

## Fred Lax - An English Flautist in America by Stuart Scott



Fred Lax (1855-1930) was a British flautist who made a name for himself in America. Soloist, composer, arranger and early recording artist, he travelled extensively in the United States with P.S. Gilmore's 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Band and then with the Boston Symphony Orchestral Club before settling in Baltimore where he continued various musical activities until his death at the age of seventy-five.

He came from a large musical family based in Sunderland, although according to the 1851 UK Census, his father hailed from Middlesex. Fred was born in Hull and had nine brothers.<sup>1</sup> Nearly all of them played an instrument. The family formed a travelling band in Fred's early years, and there is a reference, in an American music journal<sup>2</sup>, to Fred having performed on tin whistle in London during his childhood.

As a youngster he lived at 18 Portland Street, Hull with his father and his older brother William Wilson (1841-1923). William became Band Master for the Sunderland Police Force<sup>3</sup> and later leader of the Philharmonic Society Concerts in London. Another

of Fred's older brothers, Charles Wilson (b.1842), was a flautist and played under William's baton in all the local orchestras and bands. No doubt Charles offered a helping hand when Fred took up the flute. Whilst living at home, Fred quickly acquired skills as flute, piccolo and flageolet player until, in 1871, at the age of fourteen, he became a working professional musician, lodging at Bishop Wearmouth, Sunderland. There were local concerts and those a little further afield, most notably the first of Mr Morgan's Three Grand Subscription Concerts in Bradford, conducted by Edward De Jong<sup>4</sup> on Saturday October 30<sup>th</sup> 1875, in which Fred was already occupying the first flute chair.

It wasn't long before he had an eye on the more lucrative jobs at more prestigious venues. He made his way to Manchester in 1876 and secured the position of principal piccolo player in the Hallé Orchestra, marrying Alice Hutchinson that same year. He stayed with the orchestra for one season only. As a piccolo player there would be little chance of performing as a soloist and perhaps that influenced his decision to look elsewhere. Now in his early twenties, he was already a well respected player and between 1878 and 1880 he played in various orchestras and bands, usually in the position of first flute, in and around the North West of England. Choral societies provided work for orchestral players and Fred was engaged to

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<sup>1</sup> William Wilson (1841- ), Charles Wilson (1842- ), George (1844- ), Henry (1847- ), Edward (1848- ), John Thomas (1854- ), Alfred (1858- ), Arthur Sydney (1860- ), Gavin Augustus (1862- ).

<sup>2</sup> Music Education Journal, June/July 1959 Vol.45 No.6 p.34, Flutist and Friends.

<sup>3</sup> Listed in Whelan's County Durham Directory 1894 and Kelly's Directory 1902.

<sup>4</sup> Edward De Jong (1837-1920) was Charles Hallé's first flute, 1858-1870. He conducted his own Saturday Concerts in Manchester.

play in a performance of Messiah given by the Dewsbury Choral Society at Dewsbury Theatre on December 17, 1877.

It was in May 1878 that P.S.Gilmore<sup>5</sup> departed from New York with a band of seventy players and headed for England where he had arranged concerts in London and Manchester. The Free Trade Hall, where Lax had played with the Hallé Orchestra the previous season, was decorated with flags, banners and plants for the occasion and following the concerts on 23, 24 and 25 May, the Manchester Evening News critic wrote, "The wonderful chic and absolute precision with which they play reflect equal credit on the conductor and the gentlemen who follow his baton". One wonders whether or not Fred Lax attended one of Gilmore's concerts, influencing his later decision to emigrate.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Lax kept himself busy playing with any kind of orchestra, band, entertainment or concert party where he might make a solo appearance. On one such occasion he appeared at a Kingston Mills Brass Band Concert at Hyde, Manchester in November 1878, playing variations on the simple melody, "Nae luck about the oose", which according to the writer in The North Cheshire Herald, "enabled him to distinguish himself as a very accomplished player in wonderful variations". In the second part of the concert Lax played his own caprice, Witches' Dance (Paganini). The same reporter was moved to write, "he seemed to be perfectly master of his instrument, and brought out some sweet music, and, by a species of echo, producing a duet on the same instrument". One wonders how much was written, and how much was improvised, in these theme and variation pieces which Lax used throughout his career.



In 1879 he played at Promenade Concerts in Leeds and grand events such as Stockport Musical Society's first ever concert<sup>6</sup>, involving three principal soloists and a band and chorus of one hundred and ten performers, conducted by Joseph Bradley. Lax had the opportunity to appear as soloist once again, in Kendal Choral Society's concerts the following year. The orchestra on these occasions was usually made up of professionals, mostly Hallé players, with Fred as first flute. He played in a concert to celebrate the opening of St. George's Hall, Kendal in April 1880 and provided a flute obbligato in the Echo Song (Bishop) sung by Catherine Penna.<sup>7</sup>

The following month he returned to the same hall to take part in a Dress Concert, conducted by J.Lawrence Goodwin, on May 13 1880. As usual there was an orchestra of professionals from Manchester, Lax playing first flute. However, after the opening overture (Poet and Peasant, Suppé) he had the chance to introduce a solo which almost became his signature tune in later years. Lax's own Caprice, Witches' Dance (Paganini) brought tremendous applause and the next day the Kendal Mercury & Times critic was quick to point out that, "The flute solo was a really wonderful performance, the music produced by the amazing dexterity of the flutist giving one an almost perfect idea of a solo, by the manner in which, to the ear, he seemed to be running away with airs on the upper and lower notes

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore (1829-1892), Bandmaster, composer and soldier in the Union Army during the Civil War.

<sup>6</sup> October 13, 1880 – Handel's Acis and Galatea

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Penna, soprano, well known for her appearances at the Crystal Palace Concerts, London.

simultaneously.” Without doubt, Lax had gained much technical facility as a youth and was now eager to demonstrate his capacity in solo appearances. In December there were more choral concerts and Fred found himself playing first flute in an orchestra consisting of some Hallé players and Vocal Society members at Exchange Hall, Blackburn in a performance of J.F. Bennett’s Sacred Cantata: The Good Shepherd.

Early in 1881, he saw Manchester for the last time, staying a while with his younger brother Arthur and sister-in-law at Coston Park, Buckingham Road, Levenshulme, before taking up an engagement at the Prince of Wales Theatre, Liverpool. At the end of May he was initiated into Freemasonry, being unanimously voted a member of the Dramatic Lodge (No.1609) at the Masonic Hall, Hope Street, Liverpool<sup>8</sup>. The following months brought work of a different nature and the possibility of more solo performances. Lax joined Sam Hague’s Minstrels<sup>9</sup>, a troupe of vocalists and instrumentalists brought together for the purpose of a winter tour of America. Although Hague seems to have been based at St. James Hall, Liverpool, during the summer months of 1881 the troupe gave preliminary performances throughout England, preparing themselves for the American public. They appeared for one week at Drill Hall, Derby in July and the reporter in the Derby Mercury, July 13, noted that “The hall was filled and the performance high in order of merit. The troupe is a large one and their performances, both individually and collectively, are certainly excellent of their kind. Mr J. Carpenter is musical director and has arranged an overture with which the performance is opened. The performance is very lively and amusing without being vulgar.” It is clear that Hague had organized a show in which emphasis was given to the vocal and instrumental element. While the singers gave ballads and opera extracts, some of the instrumentalists entertained with solos chosen to show off their technique. The result was nothing like the so called traditional minstrel show. Only the corner men wore burnt-cork faces and costume.

The troupe sailed from Liverpool on the steamer, ‘Abyssinia’, arriving in New York on September 9, 1881. They lost no time in giving the first performances on American soil. On September 12 they were at the Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia playing to a full house. According to the report in the Philadelphia Inquirer the following day, they were hailed as probably the best minstrel troupe that had ever appeared in that city. It was also noted that “the musicians have been chosen from some of the best musical societies in England, and the vocalists are high class soloists and opera singers”. The following month (October 8) the minstrels appeared in Harrisburg with a company of sixty five performers and two days later in Lancaster PA, where a cart, with several large and attractive dogs, was driven through the street to advertise Sam Hague’s minstrel show. In November they appeared at Robinson’s Opera House, Cincinnati where, once again, it was pointed out that they bore no resemblance to a minstrel company. Making no attempt at a portrayal of the eccentricities of life in the South, the great feature of their performance was the singing and the writer in the Cincinnati Daily Gazette (November 19, 1881) took the opportunity to say that, “properly speaking, they should be called a speciality combination, numbering some forty-seven artists, every one of whom is celebrated in his line”. By the end of the year they were in Chicago performing at Hooley’s Theatre every night for a week before enthusiastic audiences.

The critics were beginning to notice that Fred Lax was now making major contributions to the minstrel performances. In New York, at the Metropolitan Casino on January 15 1882, he appeared as both soloist and composer. The New York Herald reported, “A curious feature of the concert was an instrumental quartet – an Andante with Variations by Mr Lax – for flute, clarinet, trumpet and trombone. The

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<sup>8</sup> The Dramatic Lodge was mainly for members who were actors or musicians.

<sup>9</sup> Sam Hague (1828-1901), born Sheffield, England and moved to America in 1850 to tour with a concert party before managing a minstrel troupe. Returning to England he managed troupes at St. James Hall, Liverpool for a number of years.

combination of instruments was peculiar and original but the effect was pleasing enough, thanks to the admirable way in which the brass instruments were subdued. The composition was interesting, but rather dry for such a mixed audience as last night's". The same reporter found the concert on January 22 "altogether a delightful one". Lax's arrangement of Bishop's Lo! Here the gentle Lark for flute and clarinet was included in the first part of the concert. After his own Witches' Dance<sup>10</sup> for flute solo in the second, he took part in a movement from his instrumental quartet – Pastoral No.5 in B flat (Andante with Variations – Allegretto) – with Clements (clarinet), Dodd (cornet) and Thomas Currie (trombone). At the end of the month, still in New York, he played Richardson's fiendishly difficult Scotch Airs for flute on January 29, and showing his versatility, gave his own flageolet solo, Caprice Unice, in the second part of the concert. He played his Witches' Dance once again at the first and only appearance of Hague's Minstrels in Boston (Boston Theatre, February 12). The tour came to an end soon after and Fred Lax, along with a few of his colleagues, including Thomas Currie (trombone), decided not to return to England with Sam Hague.

Now based in New York, Lax and Currie played at various venues including the Alcazar Theatre (November 12 1882) where Fred gave flute and flageolet solos with M. J. Joyce's orchestra. The early months of 1883 continued in the same vein and it wasn't until June that Fred got a taste of things to come when he played with Thomas H. Joyce's Military Band in the first concert of the season at Central Park, where he played his own flageolet solo, Diavolo.

However, it was another military band, just about to open their fifth summer season at Manhattan Beach that would bring Fred Lax fame and fortune in America. Hugely popular, P. S. Gilmore's 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Band opened the 1883 season with sixty-five performers and twelve soloists, including Fred Lax. Fred had found a more permanent position in this much respected institution and played solos at nearly every concert throughout the season. His solo appearances often featured the flageolet on which he played pieces such as, his own Concert Mazurka, Caprice de Concert and Bonnisseau's Mazurka Varié. At the close of the summer season the band toured major towns and cities, Fred continuing to thrill audiences with his solos. At the beginning of November the band played in Louisville, Kentucky and he received a special mention in the local press – "The flageolet solos of Mr Fred Lax are especially commendable. A delicious little piece of his own called a Scotch Fantasie, which he played last night, was rapturously applauded. The beautiful airs of old scotch ballads were strung together into a most harmonious fantasie. Mr Lax is a master of the flageolet, and is about the best soloist in the band."<sup>11</sup> At the end of the month the band was at Boston's Foreign Exhibition giving daily concerts and Lax appeared with Herr Stockight (clarinet) in his own arrangement of Bishop's Lo! Here the gentle Lark.

The following year (1884) began with Gilmore's Band of sixty-five players appearing at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York on January 17, giving a performance in aid of the International Charity Fund. However, there were slightly less demanding engagements in the early part of the year which included concerts at Huber's Prospect, a popular family resort with gardens, restaurant and sacred concerts every Sunday. Lax also found time to attend a social event on March 24 when over 100 musicians, members of The Musical Social Cricket Club, held a reunion at 34 Great Jones Street, New York City. The programme at this event contained a novel quartet called The First Quartet in G composed by Fred Lax. The title of the composition along with the occasion, suggesting perhaps something of Fred's humour.

During the summer season at Manhattan Beach, Lax made his usual solo contributions to the programmes which included not only his own compositions but Doppler's Caprice, Birds of the Forest,

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<sup>10</sup> Earliest verified performance of this work in America.

<sup>11</sup> The Courier Journal, Louisville Kentucky

accompanied by a quartet of French horns. More travelling followed the closure of the summer season and concerts were given in Baltimore, Philadelphia and Boston, where Lax was reported as having played the flute with rare skill.



The 1885 summer season at Manhattan Beach saw an increase in the size of the band, now numbering 80 players, along with singers and chorus, all helping to make Gilmore's concerts grand events. At the close of the season the band went on to complete a six week engagement at the St. Louis Exposition where Gilmore was presented with a gold and silver baton ornamented with diamonds. The Swedish soprano, Louisa Pyke<sup>12</sup> (1846-1929) accompanied the band. She had started her career c.1875 in Sweden and Europe and was reputed to have had a powerful and elastic voice of pleasing quality which she managed with consummate skill. She was a favourite with the public and was down to sing the 'Scena and Cavatina' from Ernani (Verdi) amongst other things. Remaining with the band making a circuit back to New York via Sedalia, Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka, Atchison, St. Joseph, Omaha, Des Moines, Minneapolis and St. Paul she took part in the evening concert in Minneapolis on November 9 singing the Jewel Song from Faust (Gounod). In the afternoon concert on the same day, Fred Lax had given his Witches' Dance once again, gaining great praise from the local reporter who wrote, "For beauty of tone, rapidity of execution and perfect phrasing – three essentials

necessary to make a great artist – Mr Fred Lax has been awarded by common consent a first place among the most distinguished soloists in the musical profession."

For the next two years life with Gilmore's Band followed the same pattern. Fred took more solo spots than any of the other twelve soloists in the band and was always being mentioned in any reports of the concerts in the newspapers. He was gaining an audience of his very own and received much adulation. Gilmore too, continued to have a great following whilst at the same time he was busy raising the profile of his band concerts. Visually, the band in their extremely plain and unpretentious uniforms of dark blue was not very striking but Gilmore introduced more spectacular musical programmes containing something for all tastes. In 1886 his summer appearances at Coney Island and Manhattan Beach featured not only the band but twenty anvils, eight pieces of artillery, Drum Corps of twenty-four drummers, fife band, Scottish pipe band, chorus, opera singers and a number of soloists including Fred Lax. All these combined elements were put to use in the final item on the programme – Verdi's Anvil Chorus - followed by fireworks of course.



Notable events of the following year included Lax taking delivery of a new flute made for him by A. G. Badger of New York.<sup>13</sup> It had been

<sup>12</sup> Louisa Pyke, soprano, introduced to the American public by Theodore Thomas at the Philharmonic Concerts, New York.

<sup>13</sup> This instrument now resides in the D. C. Miller Collection (DC 1414), Washington DC.

manufactured to Fred's own design with keys and extra trill levers to assist in fingering and a thinned head. Made of ebonite it had silver keys and featured the Boehm system with open G sharp. The maker had named it, "Lax's Model (Gothic)". On April 27 the band made its first appearance in Freeport, Illinois where once again Lax's solos brought praise from the writer in the Daily Journal (April 27, 1887) – "Mr Fred Lax is the finest flute player ever heard in Freeport. He is a foreigner, and in Great Britain he is regarded as without a peer. He played The Witches' Dance (Paganini) and upon being loudly called for, he handled the French flageolet in the rendition of American Melodies (Lax) in a charming manner." Returning to New York at the end of May the band took up a position at the head of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment to lead the Decoration Day Parade and after a fifteen week residence at Manhattan Beach during the summer months they were on their way to Kansas City where Lax played his Themes from Works of Chopin and Fantasie on Themes of Faust (Gounod). On the evening of November 4 at the Kansas City Exposition concert he was joined by horn player, Harry Weston in Titl's Serenade and later in the programme appeared again playing flute obbligato to Letitia Fritch's rendering of Bishop's Echo Song. Letitia Fritch was a resident of St. Louis and appeared regularly with the band. She was a prima donna of the Hess Opera Company and it is said that she was the first American prima donna to sing in Spanish in Mexico where she had previously toured for one year. With a "prepossessing presence and a sweet voice" her encores usually included Balfe's Sweetheart by which title she was popularly known.

In January 1888 Lax appeared several times playing flute obbligato to Letitia Fritch's performances of Bishop's Echo Song and usually playing one or more of his own compositions on the same programmes. Again, praise was forthcoming from the press after his performance at Boston Theatre on January 15 – "There are three qualifications necessary to become a great instrumentalist – tone, style and execution. Mr Lax has mastered these requirements to the fullest extent, and in Great Britain, as on this continent, he has for years been considered among the few in the very front rank of flute players in the profession."

Between April and July 1888 the band undertook its most extensive tour. Gilmore had been preparing for this over the previous few years as the trip covered over ten thousand miles. It turned out to be the band's most successful concert tour bringing in over \$150,000. Gilmore's Band of sixty-five players were the best paid band in the world, travelling all the time in a special train of three palace cars and private



dining car, living like princes. Beginning on April 8 in Washington they played at all manner of venues from large concert halls, theatres, music halls, exposition buildings and parks, travelling through more than seventeen states and visiting five cities in Canada before returning to New York at the beginning of July for the opening of the summer season at Manhattan Beach. In Atlanta (April 19) the writer in The Constitution (April 20, 1888) compared the band with Theodore Thomas's Orchestra and declared that Gilmore's Band achieved finer effects. He went on to say, "Madame Annie Louise Tanner<sup>14</sup> sang Lo! Here the Gentle Lark by Bishop, and Mr Fred Lax played the flute obbligato. This was a charming performance. The lady possesses a very high soprano voice of considerable flexibility and sweetness. The flute obbligato and the accompaniment by the band added greatly to the song. The audience became wild and demanded an encore."

A few days later Fred and Annie Louise Tanner repeated the

<sup>14</sup> Annie Louise Tanner (1856-1921), coloratura soprano, based in New York.

performance at an evening concert, lighted by gas and electricity, in front of an audience of 3000. In June the singer was heard in *Romanza: Thou Brilliant Bird* (The Pearl of Brazil, David) at Chatterton's Opera House, in Springfield, Illinois and again at the final concert of the tour on June 29, when the writer in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* noted that she had "a flexible soprano voice of uncommonly wide range. In quality it is sympathetic and sweet and nothing better to show the flute like quality of her voice could have been chosen than 'Thou Brilliant Bird', romanza from David's *The Pearl of Brazil*. This she sang with flute obbligato by Mr Fred Lax and she was rapturously applauded." The same writer went on to say that "The instrumental soloists had full sway in the afternoon concert much of the success of the day being due to their artistic playing. Mr Fred Lax, whose flute playing is superb, had to respond to an encore at the close of Paganini's *The Witches' Dance*." Of the band, he reported that, "it was never in better trim than at present, conductor Gilmore evidently adhering to his old established principle to make few changes in the personnel of his organization as possible."

No doubt thoroughly exhausted, Fred and the band arrived back in New York on July 1<sup>st</sup> just in time for the start of their summer season at Manhattan Beach. Throughout September and October they were in St. Louis where on October 12 Lax was handed a new song in manuscript and asked to score it for band overnight so that it could be performed the next day. Composition and arrangement were ad hoc jobs for Fred whilst on the road. Four days later he was performing his latest composition, *The Dance of the Sylphs*. According to the writer in the *St. Louis Republic* (October 17, 1888), it was his one hundred and third composition, not counting hundreds of arrangements.

Having achieved so much success with Gilmore's Band, it must have been a difficult decision to resign and take up a new venture with a much smaller ensemble. In July 1889 it was announced that Fred Lax had severed his connection with Gilmore's Band and had accepted an engagement with the Boston Symphony Orchestral Club<sup>15</sup> for its tour through the states, Mexico and Cuba. The other members of the ensemble playing alongside Lax that year were Alfred de Seve (violin), former member of Boston Symphony Orchestra, Joseph Lapini (violin), formerly of the Theodore Thomas Orchestra, New York, Richard Stoelzer (viola), of the Damrosch Orchestra, New York, Otto Langey (cellist and composer), from London, and J. Fasshauer (double bass), formerly with the Leipzig Concert Orchestra. The instrumentation of the ensemble was variable as Stoelzer played viola, viola d'amore, saxophone and clarinet and Fred played flute, piccolo and flageolet. Both Fred Lax and Otto Langey were composers and arrangers and used their skills for the benefit of the ensemble. The tour which Lax had signed up for didn't start until October so he spent the summer months at Minneapolis with the Innes 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment Band where he appeared as soloist. Interestingly, on August 4 the Phonograph was on exhibition at the Minneapolis Exposition and different members of the Innes band were being recorded for the benefit of future visitors. That same day Fred Lax appeared as soloist in his own *Airs from Faust* and in the afternoon had been joined by horn player, Mr Volkins in a performance of *Titl's Serenade*. There is no evidence to show that Lax was recorded here but it must have been his introduction to the possibility of recording. He was certainly an early recording artist with the Stanzione and Finkelstein Company for whom he recorded a performance of his *Lo! Here the Gentle Lark* arrangement in 1908.

The Boston Symphony Orchestral Club's tour began at Fall River on October 14 1889 and continued through the winter and into the early months of the following year. Travelling with the ensemble was Swedish prima donna, Augusta Ohrstrom (1856-1921).<sup>16</sup> Their first concert of the season was a veritable

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<sup>15</sup> Founded in 1884, the Boston Symphony Orchestral Club was an ensemble of about six players who often performed with a singer. Fred took the place of Adolphe Burose (b.1858) who had played with the ensemble in 1888.

<sup>16</sup> Swedish mezzo soprano, Royal Theatre, Stockholm 1881-1883. She spent four years in Paris and then toured America to much acclaim. From 1897 she lived in New York where she was engaged by the Metropolitan Opera for five years.

triumph, Ohrstrom being compared to her countrywoman, Christine Nilsson and delighting the audience with the Faust Jewel Song. The writer in the Boston Herald the next day noted her “faultless tones, fine phrasing and technical perfection.” If Ohrstrom was an asset to the ensemble then Fred Lax was no less. The same writer commented, “Mr Fred Lax the flute soloist is well known as a talented virtuoso, his earlier appearances here having made him an established favourite and this popularity was fully maintained.”



On November 3 the ensemble was in Cleveland where Fred played his now famous, Witches’ Dance and Arthur Foote’s Romanza, a new piece specially composed for and dedicated to the Boston Symphony Orchestral Club, was given a performance. A few days later the Cleveland Dealer (Nov 8, 1889) was singing the praises of the ensemble and Fred’s performance in particular, with the words, “The name of Fred Lax is so well known as one of America’s best flutists that no introduction is necessary.” Of even greater interest are the words he used to describe Fred’s playing style – “His playing excels for the richness of the low tones, the delicacy and clearness of the high notes and a certain bell sound easier to name than describe.” In naming “a certain bell sound”, the writer may have been referring to Fred’s use of vibrato. Contemporary players in England and America usually made little use of this technique and preferred a straight and steady sound.

Lax and Augusta Ohrstrom continued to receive the most attention from audiences and newspaper critics throughout the month of November and into December. However, the excellence of the Club’s ensemble playing was noted in Bridgeton NJ where on November 13, “The large audience was simply enraptured. In every particular, the lights and shades, the harmony, the gradations of attack, the perfect tempo and all the minute musical details, the performance gave an evening of rarest pleasure.” Praise was no less forthcoming for the ensemble at the beginning of the following year when they appeared in Dallas: “The orchestral selections were rendered with cleanness of phrasing, a precision and strength of attack that was truly wonderful. The pianissimo passages of the full orchestra were simply inspiring”. The singing of Augusta Ohrstrom continued to be noticed too - “The distinguished soprano was brilliantly successful – she is possessed of a superb voice with rich full tone, remarkable power and delicate pianissimos.”<sup>17</sup>

By the middle of February 1890 the tour with the Boston Symphony Orchestral Club had come to an end and Fred spent the early months of that year making solo appearances until the end of May when as a member of the Petersburg Festival Orchestra of forty musicians from Baltimore, he gave a solo at the Petersburg Academy of Music as part of the Seventh Petersburg Music Festival. During the summer months he found a place in C.A. Cappa’s Seventh Regiment (New York) Band based at Music Hall, Cleveland. The band, composed of forty players, and its conductor had a good reputation and no doubt they were pleased to offer Fred solo appearances in their programmes. Whether or not Lax had notions

<sup>17</sup> Dallas Morning Star, Jan 11, 1890



of leading a band of his own at this time is uncertain but at the beginning of 1892 he was offered the Leadership of the Fifth Regiment Band in Baltimore and accepted.

In February 1892 the Fifth Regiment Band gave its first concert under Fred's leadership. At the Fifth Regiment Armoury more than a thousand attended the dress parade distribution of marksmen's buttons. About 450 men took part in the parade and the band gave a concert at its conclusion. The selections included a new march, Maryland's Fifth, dedicated to the officers of the regiment by new leader, Fred Lax. Over the next couple of months Fred rehearsed the band frequently and increased its number to forty players in preparation for a Popular Promenade Concert given at the Armoury on Saturday, April 30. The programme was the usual orchestral and solo selections.

On June 1 1892, the Chattolane Springs Hotel, 13 miles from Baltimore, opened for the summer season and Fred Lax was among the musicians engaged for the season. The Hotel was a watering place and considered one of the most elegant and fashionable hotels of its day where wealthy Baltimore people brought their families to spend the summer months. However, the following month Lax was offered an appointment of a different kind. He became the musical director at Harris's Academy of Music in Baltimore, his duties including teaching and conducting the orchestra. On August 22 the Academy, newly painted and decorated, with new electric lighting, opened for the season and Fred provided the orchestral concert for the occasion. He played his solo *The Witches' Dance* and conducted a selection from *Rigoletto* (Verdi) introducing solos and cadenzas for all the principal instruments of the orchestra. In September the Music Academy presented a melodrama by A. Y. Pearson, *The Fire Patrol*, featuring a genuine fire patrol wagon and horses with entr'acte music given by the Academy orchestra. Fred conducted and took the opportunity to introduce an overture new to America, *Bonnisseau's Overture Apollo* and one of his own new works, *Patrol of the Rhine*. Apart from his usual duties for the Academy and the Fifth Regiment Band Lax ended the year with a few appearances at Benefit Concerts, mainly for the National League of Musicians.

The summer season of 1893 was quite different from that of the previous year. Excursionists were carried from Baltimore to the resort of Bay Ridge on the steamer, *Columbia* and the Fifth Regiment Band under the direction of Fred Lax furnished music daily at the resort grounds and on the steamer. The rest of the year he spent fulfilling one or two local engagements which continued into the early months of 1894. There doesn't seem to have been a summer season for him that year but the Academy of Music Orchestra kept him busy with more local events such as the opening of the Baltimore Casino on West Baltimore Street where they gave a series of operatic and popular concerts beginning on July 2.

What would appear to have been Fred's last tour with a band came in the early months of 1895. At the end of February the Veteran Corps Band, under H. Pindell, left Baltimore for a tour through Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Ohio, taking along five soloists including Fred Lax. In Bridgeton (March 8) he seems to have rekindled something of his charismatic days with Gilmore. He was down to play his old faithful, *The Witches' Dance*, but even before he had set foot on the platform *The Bridgeton Evening News* was announcing his arrival: "Tonight will include flute solos by Fred Lax, one of the greatest living flautists. His equal as a flute player has never been heard here."<sup>18</sup> The band gave their concert at Moore's Opera House appearing in bright and shining new military uniforms and the same reporter wasn't disappointed writing, "The Veteran Corps Band fully sustained its reputation of being one of the best bands in the country. After the second number Mr Fred Lax, the world famous flute and flageolet soloist, gave a flute solo *Witches' Dance* by Paganini which was a perfect revelation."

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<sup>18</sup> Bridgeton Evening News, March 6 1895

In the closing years of the nineteenth century, Lax continued to appear at various local events either as soloist or conductor but there was something new about to happen in his career. Beginning in about 1898, P. J. Lammers of Baltimore began publishing Fred's compositions and arrangements which appeared regularly over the next twelve years or so. It gave other players the chance of performing his works and kept the memory of his own performances alive. His pieces were played in parks, concert halls, hotels and churches among other venues, by all kinds of ensembles, well into the twentieth century. On Monday March 22 1926 Lanark School Band from Rockford directed by Leonard Wierson broadcast on WEBW a programme which included Lax's arrangement of Santa Lucia for clarinet duet played by Fred Horner and James McGrath. If not the first, it was certainly one of the first broadcasts of Fred's music.

On February 6, 1930, Fred Lax died and was interred in Western Cemetery, Baltimore two days later. However, for many, his name lived on through his achievements in music. He was first and foremost a flute soloist with much technical skill and prowess. A decade after his death, John O'Ren, in a letter to the Baltimore Sun<sup>19</sup>, offered a reminiscence of a performance once given by Lax with an orchestra. Fred's cadenza came near to the end of a piece and he stood up to deliver it. He improvised as he went along. He played as he had never played before, taking it from key to key in endless variations. When he arrived back at the original key the conductor was ready to bring in the orchestra but Fred had other ideas. He set off on wilder and more incredible pyrotechnics avoiding the conclusion of his solo. After this had happened two or three times a colleague sitting next to him waited his opportunity to grab his coat tails and pull him into his seat. The conductor brought in the orchestra and one of Fred's longest, most brilliant cadenzas ever improvised was brought to end.

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### Photo Credits

1. Fred Lax, June 1924, (D.C.Miller Collection, Washington)
2. P.S.Gilmore (1829-1892), 3. Louisa Pyk (1846-1929), 4. Letitia Fritch, 5. Annie Louise Tanner (1856-1921), 6. Augusta Ohrstrom (1856-1921). (Photos 2-6, Wiki Commons)

### Acknowledgements

Without the valuable assistance of Pam Covington and Frank Rutherford the task of research would have been far more difficult. Their willingness to share the fruits of their own research with me is very much appreciated.

### List of Compositions

#### Flute (or Flageolet):

- Reverie Op.44 for flute and piano (1892)<sup>20</sup>
- Caprice Unice (1882)
- Concert Mazurka (1883)
- Caprice de Concert (1883)
- Diavolo (1883)
- Polka with Variations (1883)

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<sup>19</sup> Baltimore Sun, March 26, 1940

<sup>20</sup> Dates in brackets refer to earliest known date of a verified performance.

Fantasia on English Airs Op.86 pub Cundy Bettoney, Boston  
 Fantaisie on American Airs Op.88 (1885)  
 Fantasia on Irish Airs Op.78, pub. Cundy Bettoney, Boston  
 Fantasia on German Airs Op.87  
 Fantaisie on (or themes from) the Works of Chopin (1886)  
 Caprice on Paganini's Witches' Dance (1886)  
 Reverie and Variations (1886)  
 Fantaisie on Themes from Faust (Gounod) (1887)  
 Music of the Union (1887)  
 Fantaisie on Mexican Airs (1887)  
 Fantaisie on Gilmore's Columbia (1887)  
 The Rippling Stream: Etude Caprice Op.101 (1888)  
 Romanza (Czardas arr. Lax) (1888)  
 The Dance of the Sylphs Op.103 (1888)  
 Fantaisie on French Airs (1888)  
 Romanza: Thoughts of Home – dedicated to Mrs P.S.Gilmore (1888)  
 Air and Variations: 'Bonnie Scotland' (1893) pub. Cundy Bettoney, Boston  
 Caprice for solo flute (1898)  
 Air Varié (1889)  
 Gavotte, 'Rosalinde' (1899)  
 Chromatic Polka de Concert Op.79  
 Romanza Op.23 pub. Cundy Bettoney, Boston  
 Idle Moments: Caprice de Concert Op.26  
 Tarantelle Op.82  
 Farewell to Naples

**Piccolo:**

Polka Caprice Op.20 for picc/flageolet, Pub. Riviere & Hawkes, London, c.1880-89  
 Unique Polka for piccolo, pub.Hawkes & Son, London  
 Polka Fantasie for piccolo (1903)  
 Scotch Airs for piccolo (1904)  
 The Twinkler for piccolo (1906)

**Piano:**

The Lobsters on Parade for piano, pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore, 1902

**Violin :**

Variations on Semiramide for violin and piano, pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore, 1900

**Arrangements:**

Lo, Here the Gentle Lark (Bishop arr. Lax) for flute and clarinet (1882)  
 Medley on American Patriotic Airs for violin & piano, pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore (1898)  
 Ideal Operas arr. Lax for violin & piano – includes Robert Le Diabolo (Meyerbeer), Fille du Regiment (Donizetti), Chimes of Normandy (Planquette), Ernani (Verdi).  
 Pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore, 1899.  
 Juanita (arr. Lax) for violin & piano, pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore, 1899.  
 Lead Kindly Light (arr. Lax) for violin and piano, pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore, 1902  
 Medley of Jigs and Reels (arr. Lax) for violin and piano, pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore, 1902  
 Long, Long Ago, with easy variations on Sweet By and By, Mocking Bird, Marseillaise

Hymn, and When You and I were Young, pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore, 1902  
Remember Me, I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls and Auld Lang Syne, (arr.Lax) for violin and piano, pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore, 1904  
Lyric Echoes No.4, Collection of medium grade pieces for violin and piano pub. P.J.Lammers, Baltimore, 1907 – contains arrangements by Fred Lax.  
Nearer My God To Thee (arr.Lax) for violin and piano (1923)  
Santa Lucia (arr. Lax) for clarinet duet (1926)

**Ensemble:**

Andante with Variations for flute, clarinet, trumpet, trombone (1882)  
First Quartet in G for flute, two clarinets and bassoon (1884)  
Birds of Paradise for flute and French Horn Quartet (1885)  
Twilight Carol Polka Op.112 for two flutes and piano, pub. Cundy Bettoney, Boston

**Band Music:**

Maryland's Fifth for Band (1892)<sup>21</sup>  
Patrol of the Rhine for orchestra (1892)  
March, 'Gallant Fifth' for band (1909)  
The Harris, Britton & Dean March Op.121 pub. J.C.Groene & Co., Cincinnati<sup>22</sup>

**Instrument Methods:**

Flute Method (287pp), pub. Pepper & Son, Philadelphia

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<sup>21</sup> Dedicated to the officers of the Fifth Regiment

<sup>22</sup> Piano score published by J.C. Groene & Co., Cincinnati