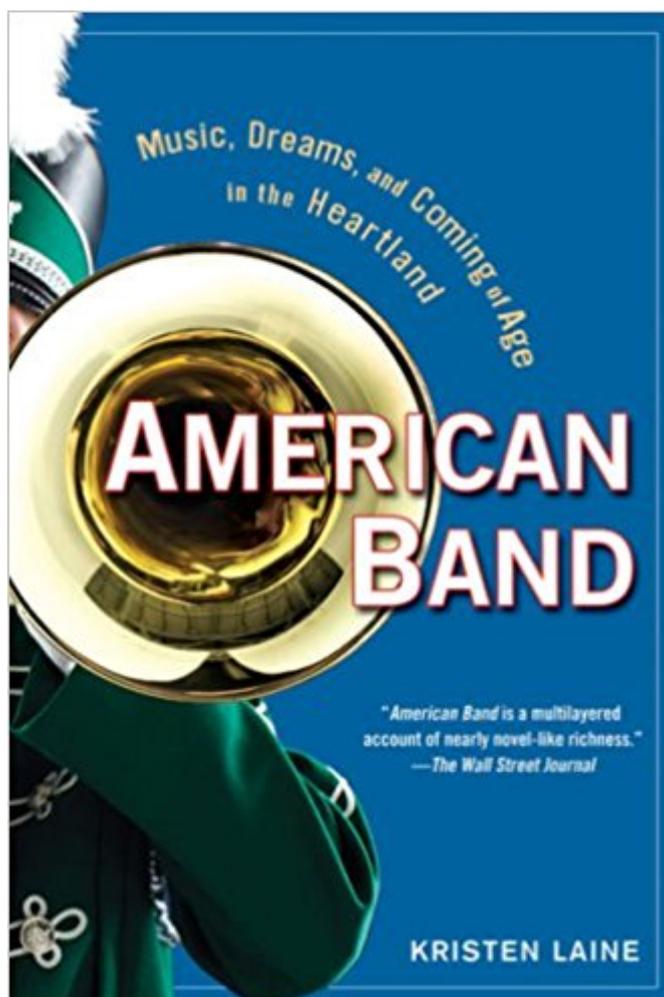


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# American Band: Music, Dreams, And Coming Of Age In The Heartland



## Synopsis

In the spirit of *Friday Night Lights* comes the stirring story of a marching band from small-town middle America. Every fall, marching bands take to the field in a uniquely American ritual. For millions of kids, band is a rite of passage—a first foray into leadership and adult responsibility, and a chance to learn what it means to be a part of a community. Nowhere is band more serious than at Concord High School in Elkhart, Indiana, where the entire town is involved with the success of its defending state champion band, the Marching Minutemen. In the place where this tradition may have originated, in the city that became the band instrument capital of the world, band is a religion. But it's not the only religion—as legendary director Max Jones discovers when conflicting notions of faith and purpose collide during his final year as director. In this intimate chronicle, the band marches through a season that starts in hope and promise, progresses through uncertainty and disappointment, and ends, ultimately, in redemption. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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## Customer Reviews

In 2004, first-time author Laine immersed herself in Elkhart, Indiana's Concord High School Marching Minutemen, a 240-plus ensemble preparing to defend its state title, and emerges with a detailed and intimate account that delves deep into the rarified world of competitive high school marching and the students, parents and teachers devoted to it. Max Jones is the band's hard-nosed director, in his final season at Concord, and just beginning to fall out of touch with his young charges; students, meanwhile, juggle social and spiritual concerns with their all-consuming

commitment to the Minutemen (practicing more hours than even the football players). In the stories of a trumpeter whose mother contracts terminal cancer, a clarinetist who longs for her native California and a drum-line captain who aspires to West Point, Laine finds an intriguing sample of small-town, red-state Middle America's next generation. Her descriptions of field performances—from the earliest planning stages to their in-competition execution—are intricate, but fail to convey their power or majesty; in addition, Laine's emphasis on narrative observation over direct quotes gives the work a magazine feature feel. Still, Laine brings passion, curiosity and affection to her heartland chronicle, ideal for anyone who's ever marked time with an instrument at the ready. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

American Band has everything going for it, from tempo to heart to the grand bittersweet finale. What a gift for readers: a pitch-perfect tribute to kids and song and community. -- Madeleine Blais, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of *In These Girls, Hope Is a Muscle* American Band is a compelling story of young people finding their voices, their callings, and their rhythm. In Kristen Laine's hands, the unfolding highs and lows of a group of high school musicians becomes an unlikely but utterly convincing venue for relating universal experiences: learning to love, learning from loss, struggling with faith.... In other words, growing up. With remarkable empathy and skillful prose, Laine not only grants access to the lives of the teenagers whose stories she so poignantly tells, she actually makes the reader nostalgic for high school, for that time when we dreamed big dreams and loved our friends as if the music of life depended on them. Best of all, while American Band will surely be relished by those who have glide-stepped to 'Take the A Train,' it invites even those of us who wouldn't know a piccolo from a pipe organ to take the field and march along. -- Peter Manseau, author of *Vows: The Story of a Priest, a Nun, and Their Son* A triumph! American Band is an incisive portrait of life and coming of age in our 'heartland' - a place so many of us feel free to ridicule and analyze, but so rarely take the time to truly comprehend. Kristen Laine pushes right through the stereotypes about 'red states,' 'evangelicals,' and the nature of life in the middle of our nation. American Band, is, in one sense, a well-paced page-turner in the great tradition of 'competition' narratives. But it is also much more. Kristen Laine has blessed us with a deeply serious, life-affirming book whose quiet insight and wisdom will stay with the reader many years after those pages have been turned.... -- Susan Eaton, author of *The Children in Room E-4: American Education on Trial* As a spats-hating, apathetic, marching-band clarinetist in high school, I didn't recognize the driven and talented Concord High musicians who train harder than the football players

at whose games they perform. But *American Band* is much more than the story of a season in the life of the most fanatical practitioners of this uniquely American ritual. Kristen Laine has produced a captivating portrait of what it's like to be a teenager in middle America in the first part of the 21st century. -- Stefan Fatsis, author of *Word Freak: Heartbreak, Triumph, Genius, and Obsession in the World of Competitive Scrabble Players* Football isn't the only thing happening underneath those Friday night lights. *American Band* leads us through the championship season of Elkhart, Indiana's Marching Minutemen. But most importantly, author Kristen Laine shows that in the heart of the heart of the country, so-called quaint notions like 'community' and 'personal excellence' are alive and kicking. -- Cathy Day, author of *The Circus in Winter* Through the graceful narration of Kristen Laine, a season of a high school band becomes the provocative story of young men and women grappling with issues of friendships, ambition, and spirituality. *American Band* transports us to the real America that so many journalists simply fly over. It makes us care us care deeply about the parents, kids and teachers who come together to create a sense of community in these fast-changing times. -- David L. Marcus, author of *What It Takes to Pull Me Through: Why Teenagers Get in Trouble, and How Four of Them Got Out* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is one of the best books that I've ever read. As a competitor of the Concord Marching Minuteman, I know first hand that they put their heart and souls into what they do. This book is so good that both of my band directors have read it! This book really shows to anyone (marcher or non marcher) that band is to be taken seriously. We've had football players say that marching band is harder than even their varsity practices. We deserve some credit too! This is a beautiful piece of literature and really does shed light into the unseen world that is high school marching band. Flawless job, Miss Laine! Everything is totally relatable!

"Coming of Age in the Heartland" is a precise and honest description of the interwoven stories told throughout this book. From the perspective of someone who has never picked up a musical instrument, I was surprised by how Marching Band could be such an intriguing backdrop for a book. I deeply enjoyed the clear depictions of students that this piece followed--particularly Grant's story, and I'm grateful to him and the author for sharing such a personal struggle of faith and grief in this context.

This book truly captures the incredibly serious, irony-free world of competitive marching band. There really are no superlatives too strong for a sport(?) where the audience is expected to throw babies

(figurative babies, of course), if they are particularly moved by the field show. It takes either total immersion, or saint-like objectivity to write about band without making fun of it, and this book succeeds at that. The author also met the challenge of showing the diverse motivations/attitudes of the individual bandos, even when they contrasted with the brilliant esprit de corps of the group. It's true she spent a lot of time on just one student, but really, that guy (or girl) is in every band. They each have their own unique leadership styles, but that charismatic figure that amazes everyone is practically a fixture in any halfway decent band. The atmosphere tends to cultivate them, and I thought it showed real discernment to identify and explore that character in the book. On a personal note, I couldn't believe Grant transferred from "Ann Arbor" to Calvin College. Seriously... you can be Christian anywhere, but there's only one Michigan Marching Band...

I bought this book for my granddaughter who teaches band to elementary school kids in our county. She found it helpful.

I had this once before and really wanted to add to my permanent library.

Having marched in band all 4 years of HS, I was drawn to this book from the time I read the excerpt in an airline magazine. I was interested in how Max Jones ran his band camps and his teaching style. What I became very bored with was the life story of Grant Loughenbaugh. I couldn't help thinking it was a good thing he was out of school by the time the book was published. Otherwise, I think there would have been a lot of fallout and jealousy from his peers that he was the focus of the book instead of the band. I suspect that the author developed an obsession with Grant and his family during the writing of this book. It shows.

A well-written book makes a topic I would not have thought interesting very engaging indeed. Although the band is well-covered, I and others may find the profile of students in a changing town more compelling.

They don't get much attention-they are the supporting act for the teams and cheerleaders but are missed if they fail to arrive at a football or basketball game. They are a part of most communities and provide music for parades, pep rallies, bonfires and other community events. The most recognition they get is a picture in the paper when they have done something special. They are the members of your local school band. I found this book in a clearance bin and purchased it. Of course

I would -I am a former high school band director. There are not many books out there about us or the kids that do more than make music;like many of the prominent personalities in the book, band kids are some of the finest young people you will find in our schools. It is about time someone told their story-and the story of millions of parents who also give of their time and talent to support our musical programs across the US. The story of this fine band is told very well: we get an insider's look into the world of the teaching staff, the students and the parents involved in the workings of this fine, carefully guided program. We see the good and bad side of it all and share the ride-the ups and downs, triumphs and tragedies of the 2004 fall season of this unique group.The author lets it all hang out. Once a high school musician herself, she shows us the inner workings of an award winning program-warts and all. The book slowly builds to its climax, culminating in a crack at the state championship in Indianapolis. Along the way we learn a number of things about life and the inner workings of teen culture-our American propensity to compete-passion and apathy-leadership and rebellion-the fear of risk and the quest for perfection. We will see emotions rise and fall and feel the power of 200 young people pulling as one, finding a common purpose and pursuing it. We will see what happens when one begins to believe one can reach just beyond one's limits.Incidentally, we also learn about the landscape of our changing nation, culture and demographic as the story moves from chapter to chapter. The band world itself is morphing in response to the changing face of our nation and culture. The book also explores the role of faith in the lives of the students spotlighted in this tale. American Band is not about the average band-but the average band director or student can identify with or be inspired by it's message. It is also a tribute to all the ones -parents, fellow teachers, administrators and civic leaders-who share the vision that a good music program teaches much more than music: it gives students a place of their own, a place to thrive and learn skills that will serve them the rest of their lives. As a director I did not teach music to kids-I taught kids music. And that is what this book is all about-teaching kids using the discipline of music. Not just music lessons:life lessons.I applaud Ms. Landis' book AMERICAN BAND. It is a window into the world of band,specifically a marching band, the visible tip of the musical iceberg in most American schools. After reading their story, you will better appreciate the hours young musicians all over America spend reaching toward a common goal-and learning lessons they never dreamed of along the way. American Bands are truly an American institution of great value and worth, even after the music fades,uniforms are hung,and the instruments put away. I heartily recommend this book to all.

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