

Star Spangled Music Editions

ALTON ADAMS MUSIC COLLECTION

Volume One



Virgin Islands March

Dedicated to the People of the United States Virgin Islands

1919

By Alton Augustus Adams

1889–1987

First Black Bandmaster in the United States Navy

**Edited by Mark Clague, Ph.D.
for the Star Spangled Music Foundation**

Composer Biography

ALTON AUGUSTUS ADAMS (1889–1987) became the first black bandmaster in the United States Navy on June 2, 1917 when his all-black Adams Juvenile Band (founded 1910) was inducted as the United States Navy Band of the Virgin Islands. At the onset of American entry into World War One, the U.S. had purchased the islands from Denmark to deny Germany a submarine base so close to U.S. shores. Adams's band served as a cultural and social bridge between the islands' new, all-white American administration and its mostly black native population. Adams was soon in charge of three bands, his own in St. Thomas and two groups on St. Croix. He also volunteered as Supervisor of Music for the islands' public schools to create its first music curriculum.

In the States, Adams had become known for his informative articles about bands, instruments, and music as a means of community service in the pages of *Jacobs' Band Monthly*—a monthly magazine published in Boston. His marches were performed throughout the U.S. and by influential bandleaders including Edwin Franko Goldman and the “March King” himself, John Philip Sousa.

In 1924, Adams's Virgin Islands bands joined forces as a single unit to tour the eastern United States including cities such as Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Adams hoped to publicize the islands as a winter haven for American tourists to help restore the islands' prosperity. War I, hurricanes, and outside financial forces had devastated the island economy. The band's concerts drew large crowds and triumphant accolades in the African American press, especially in Harlem, which had since 1917 welcomed an influx of Virgin Islanders seeking work. Due to its special status as a resident band with permanent members, the Virgin Island band became especially polished musically and its quality was compared favorably with the best military ensembles in the United States, including the Washington Marine Band.

In 1943, Adams was recalled to duty in World War II, taking over an all-white unit in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He had eight of his former bandsmen reinstated to the unit, creating the first official racially integrated navy band. Adams also worked as a journalist for newspapers such as *The Pittsburgh Courier* and the Associated Negro Press and ran two newspapers of his own. After WWII he operated the Adams 1799 Guest House (a bed and breakfast on St. Thomas) and served as president of the Virgin Islands Hotel Association. He was even active in local politics as an independent community leader and volunteer. (Note: the cover photo for this edition was taken about 1922 in New York City when Adams was touring the United States to research music education programs for the islands.)

Virgin Islands March

HISTORY: The “Virgin Islands March” was written in 1919 and dedicated to Captain William Russell White as well as his wife, who had been instrumental in forming Adams's navy band. In a 1985 interview, Adams said that the tune of the trio was inspired by an act of charity of Mrs. White who had given aid to an older Virgin Islands woman to feed her children. Inspired by the woman's story and gratitude, the melody took shape in Adams's mind. In October 1919, the score and parts were published in *Jacobs' Band Monthly* and were sent to subscribers throughout the United States. (An orchestral arrangement appeared with the same publisher.) The march quickly became the signature work of Adams's band. During the band's 1924 tour, the work's energy, color, and traditional Sousa-inspired sound helped advertise the islands as a fun, energetic tourist destination and a patriotic addition to U.S. territory. Just prior to the tour, Adams conducted the work with New York's Goldman Band in that city's Central Park and Adams's band performed it across the eastern seaboard.

Reinterpreted within Virgin Islands culture, the piece asserts a cosmopolitan Virgin Island identity, one connected to the U.S. mainland and European traditions but one that resists a colonialist collapse and thus gives voice to local pride. While there is no native or folk music content in the piece, it was played often in local contexts, such as high school graduations and community concerts. In 1963, Adams rededicated the piece to the people of the Virgin Islands, a gift officially accepted by the Virgin Islands Legislature. As a result, Adams was appointed by then Governor Ralph Paiewonsky to head a committee to write words for the trio strain. Four verses were assembled from public contributions by two dozen Virgin Islanders the next year, thus making the anthem into a song of universal brotherhood and recalling the inter-racial charity of the trio strain's inspiration. On June 2, 1982, sixty-five years to the day after Adams became a navy bandmaster, the “Virgin Islands March” was named the official territorial anthem of the United States Virgin Islands.

PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS: The piece may be performed as a purely instrumental work or sung with the lyric. It may be played for either official and unofficial occasions anywhere in the world. As an anthem, it is more celebratory than solemn. The tempo should be a bright 120–124 beats per minute, with the trio strain slowing to

114–116. Articulations should be crisp and short. In October 1983, Adams, then aged 93, conducted the U.S. Army Field Band and Chorus in a performance at Reichhold Center in the Virgin Islands. He took the march at a very slow 96 bpm throughout. The National Guard Band of the Virgin Islands performs the piece at 120 bpm. The official Virgin Islands government fiftieth-anniversary recording made by the Goldman Band under the direction of Richard Franko Goldman, a friend of the composer who had heard him conduct the piece in his prime, follows the quicker tempo and slower trio plan outlined above.

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Sources

This edition is based on a copy of the composer's holograph manuscript under the original title "Virgin Islands March" held in the Alton Augustus Adams Collection (AAC: ser. 8, box 1, item 19) at the Center for Black Music Research Chicago.

Suggestions for Further Reading and Research

Alton Adams was rediscovered by musicologist Samuel Floyd for a 1977 article titled "Alton Augustus Adams: The First Black Bandmaster in the United States Navy" in *The Black Perspective in Music* 5:2 (Fall), pp. 173–87. By 1999 when Mark Clague's article on Adams appeared in Floyd's *International Dictionary of Black Composers*, the Alton Augustus Adams Collection of archival documents had been deposited at Columbia College Chicago's Center for Black Music Research. Such documents along with islands newspapers provided additional evidence about Adams's life. The story of the band's 1924 tour is reported in Mark Clague's article "Instruments of Identity: Alton Augustus Adams, Sr., the Navy Band of the Virgin Islands, and the Sounds of Social Change," *Black Music Research Journal* 18:1/2 (Spring/Fall 1998), pp. 21–65. The University of California Press has also published *The Memoirs of Alton Augustus Adams, Sr.*, edited by Mark Clague and with a preface by Samuel Floyd. Additional information is available on the web through Wikipedia and the website <http://starspangledmusic.org>. Students are encouraged to contact a local librarian for assistance.

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Virgin Islands March (1917)

Alton Augustus Adams
(1889-1987)
Edition by Mark Clague

March (♩ = 132)

The score is arranged in 20 staves, each representing a different instrument or section. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as March with a quarter note equal to 132 beats per minute. The score is divided into two systems by a double bar line. The first system covers measures 1 through 4, and the second system covers measures 5 through 8. Dynamics are indicated by *ff* (fortissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). Trills are marked with 'tr' and wavy lines above the notes. The Percussion part at the bottom features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Instrument list (from top to bottom):
Piccolo
Flute
Oboe
Clarinet in E♭
1st Clarinet in B♭
2nd Clarinet in B♭
3rd Clarinet in B♭
Bass Clarinet in B♭
1st Alto Saxophone
2nd Alto Saxophone
Tenor Saxophone
Baritone Saxophone
Bassoon
1st and 2nd Horn in F
3rd and 4th Horn in F
1st Trumpet in B♭
2nd Trumpet in B♭
3rd Trumpet in B♭
1st and 2nd Trombone
3rd Trombone
Euphonium T.C.
Euphonium B.C.
Tuba
Percussion

9

Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
Eb Cl.
Cl.
Cl.
Cl.
B. Cl.
A. Sax.
A. Sax.
T. Sax.
B. Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hn.
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tbn.
Tbn.
Euph.
Euph.
Tba.
Perc.

19

1. 2.

Picc. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Fl. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Ob. *mf* *ff* *mf*

E♭ Cl. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Cl. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Cl. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Cl. *mf* *ff* *mf*

B. Cl. *mf* *ff* *mf*

A. Sax. *mf* *ff* *mf*

A. Sax. *mf* *ff* *mf*

T. Sax. *mf* *ff* *mf*

B. Sax. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Bsn. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Hn. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Hn. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Tpt. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Tpt. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Tpt. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Tbn. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Tbn. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Euph. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Euph. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Tba. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Perc. *ff* *ff* *mf*

28

Picc. *f* *ff* *f*

Fl. *f* *ff* *f*

Ob. *f* *ff* *f*

Eng. Cl. *f* *ff* *f*

Cl. *f* *ff* *f*

Cl. *f* *ff* *f*

Cl. *f* *ff* *f*

B. Cl. *ff*

A. Sax. *f* *ff* *f*

A. Sax. *f* *ff* *f*

T. Sax. *ff*

B. Sax. *ff*

Bsn. *ff*

Hn. *f* *ff* *f* a2

Hn. *f* *ff* *f* a2

Tpt. *f* *ff* *f*

Tpt. *f* *ff* *f*

Tpt. *f* *ff* *f*

Tbn. *ff*

Tbn. *ff*

Euph. *ff*

Euph. *ff*

Tba. *ff*

Perc. *f* *ff* *f*

§

38 2.

Picc. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Fl. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Ob. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Eb Cl. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Cl. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Cl. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Cl. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 B. Cl. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 A. Sax. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 A. Sax. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 T. Sax. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 B. Sax. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Bsn. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Hn. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Hn. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Tpt. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Tpt. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Tpt. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Tbn. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Tbn. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Euph. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Euph. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Tba. *mf* (2x *ff*)
 Perc. *mf* (2x *ff*)

49

Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
E♭ Cl.
Cl.
Cl.
Cl.
B. Cl.
A. Sax.
A. Sax.
T. Sax.
B. Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hn.
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tbn.
Tbn.
Euph.
Euph.
Tba.
Perc.

61

Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
E♭ Cl.
Cl.
Cl.
Cl.
B. Cl.
A. Sax.
A. Sax.
T. Sax.
B. Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hn.
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tbn.
Tbn.
Euph.
Euph.
Tba.
Perc.

Fine

70

The score on page 8, measures 70-73, is arranged in a grand staff format. The instruments are listed on the left side of each staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The music starts at measure 70 with a 'Fine' marking. The dynamic marking 'ff' (fortissimo) is used throughout the piece. The woodwind and brass sections play sustained notes with melodic lines, while the bassoon and percussion parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment. The score concludes at measure 73.

D.S. al Fine

78

Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
Eb Cl.
Cl.
Cl.
Cl.
B. Cl.
A. Sax.
A. Sax.
T. Sax.
B. Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
Hn.
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tpt.
Tbn.
Tbn.
Euph.
Euph.
Tba.
Perc.