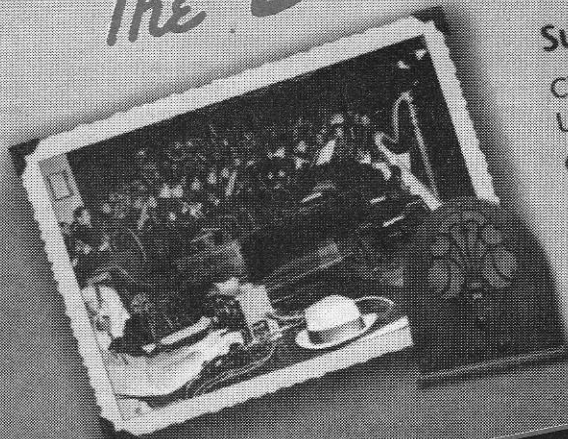


THE UNITED STATES MARINE

"THE PRESIDENT'S OWN"
UNITED STATES MARINE BAND
presents

The Dream Hour



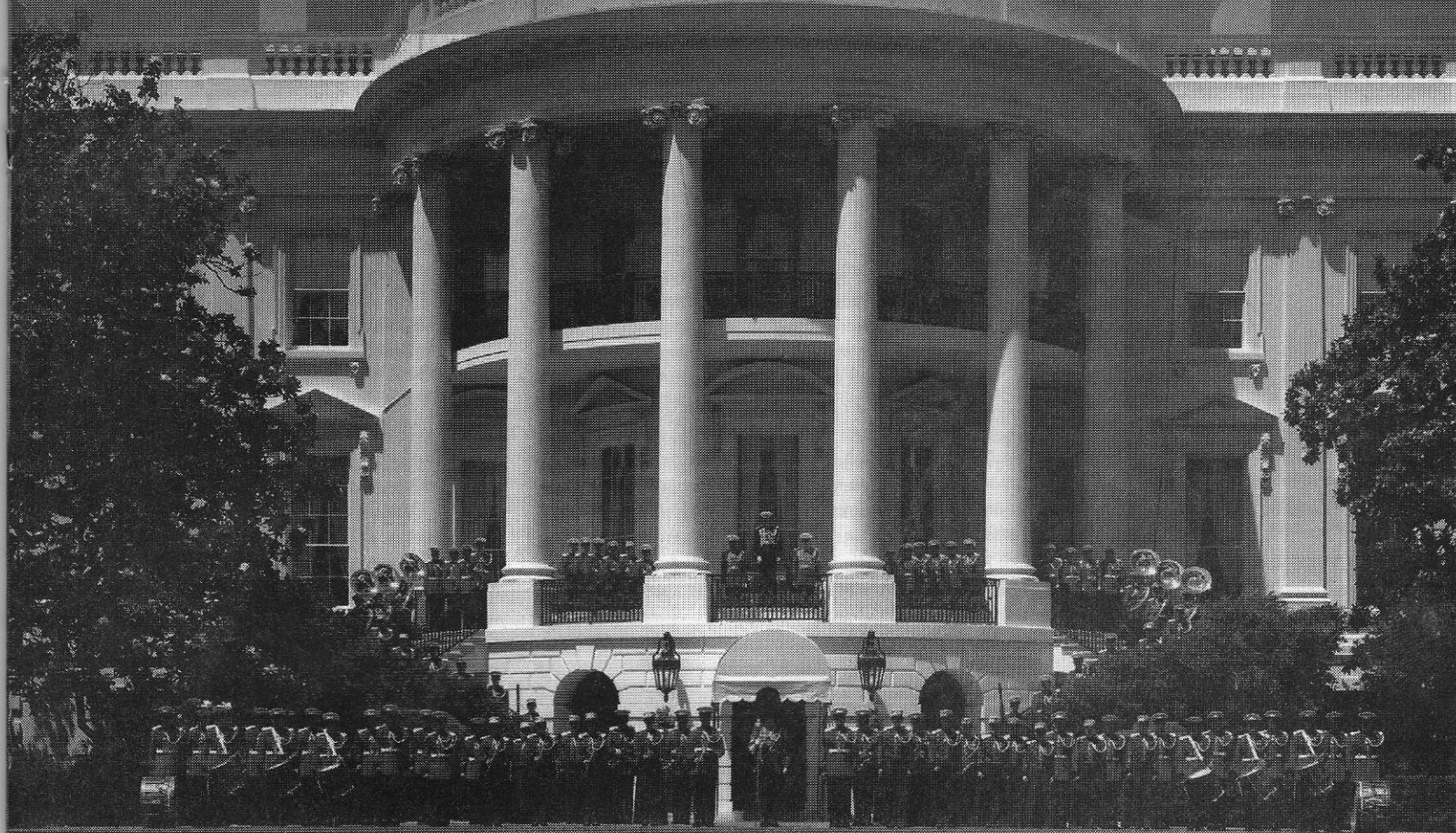
Sunday, February 3 at 2 p.m.

Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center,
University of Maryland

Colonel Michael J. Colburn, conducting
Featuring radio personality Dennis Owens

For more information call (202) 433-5809
or visit www.marineband.usmc.mil

E CORPS & THE DREAM HOUR



by Jack French

The United States Marine Band has a long and extensive broadcast history, dating back to the earliest days of the Golden Age of Radio. The band made its radio debut over a Washington, DC station on June 7, 1922, inaugurating a series of weekly musical programs. These shows were "remotes," meaning they originated not from the local radio station, but off-site, in this case a makeshift studio at Anacostia Naval Air Station. At that time, this military installation was primarily a seaplane base.

By early 1923, the broadcast site for the band had been moved to the Marine barracks, 8th and I Street, S.E. on the west side of the Anacostia River, where it would remain for decades. On August 1, 1923 the Band performed on the air for the premiere broadcast of WRC, an NBC affiliate, thus beginning a very long and close association of the band and that radio station.

The enjoyment of the Marine music by the American public predates by many years the advent of radio. The birth of the Marine Band

can be traced to July 11, 1798, when President John Adams signed into law the establishment of the U.S. Marine Corps. That document specifically included positions for 32 members of a Marine fife and drum corps to be led by a drum major. In over two centuries the band has served every American president since Adams, thus becoming the oldest, continually active, professional musical organization in U.S. history.

The Marine Band gave its first public concert in Washington DC. on August 21,

1800, at a location just northwest of the current site of the Lincoln Memorial. Thereafter it continued to play for the public at various times and venues, including national tours which began in 1891. But it did not reach the average American household until that first radio appearance in 1922, which began a regular Wednesday night concert series over the air waves. During the following decades, the band would be heard very often on a host of network programs on NBC, CBS, and Mutual. In just one month, January of 1933,

Our thanks to Jack French for this exclusive look at *The Dream Hour*. The author wishes to thank Master Gunnery Sergeant Michael Ressler, Chief Archivist, and his staff at the Library of the Marine Band in Washington, DC for their generous assistance rendered in researching this article. Our thanks as well to MGS Ressler for contributing illustrations and photographs.

As these different titles would indicate, the earlier programs were primarily aimed at those who were homebound or confined to bed by illness or infirmity.

the band was featured on twelve different network programs. In addition to special concerts which were broadcast from different sites, the networks fashioned other programs for the Marines, usually regularly scheduled weekly ones. There were many different series with a myriad of titles over the years: *School Band*, *Masterpieces of the Ballet*, *Education Hour*, *4-H Club on National Farm & Home Hour*, *National Park Series*, *Operatic Half Hour*, *Congress Speaks*, *School of the Air of the Americas*, *Spirit of '42*, *Victory Hour*, and many others.

Some of these radio series lasted for several months, many ran for years. But by far, the longest, continuous network broadcast series of the Marine Band was *The Dream Hour*. This popular musical series debuted on June 12, 1931, and remained on NBC until September 11, 1954, for a total of 952 programs. This weekly program aired on different days and at different times over the years, and even its title changed back and forth.

A press release of May 31, 1931, announced that the program would soon debut and would air weekly on Fridays for an

hour throughout the summer. It stated the new series was planned for those who were confined, and each program would be made up, in so far as possible, entirely of requests. Captain Taylor Branson, Marine Band leader, stated the requests should be sent to the U. S. Marine Barracks, Washington, DC or to the radio stations broadcasting the programs. He added that the entire membership of the Band, 78-men, would be participating.

For its first three months in 1931 it alternated between *The Shut-In Hour* and *The Shut-in Request Hour*. In September 1931 the title became *The Dream Hour for Shut-ins*, although the former names were utilized infrequently thereafter. On February 28, 1933, in the waning days of the Herbert Hoover administration, Charles F. Adams, outgoing Secretary of the Navy, ordered the Navy and Marine Bands to cease all radio broadcasting. This action was taken to placate the American Federation of Musicians who claimed the that 140,000 Americans were dependent upon playing music for their livelihood and the service Bands were in direct competition with unemployed musicians. Adams' successor, Claude A. Swanson, took over on March 4th, with the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, which was broadcast live with the Marine Band. However it would be another six weeks before the original order was rescinded by Secretary Swanson on May 6, 1933.

When the Marines were back on the air, Secretary Swanson had given their radio series a new name, *The Patriotic Hour*. After a few months, the Marines went back to calling their show, *The Shut-in Dream Hour*, apparently with the consent of the Secretary. By March of 1934, the series was titled *The Evening Dream Hour*. But in the fall of 1934 the Marines began alternating the show's name between *The Dream Hour for Shut-ins* and *The Shut-ins' Dream Hour*. With storm clouds of war gathering in Europe and Asia, in March 1939, the title was changed again, to *The Patriotic Dream Hour for Shut-ins*. It would retain that name throughout World War II, reverting back to *The Dream Hour for Shut-ins* in 1946. The series would retain that title until it went off the air in 1954, except for one brief period in 1947 when the name was *Musical Memories*



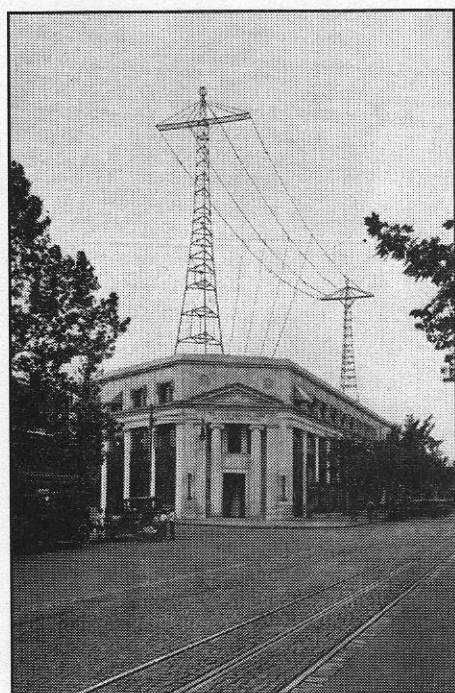
Marine band leader Taylor Branson as an enlisted member of the band when he was serving as assistant director in 1921.

for *Shut-ins*.

As these different titles would indicate, the earlier programs were primarily aimed at those who were homebound or confined to bed by illness or infirmity. The requests of those listeners were given priority in selecting the musical numbers of each succeeding program. Cards and letters from all over North America poured into the Marine Band headquarters each week. The early scripts reveal that the chosen listeners whose requests were honored, were even mentioned on the program, though not by name. The announcer of each show would state the musical selection to be played and then briefly describe the requester as, for example, "an 88-year-old G.A.R. veteran with a fractured hip in St. Louis," "a blind girl in Allentown, PA," "a 12-year-old boy in Toronto General Hospital," or "a very sick man recuperating near Owasco Lake, NY."

Later this practice of describing the requester was discontinued, and although requests were still honored, the announcer would spend more time explaining or describing the various musical numbers. So instead of saying in 1933 "we hope that the twelve ladies deprived of their sight up in Cambridge, MA, who, while they weave and cane the chairs, will now enjoy 'The Blue Danube.'" The announcer decades later would introduce "The Egmont Overture" with "In Beethoven's music to Goethe's tragedy, we find one of the earliest examples of a great composer drawing his inspiration directly from the words of a great poet."

When *The Dream Hour* began in the summer of 1931, its very first announcer for NBC was Arthur Godfrey. The young redhead was only 27-years-old at the time, and while he



Facilities of WRC in Washington DC in 1923 at the time of the premiere broadcast.

would eventually scale the heights of fame on television, in 1931 he was just a staff announcer with WRC in the nation's capital. Godfrey and Captain Taylor Branson hit it off from the beginning. Within a few months, Branson even allowed his announcer to sing on the program, including "Pale Potomac Moon," a song Godfrey had written.

In the fall of 1931, Godfrey, driving to an airport near Leesburg, VA, was hit head-on by a truck that veered into his lane. The horrific accident rendered Godfrey comatose for days with over thirty bone fractures. Doctors doubted his chances; however, Godfrey somehow survived although he was left crippled for life with reoccurring pain that never completely left him. During his months of absence, the radio station sent replacement announcers to narrate *The Dream Hour*. Godfrey returned on January 4, 1932, as announcer for the Marines amidst a warm welcome from the Marine musicians. He continued on as the regular announcer for the next two years, with Stanley Bell substituting for him in the event of scheduling conflicts or medical treatments.

Godfrey's last appearance on *The Dream Hour* was January 2, 1934. WRC station manager Berkeley sent Don Lowe to announce the program the following week. This was the first notice the Marines had that Godfrey had just been fired by Berkeley. Captain Branson was not impressed with Lowe and took over the announcing duties himself. Later Branson tried to get Godfrey reinstated at WRC but Berkeley refused to rescind his decision. Lowe became the second announcer on *The Dream Hour*. Over the 23 years the program aired, *The Dream Hour* would have dozens of announcers; a few would become household names such as Bob Trout and Mack McGarry, but most of the others were known only locally, including Bryson Rash, Ted Kimball and Edwin Rogers.

Although the program was usually called *The Dream Hour*, this did not necessarily mean all the listeners heard it for 60 minutes each week. The Marine Band in the early years always played for the full hour, but not all of the stations aired it in its entirety. For example, in 1932, the band played before the radio microphones from 3 to 4 pm. NBC broadcast the entire hour but CBS aired only the first half hour, and local station WMAL broadcast the first 45 minutes. By 1938 the program was reduced from an hour to 30 minutes and that change was eventually made permanent.

The weekly programs of *The Dream Hour* beamed over national networks—NBC and CBS—as well as several regional entities, including the Wisconsin Network. This broadcast series was very popular with radio audiences from coast-to-coast. A typical assessment of it appeared in the July 7, 1936, edition of the Ruston *Daily Leader* in Louisiana:

His [Captain Taylor Branson's] *Dream Hour Shut-in* concerts are recognized as the finest non-commercial programs on the air. Each week over a nation-wide network...the Marine Band speaks the symphonic language of the world—music.

The carefully chosen music on the series unquestionably contributed to the popularity and staying power of the series. *The Dream Hour* featured a wide spectrum of excellent music, delicately balanced to highlight many different musical styles, periods and genres. A typical program would usually include: a classical composition (i.e. 3rd movement of Mendelssohn's Third Symphony), an opera excerpt (i.e. "Bacchanale" from *Sampson et Dalila* by Saint-Saens), a military march (frequently one by John Philip Sousa), a popular song (i.e. "The Bells of St. Mary's" by Adams), a semi-classic or light opera selection (i.e. overture to *The Merry Widow* by Lehar),



Captain Taylor Branson as the director of the Marine Band during *The Dream Hours* broadcasts in the late 1930s.

a folk tune (i.e. "Irish Fantasy" by Pinto), religious hymn (words spoken, not sung, by the announcer), a waltz (Strauss' "The Blue Danube" was requested most) and some novelty number (i.e. "Let's All Sing Like the Birdies Sing" by Hargraves.)

In an interview with the *New York Times*, which was published on March 13, 1932, Captain Branson discussed which musical pieces he had received the most requests for since *The Dream Hour* debuted. He named Liebestraum by Liszt, Moonlight Sonata by Beethoven, and the Light Cavalry Overture by Suppé. Requests for non-classical music frequently named "The Old Oaken Bucket," "Holy Night," and "Old Black Joe." Branson added that there was always a demand for standard sacred songs and military marches.

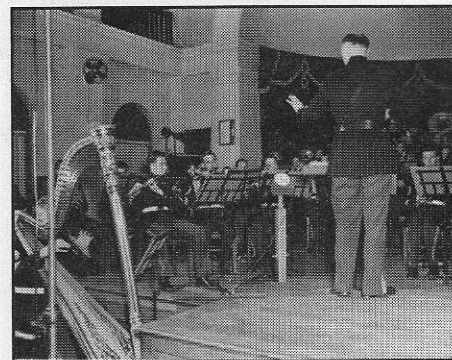
Several times a year *The Dream Hour* for *Shut-ins* would, instead of offering a wide menu of different musical choices, present a show with one central theme. For example, the January 30, 1934, program commemorated the birthday of President Franklin D. Roosevelt so most of the numbers played were personal favorites of the president, including "Home on the Range" and "Mother Machree." Each year, on the program that was closest to March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, many of the selections would celebrate the Irish musical heritage. Other holidays were celebrated annually with a central theme: Independence Day, Christmas and Memorial Day.

One of the most memorable specials on *The Dream Hour* was the program of June 9, 1951, which celebrated the



Captain Branson conducting the Marine Corps Band during a broadcast in 1930

Throughout its history, *The Dream Hour* was nearly always produced in the Marine Band auditorium in Washington, D.C. However, on October 27, 1944, the show came from Studio 6A in Radio City Center in Manhattan.



Captain Branson conducting a 1935 broadcast from the Marine auditorium.

20th anniversary of the debut of that series. This broadcast was the 823rd program in the series. The script and the music played provided an excellent historical review of that Marine Band program. The show paid tribute not only to the band and its leader, but also past announcers Arthur Godfrey, Bob Trout and Kenneth Banghart. This program ended with the hymn, "Oh God, Our Help in Ages Past."

During the annual Marine Band tour each fall, virtually all radio broadcasting by the band ceased. In the early 1930s the tours were usually less than 30 days. By 1938 the tours were up to 45 days duration and they remained approximately that length until the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. All tours were canceled during World War II so most weekly band programming, including *The Dream Hour*, aired uninterrupted through each autumnal season. When the resumption of the tours was authorized in 1946, each yearly tour averaged 60 days, normally from mid-September to mid-November, during which time *The Dream Hour* could not be heard.

The networks would fill the Marines' slot with another musical program, frequently *The*

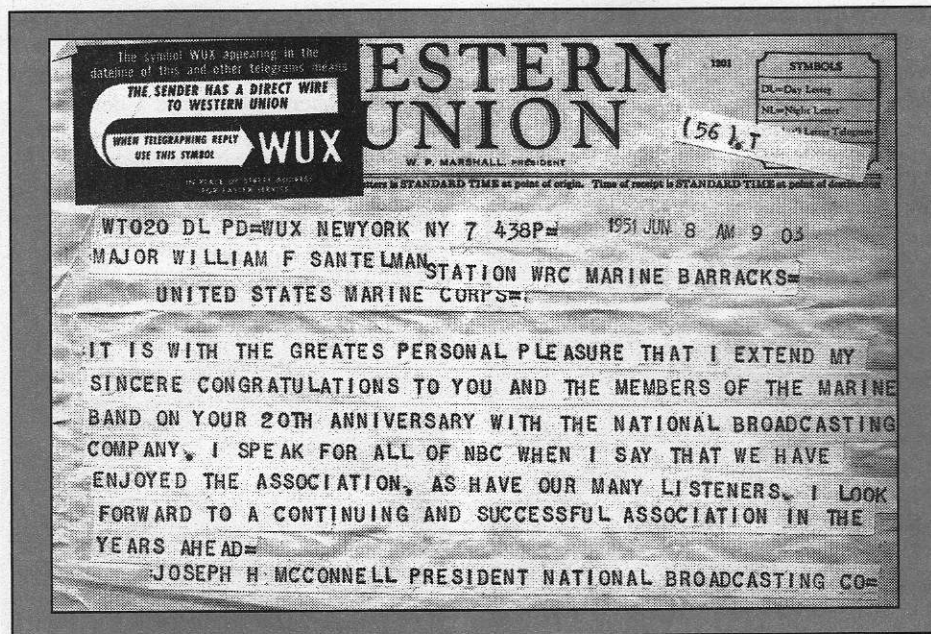
Musical Appreciation Hour with conductor Walter Damrosch or a concert series by the Boston Symphony. Once their slot was surrendered there were delays getting *The Dream Hour*, and other Marine Band programs, back on the airwaves. Several times *The Dream Hour* would resume broadcasting, after having been assigned a different day or a different time, but their audience seemed to have no difficulty in finding them again.

There were many cancellations of individual programs of *The Dream Hour* over the years, some caused by mundane factors, i.e. "lines down." But a number of shows had to be canceled because of an important news bulletin or a dignitary's speech and a number of historical events superseded the Marines' radio show. Their August 5, 1938, show was pre-empted by a news special on the transoceanic flight of Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan. On March 29, 1939, a speech by French premier Daladier on German aggression took over the slot of *The Dream Hour*. The Republican Convention in 1940 pre-empted the June 27th show of *The Dream Hour*. A world-wide radio appeal for peace by Pope Pius XII forced the cancellation of the Marine program scheduled

for June 26, 1941.

There were a number of "firsts" associated with *The Dream Hour* over the nearly two-dozen years it was on network radio. On August 5, 1932, the performance was unique in that it included for the first time on radio an actual dress parade. In an arrangement with a Marine marching group in the Midwest, the Band in Washington, DC played for the former's dress parade, which they listened to over a loud speaker. About two years later, on June 29, 1934, *The Dream Hour* became the first radio show to include the use of an octorimba in the band. However, this musical instrument never gained wide acceptance in U.S. bands or orchestras and few musicians today have ever heard of it. Throughout its history, *The Dream Hour* was nearly always produced in the Marine Band auditorium in Washington, D.C. However, on October 27, 1944, the show came from Studio 6A in Radio City Center in Manhattan. The band was on an overnight trip to New York City and arrangements were made for the program to be broadcast there. Every program in *The Dream Hour* series was broadcast live until 1950. On December 8, 1950, the Marine Band made its first recording of the show. Although some networks, principally Mutual, had aired recorded (or transcribed) shows for years, NBC was very reluctant to do this and only grudgingly gave permission to individual series. Once the Marines obtained this authority from the network, they utilized this procedure many times through the early 1950s. It allowed them to record two or more shows in the same sitting for later airing, which was a time-saver for the band and the network.

The Dream Hour has not been heard on the air for over fifty years, but it is not forgotten. As recently as February 3, 2008, the Marine Band performed a re-creation of that radio show at the University of Maryland as one of their scheduled public concerts. The Marine Band library maintains the surviving scripts and audio copies of U.S. Marine radio shows. Their holdings for *The Dream Hour* constitute 42 whole or partial scripts and 70 entire or partial audio recordings. ♪



Telegram from Joseph H. McConnell, NBC president, congratulating Captain Branson and the United States Marine Band on the 20th anniversary of *The Dream Hour*.