



WILLIAM D. REVELLI

William D. Revelli (February 12, 1902 – July 16, 1994) was an American music educator and conductor best known for his association with the University of Michigan, where he directed the university's bands including the Michigan Marching Band 1935 to 1971. During his 36 years as director, the Michigan Marching Band won international acclaim for its musical precision. Revelli is also credited with innovations that moved college marching bands across the country away from rigid military formations. Among other things, Revelli's Michigan Marching Band was the first to synchronize music and movement and the first to use an announcer.

When the history of instrumental music education of the Twentieth Century is written, the name, William Revelli, will be everywhere and inescapable. At the time of his death in 1994, at the age of 92, he was regarded as one of the great music educators and band conductors of the century. During his long career, he had received every honor and accolade imaginable. Revelli was a famous person and was on a first name basis with the likes of Percy Grainger, Karel Husa, Morton Gould, Vincent Persichetti, George Szell, Eugene Ormandy, William Schumann, Gunther Schuller, Jean Pierre Rampal, and a host of others whose names read like a Who's Who of music.

Born in Spring Gulch, Colorado, Revelli studied violin as a child, graduated from the Beethoven Conservatory of Music in St. Louis, and received degrees from the Chicago Musical College, Columbia School of Music and Vandercook School of Music. He also played in various pit orchestras in Chicago before accepting a high-school conducting job at Hobart High School in Hobart, Indiana in 1925.

Revelli transformed the Hobart High School Band into one of the best small high school bands in the country. He was music director at Hobart from 1925 to 1935. In 1934, Revelli's Hobart band was invited to play at the World's Fair, and one newspaper reported: "William Revelli has developed his Hobart, Ind., class B band to a point where it is ranked by many with the best class A organizations from larger schools. In 1931, Revelli was paid a salary of \$5,000 a year, a large sum at that time.

When he asked if he could start a band, the superintendent said, "Of course! Just know that you have no place to rehearse, no funds, and no time during the school day for class. But, please go right ahead!" Undaunted, Revelli received permission to use a large room in the basement of a church which was located across the street from the school. He went door to door in town and found instruments in attics. The bass drum was borrowed from a jazz band player who left it on his front porch when he returned home from his night job in Chicago. Every morning, Revelli would pick up the drum and return it to the

porch by late afternoon. This was the mid-1920s, and school bands were springing up everywhere specially in the greater Chicago area.

Revelli was a born recruiter and salesman. At his first meeting with his young beginning class, he said, "Anyone here who thinks they are going to quit before graduating from high school, please leave now!" When a high school student was thinking of quitting band, Revelli would go to the student's house and talk to the parents. If necessary, he would make more than one visit. One parent, annoyed at finding Revelli at her doorstep for the third time because her child wanted to quit, said to her son. "Mr. Revelli is on the porch again! You are NOT going to quit band! Now tell him to please leave!" (He would never understand the meaning of the term, "band drop-out") Revelli reached out to everyone in town. He became the "stats" keeper for the Hobart High School basketball team and accompanied them to out of town games. To students and faculty colleagues, he was known by his engaging personality and his enthusiastic quest for excellence.

Everything was going well except for one small detail. William Revelli knew next to nothing about wind and percussion instruments. It was his good fortune that, residing in Chicago, was one of the great pedagogues of instrumental music, H. A. VanderCook. Mr. "Van" was a teacher's teacher and was the great mentor of an entire generation of music educators. He took an instant liking for the young violinist who wanted to be a band director and began to teach him to play the cornet. It was VanderCook who convinced Revelli that he needed to learn to play all the instruments. "If you cannot play it yourself, how can you teach others to play?"

Once a week, on a school night, Revelli would travel to Chicago by rail to take private lesson with Mr. "Van" and with the wind players of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. His plan to was to study each instrument for six months. It took several years, but one by one, he learned to play all the wind and percussion instruments. On the top of his list of instruments to master was percussion. A visiting musician observing one of Revelli's early Hobart Band rehearsals noticed that the percussionists were not reading the music printed on the page but were improvising the parts instead. That situation was soon changed!

By mid-winter, the superintendent asked Revelli if the newly organized school band could play at the school basketball playoff game. Apparently, the only piece of music that the band could play was the "Military Escort March" from the Harold Bennett (Henry Fillmore) band book. Before the game, the band played the eight bar introduction and stopped. At the first break, the band played the first strain and stopped. At the next break, they played the second strain, and later, the trio. The superintendent was amazed. "How were you able to teach those students so many different songs?" he asked.

During late 1920s the era of the great National Band Contests school bands from Chicago, northern Indiana, and Michigan set the standard by which others were judged. Like his colleagues in northern Indiana, Revelli was caught up in the contest excitement. From the start, he knew that the only way he could develop his band was to involve students in a more personal way other than the large band setting. Thus, every member of the Hobart Band was required to perform in solo and ensemble festival. He would mix the first chair players with the last chair players in trios and quartets so that the weaker players would be influenced by the best. In his band room, Revelli posted a sign that read "So goes Solo and Ensemble so goes the Hobart Band!" And it worked. In a time when bands were "ranked", the Hobart Band soon "won" the national championship for Class B bands. The adjudication panel at these contests consisted of the best known band figures of the day John Philip Sousa, Edwin Franko Goldman, A. A. Harding, Karl King, and Henry Fillmore.

Early on, Revelli learned (the hard way) that “points” were deducted from a band’s score if the “right” instrumentation was not adhered to too many saxophones, not enough bassoons, etc. This was during the start of the Great Depression, and there were no school funds available to purchase the needed instruments. Revelli’s response to the problem was to organize the Hobart Band mothers into action. These dedicated band parents held countless fund raising chicken dinners to benefit the band. Years later, Revelli would remark that “there wasn’t a chicken left in northern Indiana after one of those dinners!” Many a student from the Revelli Hobart years went on in music to become band directors and professional musicians. From the start, the Revelli inspiration was felt keenly by his students.

For more information on the Michigan years compiled by Dr Daniel P. Bolin, continue below

In 1935 Revelli was hired by the University of Michigan as director of bands. Revelli almost decided against applying for the Michigan job because the pay was significantly lower than what he was earning in Hobart, but he did apply for and later accept the job,[2] a position he held for 36 years. Revelli retired in 1972 and was director emeritus until his death in 1994.

Known on Michigan’s campus as “The Chief,” Revelli was known as a tough taskmaster. Revelli had a fierce dedication to excellence and drilled the desire for perfection into his band students. One former band member recalled that the “sequence of our attitudes toward him often went from fear to anger to respect to awe to reverence. It has been said that, if asked, “nearly every student who played under Revelli could vividly recount some memory of him; he left a lasting impression on everyone with whom he crossed paths.”

Interviewed in 1970, Revelli said: "I've been called the Vince Lombardi of Ann Arbor because I just won't compromise. I'm intolerable when it comes to perfection. Sometimes I'm even downright mean about it." Revelli added that his pursuit of perfection was about more than the music: "This striving for perfection will carry over into other areas of their lives."

Revelli also viewed school bands as a bulwark against juvenile delinquency. He noted: "We keep our musicians too interested and busy to get into mischief." On another occasion, he noted, "Young music students have better things to do than get in trouble."

Revelli was also dedicated to furthering musical education in high schools. He regularly toured the Midwest offering band clinics in small towns and big cities. In 1949, Revelli held the first Band Day at Michigan Stadium. By the 1960s, the number of Band Day participants had grown to more than 14,000.

In 1946, the band moved to Harris Hall. Revelli joked that the band was making "progress" as it moved from a building built in 1854—Morris Hall—to one built in 1888. The large upstairs room with its plaster walls and wooden floor provided the perfect acoustical setting for a band rehearsal. Revelli later said the "Michigan Band sound" was in part due to the perfect acoustics of Harris Hall and Hill Auditorium.

In 1961, Revelli and the U-M Symphony Band, under sponsorship of the U.S. State Department, toured the Soviet Union, Romania, Egypt, Greece, and five other Near East countries for 15 weeks. One of the attendees at the USSR concert in Minsk, USSR - according to the Warren Commission report - was none other than Lee Harvey Oswald - the reported assassin of John F. Kennedy. On other tours, the Symphony Band under Revelli appeared at Carnegie Hall in New York, the Philadelphia Academy of Music, Boston Symphony Hall, and the Shrine Auditorium in Detroit.

Revelli was the founder of the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA) in 1941. The CBDNA began as a committee of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC). In the fall of 1938 that committee, under the leadership of Revelli, met independently in Chicago. The group met again in December 1941 and formed the University and College Band Conductors Conference. The name of the organization was changed to the College Band Directors National Association in 1947.[21] Revelli also served as a President of the National Band Association and the American Bandmasters Association, and was named Honorary Life President of the CBDNA.[2]

Awards and honors

-Revelli Hall

-Revelli received numerous awards and honors for his contributions to marching band music, music education, and the University of Michigan. These honors include:

-In 1947, the Chicago Musical College conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Music on Revelli.

-In 1949, at the Twelfth Biennial Convention of Kappa Kappa Psi, National Honorary Fraternity for College Bandsmen, Revelli was honored by being elected to the position of Grand Honorary President, "an honor seldom given and one of the highest honors that could be bestowed upon any conductor or member of the fraternity."

-In 1961, the University of Michigan presented Revelli with the faculty award for distinguished achievement.

-In 1964, Revelli was honored as one of the first ten recipients of Kappa Kappa Psi's Distinguished Service to Music Medal.

-In the 1970s, the Michigan Marching Band moved into a new building constructed specifically to house the band. The building, located at 350 East Hoover, was named William Revelli Hall.

-In 1981, Revelli was among the first living inductees to the National Band Association Hall of Fame of Distinguished Band Conductors.

-In 1989, the Louis Sudler Foundation and the John Philip Sousa Foundation presented Revelli with their highest award, the Order of Merit.

-In 1989, Troy State University (now Troy University) conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws on Revelli.

-In 1994, he was posthumously awarded the Charles E. Lutton Man of Music Award by Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia fraternity for men of music at its national convention in St. Louis, Missouri. The award was accepted on his behalf by his grandson. He had been initiated by the Fraternity's Alpha Lambda chapter at Illinois Wesleyan University in 1935.

Revelli died of heart failure on July 16, 1994 at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor at age 92. He was preceded in death by his wife, Mary, and his daughter, Rosemary Margaret Revelli Strong.