

To a New Brass Band - *Fall River Daily Herald*, Massachusetts, 14 January 1881

Gavin Holman (edited), 10 March 2024

A brass band is forming at Groton [Connecticut], to be called the Fort Griswold Band, and Oscar W. Hewett, the Pawtucket historian of the *Providence Journal*, addressed to it the following advice:

Gentlemen, you have now entered upon the most serious undertaking of your lives. It is a solemn thing to put the brazen serpent to your lips. It is no idle act to blast a brass viper or to set a pair of cymbals to butting. True, there is no harm in gnawing upon a trombone, even after one has his cornet, but we repeat that it is a solemn thing to startle the world with sudden "brass music." Therefore, brethren, we would enjoin care and painstaking. Be ye not puffed up, as are wind instruments of winding brass. Temptations bestrew your path. There is always a snare set for the drummer, and no drummer knows when he may become base. To the cymbal player we would say, 'Strike, but hear.' Yours is a higher calling than that of the punster. He plays upon words. You play upon cymbals.



An unknown band from Connecticut, c. 1885

To him who plays upon the brass boa constrictor with a grasshopper-leg attachment, you are particularly subject to temptation. Your temptation is to keep the piston rod ever in motion. It strengthens with years. It becomes grim habit with practice, so that men operate it by muscular action merely, after they are dead. An admonitory word to

the young man who has chosen the yellow clarinet. Yellow clarionets tend to melancholy - sometimes suicide. Either he who plays the yellow clarinet or his nearest neighbor must commit suicide, otherwise the clarinet is not a yellow one, or it is out of order. Yellow clarionets are not compatible with long life. A man with an iron constitution may possibly live to fifty years on the flute, but a yellow clarinet is as dangerous as the deadly and anaconda-like accordion. To him that handles the stupendous and sententious tuba - we mean the brass monster that gapeth and grinneth like a hippopotamus in the river brakes - think what a wakeful capacity this instrument has! The bellowings of famished thunder are in its brazen bowels, and its expansive mouth uttereth earthquakes. Whisper in her lightly, my boy, and the whole world will be obliged to listen to you! Fair fame and success to the Fort Griswold Band. Our faith is that it will acquit itself grandly on the next September 6. It has an able instructor and an efficient president. We therefore conjure to remember the beautiful lines of Tennyson:

The uproar falls on Groton's walls,
And snowy summits old in story;
The trombone roars between the shores,
And the bass drum resounds in glory!
Blow, bugle, blow, etc.

Known engagements of the Fort Griswold Band:

- Friday 18 August 1882 – the band accompanied the steamer Osprey taking 250 persons of the Groton Congregational Sunday School on their excursion to Crescent Beach, Niantic.
- Friday 27 October 1882 – the band was engaged to play each Friday evening at the Music Hall Roller Rink, New London.
- Thursday 16 October 1884 – the band accompanied the Republican campaign company from New London to a demonstration in Westerly.
- Monday 27 October 1884 – the band accompanied the Morgan Guards of Groton to a Republican rally at Norwich.
- Thursday 25 July 1912 – the Fort Griswold Band gave a concert at Ocean Beach, New London.