

The Matador of the Musical World

by Gordon Laird

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He stopped the band in its tracks with a yell. "Stop! Stop!"

"You are not going to ruin my music that way!!"

He was a strikingly handsome man in his late sixties with a shock of white hair. Fashionably dressed, he pulled his red cashmere sweater over his head, threw it on the floor and did a little dance on his sweater. He glowered at the roomful of young boys and girls, each of them hanging on tight to their trumpets and clarinets and trying with all their might to avoid the terrible look in his blazing eyes.



"OK, take it from the top!"

You have now been introduced to Arthur W. Delamont, world-famous conductor of championship bands and most especially of the Vancouver Kitsilano Boys Band, which traveled to Europe many times under the title: Vancouver Boys Band.

Stories about Arthur Delamont abound among the "boys" who made up his bands from the early 1930's until the 1970's. The event I described took place in White Rock, B. C. and was acted out in front of members of the White Rock Band. But it could have been any band of any year. After our reunion concerts, the last of which took place in Vancouver in 1998, the "boys" repair to a hall to remember old times. Over beers or hard liquor, both habits learned in Europe on band trips, the stories flow and cascade over each other.

The time Dee (behind his back we called Arthur Delamont, Mr. D, Dee for short)

bawled out the Dutch volunteers who had billeted the "boys" for the night and fed them breakfast. Dee told them that buns and cheese was not a substantial enough breakfast for "his boys".

The time, reported to me from a member of an earlier trip, when one of the "Boys" turned up late for the concert in Bath, England. Dee threw down his baton and walked off the stand. When he did not return to conduct the concert one of the "Boys" had to step in and conduct.

The night in Penticton when the "Boys" were bedded down in a school gymnasium, together with an opposing band. The night was filled with flying peas from pea-shooters: tens of pounds of peas. Only conscripted fathers attempted to keep control on the "boys" and to handle confrontations with the fathers of the other band. Dee was nowhere to be seen.

In the morning Dee arrived, looking as if he had stepped out of a bandbox, with white pants showing a razor-sharp crease, angrily bawled out boys and fathers, and marched the band through town, giving their best number at the reviewing stand. The White Rock Band won its first trophy, and everyone went home tired and happy, with great yarns to tell. Dee had paced out the route of the parade the night before.

Arthur Delamont was born in Hereford, England, the son of Salvation Army parents. He learned to play the cornet in the Salvation Army band and entered upon a distinguished and prize-winning career as a solo cornetist. The Salvation Army background showed in the fact that he never drank, nor smoked, and he didn't exactly swear, yet the words he would use when angry, which was most of the time, were as close to swear-words as anyone has heard.

In 1910 the Delamont family moved to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. A tragedy befell them on a trip back to England for a Salvation Army convention, in that they were survivors of the sinking of the Empress of Ireland in 1914 in the St. Lawrence river. Leonard Delamont, Arthur's brother and conductor of the band, was lost in that tragedy.

Arthur's musical interests and obvious talents were putting him at loggerheads with the rules of the Salvation Army. He found that he could get jobs in dance-halls and musicals, and this was against the strict ideals of the Army. Arthur parted company with them and moved to Vancouver in the 1920's.

In 1928 he decided to form a Boy's Band which was called "The General Gordon School Band. We "Boys" always remember the story in this phase: "I saw a couple of boys on the street and I thought to myself, 'I could teach those boys to play...'"

We grew bored in hearing these old stories but there was more than a grain of truth in them. Out of those "couple of boys" Arthur created a band which won trophies against top English senior colliery bands. He did it through only his own genius.

In this day in which tact and carefulness, especially with children, are the marks of "political correctness", it reminds me that Arthur knew nothing about either tact or careful relationships with children. But we "Kits Boys" will never forget what we learned from Arthur Delamont. He changed every one of our lives, each in different ways. I think we are all better people for having known him.

We have something in common with other "Boys" from any of the bands. Because we shared something in common, we are already known to each other - we recognize each other. I have noticed that in later life meeting a member of "our trip", with whom we did not have much in common at that time, we recognized the brotherhood of shared experience we have with each other. The bond is there: immediately and forever. This is a legacy from one man: Arthur Delamont.

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