

December 2002

Band Together

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Recommended Citation

Kass, Dustin (2002) "Band Together," *Ethos*: Vol. 2003 , Article 11.
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2003/iss2/11>

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TOGETHER



ETHOS FINDS OUT THE THINGS THE BAND NEVER WANTED YOU TO KNOW.

story by | DUSTIN KASS

photography by | JAMES MCKENZIE

Hundreds of students are milling about, entering and exiting Music Hall, loading the six charter buses with instruments, band uniforms and enough snacks to keep a band of over 300 satisfied. Band officers are ensuring everyone gets on the right bus. No need for a piccolo to get mixed in with a group of saxophones. It is 8:30 on a Saturday morning, yet there are surprisingly few half-opened eyes and matted-down hairdos indicative of those who rolled out of bed a little too late. Today's the big day. The Cyclones and Hawkeyes are set to rumble in Iowa City in ten hours. The marching band is already pumped.

I am riding in the lead bus, serving as the divider between the marching band staff and their families at the front of the bus and the all-female flag line in the back. While I'm sure that it's merely a coincidence that I got placed on the only bus with band officials, I'm still the only male college man here. Maybe this will be entertaining.

Or not. Less than ten minutes outside Ames, the entire flag line is asleep, a dozen girls sprawled out in the empty spots. *Wayne's World* plays on the TVs, freshly baked chocolate chip cookies are passed between families up front and a passing black Ford Ranger sporting both Iowa and Iowa State decals on the back is criticized.

Pick a team. You can't have both.

Tired Big 12 football jokes are told. *How is Baylor like a possum? They get killed on the road and play dead at home.* Boy, you got to love these crazy band trips.

The band likes to party. They like to drink, dance, flirt awkwardly. They like to sing their band songs, filled with vulgarities and insults.

It's the old screen door that makes you want to bang her!

In the halls! In the halls!

It's the old screen door that makes you want to bang her!

In the halls of ISU!

But they do not all party together. Clarinets only party with clarinets. Trombones only with trombones. Same for the saxophones, flutes and the tubas. It's partly due to logistics — few college students would voluntarily attempt to cram 300 people into their house. But it's also due to the fact that they don't all play the same instrument.

So you won't catch a saxophone at a Friday night trombone party, or a clarinet at a flute bash. Tuba at a trombone kegger? Forget about it. In band, there are some unspoken restrictions to intermingling with the others.

"The groups don't really hang out like that," says Alyssa Rudloff, a senior flugelhorn player. "Sometimes two different instrument sections will do something together, but we usually just party with our section."

Each section also has its own drink, a



“Sometimes, two different instrument sections will do something together, but we usually just party with our section.” Alyssa Rudloff | *flugelhorn player*

special blend of random alcohols and fruit juices especially designed with the sousaphone player or flag girl in mind. Drinks have names like “Agent,” “Buffalo” and “Purple Bra” — the drink of the flag girls, whose taste is said by non-flag girls to be very reminiscent of an unwashed version of its namesake. But the recipes, like many of the quirky band traditions, are fiercely guarded.

“I think only the section leaders and seniors know what’s in our drink,” says Brett Hagen, a freshman who plays the sousaphone. “All I know is that there is orange juice and Everclear in it, but I’m not sure what else.”

But they all sing the songs. It usually takes a couple of hours for everyone to get a little liquored up, but finally they gather — 50 or 100 people crowded into a room, plastic glasses and beer mugs raised above their heads to indicate they’re ready to sing. The section leaders take control, clambering onto tables, chairs or couches to be above the masses and orchestrate the rowdy, intoxicated choir before them.

“How about *Asshole?*” a faceless voice shouts. And they’re off.

I’m an asshole! I’m an asshole! I’m an asshole ‘til I die!

But I’d rather be an asshole than a goddamn Hawkeye!

I’m a piece of shit! I’m a piece of shit!

I’m a piece of shit, I know!

But I’d rather be a piece of shit than a black and gold dildo!

And on they go, booming out the words with the surprising gusto that comes with being part of a crowd. The songs voice displeasure with Hawks, wish death upon Oklahoma Sooners, provide alternative nicknames for Hayden Fry and Kirk Ferenz, and detail how Herky, the Iowa mascot, has been violated. The songs from some overcrowded little house or well-furnished apartment can often be heard blocks away, the words — but not the melody — dulled by the distance.

Hidden away in places they won’t talk about lies the Band Bible. Everyone has one. The drunk songs are found here. A student-produced unofficial guide to some of the finer aspects of the ISU marching band, it is as essential to band members as the Bible is to Christians. According to its final page, the Band Bible contains portions of originally composed material that has served the marching band — from baritones to mellophones — since the ’70s.

Good luck trying to get a peek at it. Most guard their copies fiercely, many clamming up at its mention, even refusing to talk openly of its contents. The Bible is revised frequently, and members get their copies only through the leader of their band section. With their copy often comes instructions to hold onto it dearly, lest a copy fall into the hands of a regular student.

There is “The Gospel According To The Marching Band,” parodying the gospels of the Bible with numerous verses that hold little meaning to those not in band.

In the beginning, there was Jimmy the Howard of Reynolds (not the wrap), and he was good. And he was alone on the field.

There is also the great tale that expunges all doubt as to how the band got its current, official name.

Once upon a time, the marching band would make a few dollars by cleaning up the stadium after games. One afternoon, a few band members were changing out of their uniforms into work clothes in the football locker in the Olson building. In walks head football coach Earle Bruce. He looked around the locker room and saw all of the non-football players and said "Hey! You can't change in here! This is the Varsity locker room!" At this time, band member Tim Jensen looks at Earle and says, "Yes we can! We're the Varsity Marching Band!" That was good enough for Earle. And it stuck.

At 11 a.m., the bus convoy pulls into the parking lot of Iowa City West High School, the location of the first band practice of the day. A Hawkeye marching band representative, whose duty for the day is to keep the band on schedule and alive, directs the mass of red and gold spewing from the buses to the school's football field.

Before the practice, can begin the masses are fed — three chicken strips, two muffins (poppy seed, orange and blueberry as choices), a few carrot

sticks and a can of pop.

Practice begins in all its fury, horns blasting as their owners lean backward, putting more into it when needed. Band Director Matt Smith chimes in.

We need to be sharper. Everybody needs to get to their places by that note.

They look sharp to me. That is, other than the three guys clad in the white wife beaters with "BAND" written on them, white boxers with "AWA SUX" written on the rears, white socks and white tennis shoes to match the pasty white thighs being too prominently exposed.

Practice number one is over. The band needs to get to the Hawkeye practice field to work on their National Anthem collaboration with the Iowa band, but traffic is already at a standstill miles away from Kinnick Stadium. It should only take four to six hours to sneak out six massive buses from the parking lot onto the road.

That is, unless you have very creative University of Iowa band liaisons with you. Two hop out and block two lanes of traffic heading toward Kinnick, giving the buses room to pull out. One directs our bus to follow as he starts running down the street into oncoming traffic. He is sprinting as two lanes of traffic come toward him, a Mack truck slowing in confusion. The six buses travel the three-quarters of a block to the next intersection on the wrong side of the street before getting back into the correct lanes. Sure, one of the



Hawk guides mistakenly gets left behind, but the buses now have a short drive to Kinnick.

Marching Band isn't a hobby, something to do in your spare time. It's what ensures you won't have any spare time.

Practice is the backbone of the band, eating up an hour and 20 minutes every weeknight. During weeks with home games, there's a two-hour practice Saturday morning, and then the band is at Jack Trice an hour-and-a-half before kickoff. They play throughout the game, win or lose. Unlike other students, they can't take off between quarters of a blowout.

And all this for one credit, pass-fail. During game weeks, there are over 15 hours of band-related activities.

But Alyssa Rudloff, the flugelhorn player, can handle it. She transferred to Iowa State from her first college in Pennsylvania two years ago, making this her second year with the marching band.

"Some majors don't even let the credit apply to their social sciences/arts and humanities credits," Rudloff says. "Basically, we're getting screwed. But we do it because it's fun."

The devotion does have its limits, though. During the recent Iowa State-Missouri shootout, many band members were fretting over the possibility of overtime. The bitter wind had been chilling them all evening — even the trumpeters with their red long johns beneath their uniforms — and the pos-



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sibility of additional time in the elements was too much to consider.

"God, that game was scary," Verlo says. "The worst thing was we didn't want to go to overtime. We're freezing. We go to overtime, and I'm gone."

With all the time spent amongst one another, "rank-loving" only makes sense. The band spends a significant portion of their college lives together, practicing day in and day out, playing at games and partying together. It's not long before the girl playing the

clarinet who marches three rows ahead of you starts looking pretty attractive. And the shirtless guy sporting the drums seems especially dreamy one afternoon. Call it the "band goggles."

"We've had two or three proposals in the past couple months between band couples or couples where one is still in band and one was in band before graduating," says Dennis Girsch, a freshman tenor saxophonist.

Most band love — like band parties — is often restricted to same-instrument relationships. However, some couples are able to look past the fact that she's a piccolo and he's a sousaphone, and somehow make things work. Screw up the relationship and the penalties are high — you'll be seeing your ex day after day.



The band gets in a haphazard formation, playing the ISU fight song as its members march down the street to the Hawkeye practice field for their rendezvous with the University of Iowa marching band. Black and gold clad Hawkeye fans — many beers in hand — line the street.

The taunting begins.

Scattered cheers from Cyclone fans, whose cardinal red sweatshirts leap out from the clusters of black and gold, are drowned out by the band's emphatic rendition.

Upon arrival at the practice field, the disdain felt by each band toward the other is palpable. I thought there might be some sort of mutual respect between them, or at least excitement that the two bands would be playing together. But the glaring eyes, hardened faces and scattered comments paint the real picture — pure, unadulterated hatred.

The Hawkeyes scoff at the Cyclones and their high-knee jogging onto the field. The Cyclones hold back laughter as they watch the Hawk band “waddle” in place, looking more like a band of ducks than one of Hawks.

Game time. Time to head to the big house. The pristine white and red uniforms are on, each button gleaming, instruments glimmering in the sun. The band itself is suffocating in the 80-some degree heat, beads of sweat already dampening their brows and uniforms.

A tight marching formation is being formed for the dramatic entrance into Kinnick, a formation I am now a part of, near the front with a blue duffel bag of unknown band supplies draped across my shoulders and pushing a gray Rubbermaid trash can filled with ice and 25 cases of bottled water. As we start off, a new tune is trumpeted by those behind me, a fitting song that I could sing to.

Beat Iowa... Just like last year.

The march takes us through Hawkeye tailgate country, the boos

becoming especially hardy, the curses yelled with added emphasis.

You fucking suck! Let's go Iowa!

The crowd parts far enough for the band to get through, not an inch more. Some Hawk fans dart close to the line of expressing their dislike physically. A gruff middle-aged man — a can of Budweiser in one hand and a Hawkeye baseball cap in the other — refuses to get out of the way. He gestures wildly with his arms flailing about, swearing at the guide leading us to the stadium, his gut shaking violently and threatening to burst through his too-small gray Hawkeye T-shirt. It takes nearly a minute before he's convinced to move to the side.

The taunting grows more severe as we get into viewing range of the stadium itself. Men are cursing, faint traces of their veins showing on their foreheads, faces reddening as they try to let us have it.

My rolling garbage container of ice and bottled water is provoking the more intelligent comments.

You can put the pieces of Seneca in there after the game!

Are the tampons for all the Cyclones in there?

Other than the football team and staff themselves, the marching band is the most obvious representative of Iowa State to rival fans. And it is abused because of it.

In years past, when Iowa State was regularly stomped in Ames by Nebraska or Kansas State, Husker and Wildcat fans found ways to let the band know it. There are stories of fans pelting them with cups, food scraps and change. The entire sousaphone section — the men who play the “marching tubas” — essentially serves as a target for anyone with something to throw, it being a great accomplishment when a fan can toss an object into the upright opening. Brett Hagen says he once found a bag of chips inside his sousaphone.

They have been pushed, jabbed and slapped. Showered in beer, had a hat



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FROM BAND PAGE 31

or two stolen, had their instruments played by total strangers when they made the mistake of not watching them constantly.

And they can't do a thing about it. They can't swear back. They can't take aim with their loose change. They have to take the abuse, regardless of how pissed off they get.

"There are so many times I just wish I could swear back," says Chris Verlo, freshman who plays the flugelhorn. "It's so hard, so frustrating to just stand there and take it."

This season, however, it was their fellow ISU students who nearly ended the marching for some members of the band. The marching band regularly occupies an area of the stands directly in front the ISU student section for home games at Jack Trice Stadium. As the final seconds ran off the clock at the end of Iowa State's dismantling of Nebraska, thousands of students were determined to rush the field, the marching band standing before them notwithstanding. Only through a combination of intense yelling by some of the band members and the back rows brandishing their instruments as possible weapons were the excited students convinced to go around the band, not through or over them.

"Everyone was freaking out," Verlo says. "Some people were calling DPS on their cell phones. We were afraid we were going to be trampled."

The band learned its lesson, and when it became apparent that ISU students were going to inexplicably charge the field following the Cyclone's win against Texas Tech, they moved from their normal spots and pulled back to the nearest corner of the stadium to avoid another tense encounter. However, Matt Smith and his band wrongly assumed that the corner — where students could only enter by climbing a railing and then jumping several feet to the ground — would be a hideaway from the frenzied fans. A dozen or so made the leap, almost landing on the band members nearest the railing. The rest thought better of it and

sought alternative access.

It's the second quarter, and the band is taking quite a beating in the stands. One fan has already slapped a trumpeter across the back of the head. There's not enough room for the whole band to sit in the stands, so 30 are seated in folding chairs along the sidelines. The flag line is relegated to standing in the corner of the stadium.

The band takes the field to perform its routine, the one that has been practiced time and again all week long. The horns sound strong; the drums are precise and definitive; the flag line's movements seamlessly coordinated. The largely Iowa crowd rewards them with a stirring applause, noticeably more appreciative of this performance than that of their own band. Chests still heaving from the performance, beads of sweat running down their faces, they gulp their water between broad smiles of success.

The Cyclones win again. Five straight years. As the Cyclone players slowly stream off the field, receiving handshakes and back slaps from everyone within reaching distance, and the last of the black and gold shuffle to the exits, victory music flows from these 300-plus proud Iowa State students.

The band plays the fight song one last time during its triumphant march back to the stadium. Cyclone fans emerge from the shadows to cheer their team, their school, their band. Now carrying a large aluminum ladder, I feel proud to be part of this formation, to be associated with this group. Even some of the Iowa fans join the fray.

You were the better band out there!

You guys were great; our band sucked! e

FROM EDGE PAGE 35

Shelter is alcohol and smoke free. About 45 hardcore fans are huddled in the small room waiting for the next band — Rice missed only the first band — to carry in its equipment and set up. The walls are adorned with spray paint graffiti renditions of looters and anarchy signs. Seven-inch records are

attached to the walls and placed sporadically on the rectangular ceiling tiles — some painted black, not in any particular order.

Painted just above the half-foot light green carpeted stage in sloppy writing is the phrase, "Make your own noise."

Small groups are clustered about the drafty room. As the music starts — Love Lost But Not Forgotten, from Iowa City — the huddles become one large anonymous mass in front of the stage. The music is impossibly fast, vocals screamed, guitar riffs short and quick. If there's an angry, pessimistic political message in these vocals — and there surely is — it's indistinguishable, hidden within the blistering screams.

A semicircle forms in the front of the crowd as 20 kids begin pushing each other, forming a chaotic pit of sweaty bodies. The walls of the Fallout Shelter have scars from these pit battles — one body-sized imprint and another hole about the size of a human head.

Mosh pits and heavy music may not be every parent's dream, but certainly the straight-edge message is a welcomed pledge coming from a child. "It's a good feeling knowing some of the problems that some of the young people today have," Ronnie Slaba, Ken's mother, says. "We warned him the dangers of getting involved in drugs and things like that, but ultimately the decision was his."

Since straight edge is a life-long decision, slipping means losing respect from your fellow straight edgers. In some areas, slipping up might even be met with violence in some cases. "It just depends where you are," Rice says. In cities like Salt Lake City, as well as some on the East Coast, violence is associated with the straight edge-crowd. Rice says in Salt Lake City, a group of militant, straight edgers have turned their camaraderie into gang-like violence — beating up and even killing people they see smoking or drinking. Cases like these have also popped up on the East Coast.

"There are a lot of kids out on the east coast, who, although they don't do drugs or alcohol, won't accept the label