

An American First
Alton Augustus Adams
First Black Bandmaster of the US Navy

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Biography—Born on the island of St. Thomas in 1889 in what was then the Danish West Indies, Alton Augustus Adams learned the flute, began composing marches, and founded his own Juvenile Band in 1909. Adams wrote articles for the *St. Croix Herald* and became well known on the U.S. mainland as editor of “The Band” column in the *Jacobs’ Band Monthly*. In 1917, when the United States purchased the Virgin Islands from Denmark, he and his band were inducted into the U.S. Navy as a cultural bridge between the new (white) naval administration and the (predominantly black) native populace, becoming the first black musicians in the Navy since The War of 1812. Having founded the islands’ music education program and led his naval ensemble on a triumphant tour of the eastern seaboard in 1924, Adams musical career



declined, especially when his band was transferred to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba (1931). Soon Adams retired from active duty and returned to the islands to resume his educational and journalistic careers. Recalled in 1942 after the Pearl Harbor attack, Adams took over an all-white unit in Cuba and added eight of his former bandsmen, thus creating the first racially integrated Navy band. Adams had become well known to bandsmen including John Philip Sousa and Edwin Franko Goldman through his compositions and writings. He was invited to conduct the Goldman Band in Central Park on three occasions, and Sousa repeatedly featured three of Adams’ marches at Willow Grove in the 1920s. Adams retired permanently from the navy in 1945 and took up a career in public service and hotel management, soon becoming president of the Virgin Islands Hotel Association (1952). An experienced author who had edited several newspapers, Adams began writing his memoirs in 1971 after retiring. (These writings will finally be published in May 2008 by the University of California Press.) Adams died suddenly in 1987 just after his 98th birthday. The US Navy Ceremonial Band performed a tribute concert of his music and other black band composers in May 2006 in the Virgin Islands.

Major Works for Band

MARCHES

- “Virgin Islands March” (1917), published in *Jacobs’ Band Monthly* (1919)*
“The Governor’s Own” (1921), published by Carl Fischer*
“Spirit of the U.S.N.” (1924), published by Carl Fischer

WALTZES

- “Caribbean Echoes”*
“Childhood Merriment”

SOLOS WITH BAND

- “Warbling in the Moonlight” (Piccolo Solo)*

BAMBOULAS

- “Sam Polo / Bull Passin”**

* Works with an asterisk are available in new critical editions by today’s speaker. Please email claguem@umich.edu for more information.

Recordings

“The Governor’s Own” appears as the first track in *The Pride of America: The Golden Age of the American March* (New World Records 80266, 1976); currently published on CD.

Further Reading

- Adams, Alton. *Suite Virgin Isles: The Memoirs of Alton Augustus Adams, Sr., A Musical Life in the United States Virgin Islands*. Edited by Mark Clague. (Berkeley: University of California Press, May 2008).
- Clague, Mark. “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.
- . “Adams, Alton Augustus,” *International Dictionary of Black Composers*, vol. 1, ed. Samuel Floyd (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), pp. 9–16.
- . “Alton Adams,” on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alton_Adams).
- Floyd, Samuel. “Alton Augustus Adams: The First Black Bandmaster in the United States Navy.” *The Black Perspective in Music* 5:2 (Fall 1977), pp. 173–87.
- Moolenaar, Ruth M. “Adams, Alton Augustus, Sr.: musician, composer, educator, entrepreneur, St. Thomas, 1889-1987,” in *Profiles of Outstanding Virgin Islanders*. (St. Thomas: Department of Education, Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands, 1992), pp. 1–2.
- Thomas, Dale. “Alton Augustus Adams: One of the Best-Known Musicians of the U.S. Virgin Islands,” *Journal of Band Research* 41:1 (Fall 2005), pp. 30–41.

The Governor's Own (1921)

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

March (♩ = 120-128)

This musical score is for the march "The Governor's Own" by Alton Augustus Adams, published in 1921. The piece is in 2/4 time with a tempo of 120-128 beats per minute. The score is arranged for a full band and includes the following parts:

- Piccolo
- Oboe
- Clarinet in E♭
- Clarinet in B♭ 1
- Clarinet in B♭ 2,3
- Bassoon
- Soprano Saxophone
- Alto Saxophone
- Tenor Saxophone
- Baritone Saxophone
- Trumpet in B♭ 1
- Trumpet in B♭ 2,3
- Horn in F 1, 2
- Horn in F 3, 4
- Trombone 1, 2
- Trombone 3
- Euphonium T.C.
- Euphonium B.C.
- Tuba
- Percussion

The score is divided into three systems. The first system covers measures 1-4, the second system covers measures 5-8, and the third system covers measures 9-12. Dynamics are marked as *ff* (fortissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The percussion part includes a cymbal (cym.) in measure 11. The key signature is one flat (B♭ major or E♭ minor).

Bull Passin'

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

Bamboula [$\text{♩} = 100$]

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with ten staves. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 2/4. The piece is marked with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 100$ and a dynamic of *f* (forte). The score begins with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Piccolo:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Clarinet in B♭ 1:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Clarinet in B♭ 2, 3:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a harmonic accompaniment of eighth notes.
- Alto Saxophone:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Tenor Saxophone:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Horn in F 1, 2:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Trumpet in B♭:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Trumpet in B♭ 2, 3:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a harmonic accompaniment of eighth notes.
- Trombone 1, 2:** Bass clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Trombone 3:** Bass clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Euphonium:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Tuba:** Bass clef, 2/4 time. Starts with a forte *f* dynamic. The part consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Percussion:** Indicated by a double bar line and a 2/4 time signature, with no notes written.