Marching man

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Tony Labat is a junior in music. Beginning in middle school, with a free flute (yes, he plays the flute), Labat moved up through the woodwind ranks to become the principal flute of the wind ensemble in his high school concert band. In high school, Labat preferred concert band to marching band, but that would change when he got to college and saw his first game at ISU. It only took one look at a well-practiced collegiate marching band having fun out on the field to get him hooked.

As most people know, band is a social entity not unlike a cult. A band has its own subculture. Band isn’t just a place for music majors, either; they recruit for a wide range of educational calling. In fact, there are only eight music majors in the entire band. The rest are a sampler plate of ISU majors. “I didn’t even know there was a forestry major until I met one in the marching band,” Labat said.

This diversity of students from across the college provides an incubator for friendships with students that would never meet outside of class. Or in class, for that matter. Of course, the marching band isn’t an exclusive group. “We like other people; we don’t just hang out with each other,” says Labat.

Training begins in mid-August, and the first three days of band camp are dedicated to goal setting and leadership, discussing what direction the band will take that year. About a week before classes start for the fall, the rest of the band shows up and rehearsal begins. Marching band at the collegiate level is an enormous time commitment. Usually one or two people drop due purely to time constraints, but most of the members are extremely dedicated. Rehearsal ends in early January if ISU makes a bowl game. If not, band ends with the semester.

Labat says the ISU Marching Band doesn’t compete against other bands, either. “That’s not our style.” Instead, they’re an entertainment band, and they’re “all about creating the atmosphere.” And the students who work with the staff of the band require even more time to prepare. They’re the first to show up for the season. The drum major (not as in an ISU major; it’s a position in the band) acts as the liaison between the band and the staff; he or she has to know the music better than anyone else in order to lead.

Marching band runs like a well-oiled machine. Auditions for leadership positions are held at the end of each year; people who work within the band are guides and section leaders. These students start leadership training before everyone else shows up in August. The director is the brain, the staff does set up, and the drum major is everything else; basically he’s the face of the band. Labat plans on auditioning for drum major saying, “I can’t help but want to be more involved.” Labat believes he’s “got what it takes” and that he could contribute a lot of energy to the marching band. SARAH HUEMPFNER