

**Testimony by Robert Ponto in Support of HB 3348
University of Oregon School of Music and Dance**

**To Designate March 10 of each year as
“Mighty Oregon” Day**

**For Public Hearing Scheduled on June 4th, 2015
Before the Senate Rules Committee**



UNIVERSITY
OF OREGON
School of Music
and Dance

Chair Rosenbaum, Members of the Senate Rules Committee, for the record, my name is Robert Ponto. I am the Assistant Dean for Admissions and Financial Aid, and former Director of Bands at the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance. I have been asked to provide a bit of historical background on “Mighty Oregon” and it is my pleasure to do so.

In the Fall of 1915, bandmaster, clarinetist, and composer, Albert Perfect, born in Skåne, Sweden and trained at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Stockholm, arrived in Eugene to begin his tenure as the director of the new Eugene Municipal Band, as well as director of the University of Oregon Varsity Band and the Eugene High School band.

Albert Perfect’s granddaughter, Ruth Lyon, told me that soon thereafter, Albert gathered up his music-writing materials, walked over to the nearby mill race — then a popular gathering place for University of Oregon students and faculty — and sat on its banks over a five-day period, composing for many hours at a time. According to his

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wife, Ethel, on one of those days, Albert suddenly burst through their front door and exclaimed, "I've got it!"

What he had done, of course, was compose a brand new march he titled, "Mighty Oregon." (Perfect later collaborated with UO journalism major, John DeWitt Gilbert, to create words for the new march.)

As composers often do, Mr. Perfect did a little test run of his march before its formal premiere. He snuck it into one of his Eugene Municipal Band concerts at the National Guard Armory on January 7, 1916. Presumably, he then made a few tweaks before the official premiere a couple of months later on March 10.

While researching "Mighty Oregon," I confess to being perplexed by the subtitle appearing on early editions of the sheet music, namely, "The Tipperary of the West." I couldn't figure out what that meant. Perfect was from *Sweden*, after all, not Ireland! I studied pictures of Tipperary, thinking perhaps that the landscape of Oregon reminded him of Ireland — a country I doubt he even visited during his lifetime. Despite some unmistakable similarities in beauty and topography, I could not discern any concrete relationship. I had almost given up hope of finding a Tipperary connection when I experienced some welcome serendipity.

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While doing my research, I thought it would be enjoyable to listen to music from the time period I was studying, specifically, from 1914 through the early twenties. It so happened that one of the recordings to which I listened was a collection of songs popular during World War I. One of these songs was Jack Judge's British Army chart-topper, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." After listening to it several times, it suddenly struck me that the chorus employed the same sequence of chords as the trio section of "Mighty Oregon" — the part we all know and love. Mr. Perfect had simply taken the harmonies from this popular song and fashioned a new melody to fit on top of them. I guess I then had my own Albert Perfect moment because I thought to myself, "I've got it! We've finally solved the Great Tipperary Mystery."

Musically, historically, and as a popular hit, "Mighty Oregon has stood the test of time. As we approach the centennial of "Mighty Oregon" next March 10th 2016, let us indeed "gather 'round and cheer her and chant her glory... Mighty Oregon."

Thank you for bringing HB 3348 forward. I urge that the Senate Rules Committee give a DO PASS recommendation to the Oregon Senate.