a “leprechaun,” Willson (1959/2009) recounts that, in his audition Preston instantly “disappeared into Harold Hill” (p. 119), and marvels at how Preston delivers night after night … an opening night performance in the most glittering polish a role could ever hope to receive. You have to watch closely to see those flashing feet … as they seem to touch the Majestic stage not more than twice in the nearly two hours that Harold Hill is on view. (Willson, 1959/2009, p. 120)

This was Preston’s first role as a “song and dance man,” and his Harold never walks, but literally runs, skips, hops, jumps, leaps, prances, and dances. He is so light on his feet that one might infer that Preston’s Harold is “light in the loafers.” Unintentionally gay, Robert Preston plays Professor Harold Hill as *Camp*.

Although not synonymous with homosexuality, “homosexuals … more or less invented *Camp*” (Sontag, 1964/1999, p. 64)\(^\text{17}\) as a way of “re-imagining … the material world into ways and forms which transform and comment upon the original” (Bronski, 1984, p. 42). Harold’s every action and interaction exhibit what Susan Sontag calls “the essence of *Camp* [that] is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (1964/1999, p. 53). Dominating every scene in which he appears, Harold’s exhortations are over the top, incredible, beyond literal belief. Yet he and everyone around him do believe—even Marian eventually. Using Willson’s newly conceived “speech-songs” with extravagant gestures and dance moves, Harold not only convinces the townspeople that a pool table represents dangerous decadence and degradation, but conjures out of “thin air” a band of boys and girls that members of the school board and the mayor admire and compare to bands in other towns. Exhibiting the passion and innocence of *Camp*, Preston’s performance theatricalizes experience. It is playful and generous, and “relishes, rather than

\(^{16}\) Preston’s over-the-top performance is in large part exactly why the musical is successful (Schwartz, 2009).

\(^{17}\) Sontag (1964/1999) notes that homosexuals also “by and large constitute the vanguard—and the most articulate audience—of *Camp*” (p. 64).
judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of ‘character”’ (p. 65). Indeed, it is Harold’s unremitting intensity, evidenced by his utter devotion to and unflagging belief in the band, that sustains the fantasy. And because it is unintended, the (failed) seriousness of Preston’s over-the-top portrayal is in large part why the musical succeeds (Schwartz, 2009). Exaggerated, passionate, and playful, Preston’s band leader Harold is pure Camp. Unintentionally calling heterosexuality into question, his would-be masher Harold is naïve Camp (Sontag, 1964/1999).

**Heterosexual Complacency**

Purported to be pursuing Marian strictly to prevent her from exposing his fraud, Harold articulates his preference for the “sadder but wiser girl” in a song and dance that he performs with Marcellus before heading over to the library to woo Marian. He speaks and sings openly about his desire for an “adult romance” with “the lady who knows what time it is” and whose virtue he’s “too late to save” (Willson, 1958, p. 71). In their duet, Marcellus dances the woman’s role. This is more than a convenient musical theatre device, as Marcellus takes the woman’s role again while dancing with his “sweetheart” Ethel Toffelmier at the social where Tommy asks Harold to teach the crowd of dancers some “new steps.” Harold immediately jumps in, cleverly selects Marian as his partner, and leads the dancers in an intricate quickstep that becomes an extravagant production number reminiscent of Busby Berkeley musicals of the 1930s and ‘40s.

Meanwhile, Marian is presented by Willson, and accepted by audiences, reviewers, and commentators, as an old maid spinster, a barren woman who is nevertheless young enough to be attractive—and attractive enough for the local women—portrayed as gossips, all—to impugn her reputation. After all, they assert, she was seen “going and coming” from old “Miser” Madison’s place, where Eulalie, the mayor’s wife, alleges she made “brazen overtures to a man who never had a friend in this town till she came here” (Willson, 1958, p. 75). Not only that, with her cold heart of lead, she apparently bilked the old man into leaving her all of the books in the library (including the “dirty” ones she advocates by Chaucer, Rabelais, and Balzac) even as he left the building to the town. Conveyed during the song, “Pickalittletalkalittle,” this information reveals quite a lot about River City’s librarian and her family. The Paroos are newcomers; which is to say, outsiders (Altman, 1987). They apparently moved to town with Marian as head of the family, as Eulalie’s revelation mentions neither father nor parents. This suggests that her father’s death likely precipitated her move, which is supported by Marian’s explanation to Harold that her father’s best friend, “Uncle Maddy” left her the “library job” so that she, her mother and Winthrop “would have some security” (Willson, 1958, p. 132).

Clearly not the typical musical theatre ingénue, Marian is self-sufficient, confident, and educated—if apparently lonely and longing for love. She lived during “the epoch of the American New Woman” (Malinowit, 1999, p. 59) when intellectual professional women were suspect for their heightened interest in ideas and apparently lesser interest in heterosexual love and marriage. If not lesbians, they had to be “loose women,” and either way, it does seem that Marian is rather more sexually experienced than we are led to believe. Determined to delay anvil salesman Charlie Cowell, who is intent on exposing
Harold’s plot, she speaks and moves suggestively to “The Toreador Song,” playing upon the attraction he has already expressed for her: “I’d like to do more than [listen to you], if I had the time. I sure got the inclination” (Willson, 1958, p. 125). When Cowell demands proof that she will deliver information confirming Harold’s deception, Marian boldly declares, “Try me,” and “plants her lips on his. It is a long kiss” (Willson, 1958, p. 127). As Willson’s stage directions suggest and the movie depicts, this is hardly the kiss of a virgin. Marian knows exactly what she is doing, and it is not saving herself for Harold. It would seem that Marian has kissed—well, someone before.

Is this the reason she moved to River City? Winthrop is consistently referred to as her brother; indeed, he calls her, “thither.” But the story and staging clearly imply that Marian, Harold, and Winthrop form a nuclear family. As the three are grouped together in two crucial scenes: when Harold hands Winthrop the cornet, and when he confesses his deceit to Winthrop. Although widow Paroo is clearly young and healthy enough to continue raising Winthrop, the expectation conveyed by these images is that Marian and Harold will assume the role of his parents, which is supported by the casting of Winthrop, whom Willson describes as “a ten-year-old-boy” (p. 46). Although he looked younger, Eddie Hodges was ten when he began playing Winthrop on Broadway (Oja, 2009). Similarly, “little Ronny Howard” (Purdy, 2002, n.p.) looked younger than his seven years when he played Winthrop on screen, raising the possibility in both cases that Winthrop could be Marian’s child.

But Marian never plays the part of a potential mother—or wife, for that matter. She never clings to Harold, never reveals any intention or desire to marry him. Instead, she anticipates that he will leave, and consistently reassures him that she doesn’t expect too much more. One can’t expect a traveling salesman to stay put. I know there have been many ports of call—and there will be many more. But that’s no reason for me not to be grateful for what you will have left behind for me! (Willson, 1958, p. 139)

Cutting off Harold’s puzzled objections, she sings, “Till There Was You,” which is understood to be their love song, given that they kiss at the end. When Harold tries to confess, Marian assures him that they do not ever have to discuss what she does not know about him—and then reveals her own deception that she knew almost from the beginning he never attended Gary Conservatory. He is dumbfounded, but she is almost nonchalant, kissing him again and confidently taking charge of the action, leading him back to the Paroo house where she retrieves a shawl. There, with Harold standing in the street and Marian in an upstairs window, they sing their “love song.” Exchanging phrases, he sings “Seventy-Six Trombones” while she sings, “Good Night, My Someone,” two songs Willson creates out of the same melodic and harmonic materials; the former a 6/8 march, the latter a waltz.

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18 Even Matthew Broderick, who plays Harold in the 2003 Disney version of *The Music Man*, observes that not only is the con man saved, but “this boy who lost a father gets one” (quoted by Pogrebin, 2003, n.p.).

19 This is the age Willson would have been at the time *The Music Man* is set.

20 I must admit that when I saw the movie as a child, I didn’t understand why Winthrop called Marian “thither” as I assumed without thinking about it that she was his mother.
Reminded of how she protected him for most of the summer, he takes up her song, while she sings his. This combined song constitutes Harold and Marian’s love song not because one is associated with him and the other with her, or because they are the same song. It is their love song in that by singing it Harold and Marian find themselves—as individuals—which is the basis for their love. Afterward, even with his “foot caught in the door,” she implores him to leave yet again: “Now go, Harold—Please” (Willson, 1958, p. 152).

**Dispossession**

Harold’s paradox and contradictory impulses are a function of his dispossession from a world where he feels unwelcome, or one he rejects. Perhaps even more than “salesmanship,” pitching a band requires musicianship Harold repeatedly and convincingly delivers. But the world of 1912 middle America constructed music as a “feminized” profession (Eaklor, 1994), and required of him hegemonic masculinity that was at odds with his musical interests and abilities. With its nearly universal appeal and military associations, a band, particularly a boys band with its masculinist implications, was his best option for resolving this dilemma. The fantasy of the band enabled him to escape “enforced heterosexuality and stifled freedom” (Brons, 1984, p. 54); indeed, the band provides the only space where Harold seems comfortable—as opposed to Gregory, who clearly is not.

A con man who “doesn’t know one note from another,” Greg lies and steals. He chases women to protect himself from detection and divert himself from his unhappiness. His very name, beginning and ending with the same hard, voiced consonant, speaks hegemonic masculinity and strength. But while Greg charms the women of River City with his not-so-subtle flattery, Marian falls for Harold who dazzles her with his singing and dancing, and of course, the band. She never refers to or calls him Greg, even when she knows that is his real name. Beginning with an unvoiced, breathed consonant and ending with a voiced consonant cluster, “Harold” speaks of complexity and (sexual) ambiguity. While Greg might catch his foot in the door for love, Harold hesitates for the band. He falls for Marian precisely because he knows she also believes his fantasy; as she tells Winthrop, “I know what he promised us and it all happened just like he said. The lights. And the flags and the colors. And the cymbals” (Wllson, 1958, p. 151). Faced with a real band (of sorts), Greg falters: “No, I couldn’t,” he tells Marian, shrinking from Harold’s fantasy, his handcuffed hands clutching the baton she created for Harold. But Marian knows how the music goes, and guides Harold back to the band only he can actualize: “Think, men, think!”

In the end, of course, Marian does not marry Harold; he would cease to exist if she did. Repeatedly urging him to leave, she never so much as hints that she wants him to stay; the fantasy would cease to exist if he did—for both of them. Similarly, Marian does not marry Greg; she does not love him; she does not even know him. During the credits when she rushes out to take Harold’s hand and march with him enthusiastically out of step,

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21 While he may not have known “one note from another,” Harold could clearly sing, harmonize, and dance very competently.

22 “During the heyday of Hollywood musicals, … the status of the male dancer as a heterosexual figure was always in question; … heterosexuality had to be asserted; it could not be assumed” (Feuer, 1993, p. 141).
Marian joins the band. Every reviewer and commentator—and even Willson himself—underestimates and misrecognizes the importance of the band. This is not a story about the reformation of a con man. It is the story of the affirmation and love of a particular kind of (amateur) musician—the one all of us carry in our hearts. Similarly, it is not a conventional love story between a man and a woman. Subverting heterosexual imperatives of marriage and happily ever after-ing, Harold and Marian do the only thing they can: lead the band off the screen and into our hearts—which is exactly why the story does not include—or even imply outside of the assumptions of heterosexual complacency—a wedding ending (Feuer, 1993). Instead, we all join the band—the one becoming as desire, the one opening potentialities for queer bodies and queer readings.

Discussion

And so I did—join my school band. Taught by brothers Alexander and Bannister Merwin, the Grand Haven, Michigan school band program reflected the values of early 20th century amateur bands. Constituted as banding: “a social practice embedded within the workings of a community” (Mantie, 2009, p. 256), these values were predicated on band as an activity that was undertaken for the enjoyment it provided.

While arguably ... a global practice, ... the goals of banding are entirely local. Belonging to the community band was/is a form of togetherness celebrating time, place, and space. When the band performed outside of community (as many often did, especially in competitive contexts), its members were representatives of the community. (p. 257)

Without a community band, it was left to my school bands to provide this intense sense of belonging that enabled me to say (if only to myself): “It’s okay, I’m with the band.” Band provided a space where I had a deeply personal and passionate relationship with music, even as we all worked to improve our performance of it. Our quest for perfection, however, was not so much that we might become better musicians or to gain a deeper understanding of the music’s aesthetic qualities. It was on behalf of the band, so that we might perform in ways that deepened our connections with each other in the context of our communities, the school and town. That our school bands were considered to be among the best in the state was due to the exceptional musician-ness of the Merwin brothers. Sons of a violin-playing salesman and piano-playing woman who traded potatoes for euphonium and cornet lessons, they brought to their teaching values learned while playing in the tiny Mayville, Michigan school bands shortly after World War I (Bloemers, 1969; Poel, 1961). They held these values, I believe, as a function of growing up in a time and place not far removed from that of The Music Man, although, to be clear, not all band directors of that generation evidenced banding values, even as some band directors of later generations do exhibit them. The Merwin brothers’ bands were the reason I survived school, a place I otherwise found to be inane, banal, and singularly miseducative. And where I was required to act “straight.”

This is not to infer that my pre-tertiary band experience was idyllic, for it also was decidedly heteronormative and attempted to conform me to civic values of order and
control. Logging countless hours in the cold and rain, we played at football and basketball games that extolled masculinity, even as we prided ourselves on visual extravagance, and musical excitement. We also participated in all of the obligatory patriotic events, such as Veteran’s Day and Memorial Day parades, although they comprised a remarkably small part of our performing obligations. On the grounds that the U.S. did not provide “justice for all,” I refused to play the national anthem—with the knowledge and blessings of Messrs Merwin. It was, after all, the late 1960’s, and not only were they remarkably hip to the times, they knew their band students well—and implicitly trusted our judgment. With all of its contradictions and paradoxes, particularly at that time, band provided me a respite—from the straight world.

Dispossessed by middle America ideology and heterosexual complacency, I inhabited a queer space opened by these particular school bands. Even as our uniforms masked individuality, they enabled me to assert mine. Required to wear heterosexual hegemonic masculinity, I was instantly free of performing heterosexual hegemonic femininity, for the uniform coded me as neither a woman nor as a body that could desire men. Like all girls in the “boys” band, my very presence destabilized heterosexual hegemonic masculinity, but similar to pants roles in opera, my femininity remained undisturbed by the uniform as a function of heterosexual complacency. That I confounded the coding of heterosexual femininity by desiring women literally was not “code-able” and did not register. Cloaked in a uniform that disallowed me, I walked freely in school—for the first time in my life—as part of a community that engaged me based on my contributions to our common activities, with all the usual adolescent squabbles and crises.

But my queer bands were already anomalies. While my undergraduate band experience at a small liberal arts college retained aspects of banding (the marching band was affectionately known as “the stumble society”), my graduate experience at a mid-size state university decidedly did not, as all that mattered was the repertoire—what and how we played it—whether or not it killed us. I was given a glimpse of this when Bannister Merwin abruptly left my high school after my grade-10 year, and was replaced by a very musical and capable and quickly successful (handsome) young man who had recently graduated from a prestigious Big-10 university. None of our activities changed; he was faithful to Mr. Merwin’s plans, and we were determined to carry on. Our banding slipped away quietly, slowly, and subtly—without blame or regret. Today the girls in the band, who are likely in the majority, wear for their wind ensemble concerts long black dresses—including girls like me, because the tuxedo worn by a girl in the presence of dresses does disturb femininity—while their bands still rank among the best in the state. It is a wonderful legacy. It is just not queer—anymore.

**Conclusion**

To repeat, I am most emphatically not making a nostalgic call to return to a complacent heteronormative past that has rightfully disappeared. The imperfect and

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23 Alex Merwin once listened to and discussed with me the musical merits of my recording of “In-A-Godda-Da-Vida” by Iron Butterfly.
anachronistic banding practices and values of a hundred years ago have little relevance to and no place in postindustrial societies, schools, and musics. Analyzing queer moments in *The Music Man* and my school bands underscores that neither hegemonic masculinity nor heterosexuality have ever been monolithic; that both are socially constructed. How queer moments in music education might be reclaimed is a function of how we confront heterosexuality and dismantle heteronormativity. Not only does heterosexuality comprise the social contract: “To live in society is to live in heterosexuality” (Wittig, 1980/1992, p. 40), but it also enforces it, as “The threat of precipitous expulsion from the class of heterosexuals, and from all the material and discursive privileges enjoyed by members ... bribes [them] into complicity” (Halley, 1993, p. 83) with heteronormativity.

Our goal here is not how to include homosexualities in heteronormative music education discourse and practices, as if inclusion for LGBT2Q people “is synonymous with equality and freedom” (Warner, 1993, p. xix). Simply including homosexualities in dominant discourses contains and constrains them, as practices of inclusion, even and perhaps particularly those that would accommodate and assimilate, also mis-represent and mis-appropriate while they allegorize and valourize. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the best-intended and well thought-out concepts of inclusion necessarily consist of heteronormative music education acting upon its Others. Rather than inclusion we desire diffusion: “We are everywhere,” thus *opening* enclosures rather than *entering* them.

Still, our discussion does begin here—and that is exactly why we are here—from positionalities of LGBT2Q people in consort with allies. While we all embark on this exploration together, the lived experiences that we bring and share are separate. Navigating together, we make feminist queer commitments to actively dis-include homosexualities *from* music education—which does not mean exclude them. Instead, we subvert and disrupt the cultural carelessness and heterosexual complacency embedded in discourses of inclusion. Similarly, we commit to “actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world” (Warner, 1993, p. xvi) of music education where we interrogate and de-center heteronormativity with feminist readings queer, playing together with affection and compassion and intense relish. This, I imagine, just might incite the queerest music education of all.

Oh, I was very involved with bands from when I was a kid. So there’s no question in my mind I was going to be a band director. (Woman university band director quoted in Gould, 1996, p. 168)
I always think there’s a band

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