

H. Alford

HARRY L. ALFORD

(Born in Blissfield, Michigan, ¹⁸⁷⁵~~1885~~--Died in Chicago, Illinois, 1939)

Harry L. Alford's first march was played in Hudson, Michigan, by a visiting show band when he was only fourteen years old. Encouraged by his initial success he continued to compose marches and concert works for the rest of his life. His first musical job was in Toledo, Ohio, when he substituted for the regular trombone player in a theater orchestra. He studied music at Dana's Musical Institute (now part of Youngstown State University) in Warren, Ohio, then progressed from church organist to trouper to director of musical comedy. He became best known, however, for his professional arranging bureau in Chicago where he had a full staff of copyists and arrangers who worked in sound-proof music studios. In the days of vaudeville, his pit orchestra music for the musical *Eva Taguay* made him so famous that every act in the area wanted his services as an arranger. Although his typical band arrangements sold for only thirty-five cents each (in 1921), he utilized a very fast shorthand method of notation and had a thriving business. Alford died in Chicago in 1939.

While A. A. Harding was director of the University of Illinois Band (1905-1948), he commissioned Alford to score some of his first big football halftime extravaganzas, including *My Hero* and *The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise*. He was thus an important pioneer in that still-flourishing area of school band development during the three decades preceding World War II. Alford was a prolific composer as well as arranger. The Chatfield, Minnesota, Free Lending Library lists nearly 100 of his compositions and arrangements in its holdings. Original works include overtures, drum solos, trombone smears, and novelties such as *Blind Man's Movie*; *Clownette*; *Old Frog Pond*; *Sliden' Easy*; *Wedding of Heinie and Kathrina*; and *Whistling Willies*. The U.S. Navy Band recorded the following marches for the Heritage of the March series: *Call of the Elks*; *Hustler*; *Imp--A Devilish Good March*; *Law and Order*; *March of the Illini*; *March of the Jackies*; and *Skyliner* (dedicated to his son Harold, a transport pilot). Other well-known marches include: *The Army*; *Contestant*; *Glory of the Gridiron*; *Grab It*; *Let's Go*; *Peacemaker*; *The Purple Carnival*; and *A Step Ahead*. Alford's last work was an arrangement of *Melody à la King* (in honor of K. L. King); it was premiered at the American Bandmasters Association meeting shortly after Alford's death. (Information from Loren D. Geiger, Robert Hoe, William G. Pruyn, and Leonard B. Smith)

Glory of the Gridiron (Pub=FZ, 1932. Gr=4. T=3:00. Rec=SC-109, Southern California Directors)

Alford was an innovator with his arrangements for the gridiron halftime show as well as for the pit orchestra and the concert stage. Many of his arrangements were used by the marching bands at the University of Illinois and Northwestern University. Like most of his marches, *Glory of the Gridiron* calls for a wide range of dynamics--some gradual, some sudden--and features smooth melodic woodwind passages contrasted with marcato brass fanfares.

Purple Carnival (Ed/Pub=GS, 1933; Erickson/GS, 1969. Gr=4. T=3:50. Rec=CR-ABA-75-4. Un. of New Orleans, Bush; CL-M-33513, Columbia All-Star, Schuller; DL-78451, Barnum & Bailey's Circus, Evans; CR-MID-73-15, Pioneer H.S., Ann Arbor, MI, Bordo; CRE-9005, 1971 Ithaca Col. Alumni, Musser)

Harry Alford wrote this stirring march in 1933, dedicating it to Glenn Cliff Bainum and the Northwestern University Band. It was edited for concert band by Frank Erickson in 1969 and has continued to grow in popularity. The brass fanfare and the idiomatic use of woodwinds show Alford's knowledge of instrumental color and technique.