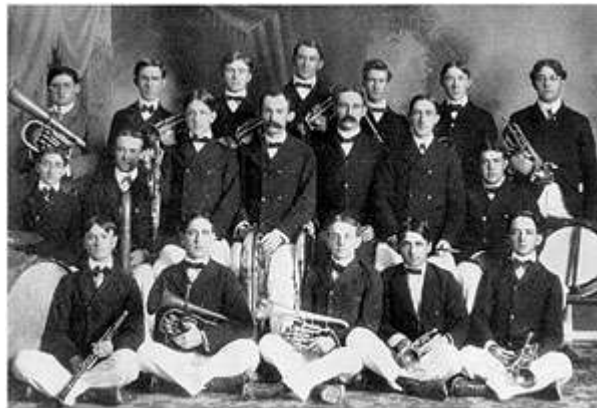


A Blast From The Past



Just once a year, usually on a crisp fall morning, a very unique group of individuals gather on a practice football field in Austin, Texas, to take part in an organization that is the largest of its kind in the world. These men and women come from all walks of life, and many travel from great distances to play music together. They are called the Longhorn Alumni Band and count membership in the thousands. On that one particular weekend they arrive from all over the United States and from many different countries. These enthusiastic individuals are not normally musicians in their day jobs, but young and old business professionals, some of whom have been attending over a period of many decades. To most outsiders, very little is known of this group, and how they came to be. Being often asked about the history of this group, this summary is an attempt to explain, from one prospective, the flavor of a unique organization that has entertained hundreds of thousands of applauding football fans during football halftimes at the University of Texas' Memorial Stadium.

Background



Longhorn Band in 1900

To explain the background, one has to include a brief history of the Texas Longhorn Band itself. The Longhorn Band was founded in 1900 by a distinguished professor of chemistry, Dr.E.P. Schoch. Envisioning marching bands as an inspiring addition

to the turn of the century football season, Dr. Schoch, along with Dr. H.E. Baxter, the first director, recruited sixteen students and spent \$150.00 at Jackson's Pawn Shop in downtown Austin for instruments, In early years the band was not a part of the music department at UT, but received partial funds from the athletic department and generous donors. The first Longhorn Band Hall was a little shack on campus known as the chemistry lab. Later, in 1947 the band moved to an old wooden World War II barracks building that was to serve as a temporary band hall.....a temporary hall that was to last for 22 years. The early uniforms were very ornate embroidered cowboy outfits with the cowboy hats that were to later give way to military style uniforms with crushed style hats. The students got minimal credit for participation but membership consisted of just about anyone that could hold an instrument. There were no auditions. On road trips the band slept at the Salvation Army. Competing with the Texas Aggie Band became a joke for many years, but in the latter fifties, a small group of bandsmen went to a University of Texas Dean to air out the grievances about the quality of the Longhorn Band, and the very next year Vincint R. DiNino came onboard to upgrade the band and, the rest is history. A major change that took place in the Longhorn Band during the DiNino era was the admission of women. Until 1956, the only women in the marching band were the majorettes. Ten girls were admitted in the fall of 1956 and the first to march with the Longhorn Band was Leah Raye Sexton, in January 1957 during the Governor's Inaugural Parade. In the fall of 1957, an Asian flu epidemic swept through campus. So many bandsmen were ill the weekend of the Oklahoma game that women were called to the rescue and have been marching ever since.

The band soon became part of the music department, auditions were held, and the cowboy hats returned. In 1986 the Longhorn Band was officially recognized as the nation's top collegiate marching band by being awarded the John Philip Sousa Foundation Sudler Trophy. Today, only a select group of the many new applicants are chosen for the freshman class, and most have the reputation of being the top musicians in their respective high schools.

The Beginnings

The Longhorn Alumni Band began in 1964 with 67 members. Director Vince DiNino initiated the idea of forming such a group, and 4 couples joined together to formulate the plans. Married former band students, Patsy & Jimmy Hejl, Pat & Max Loughmiller, Betty Ruth & Dickie Dove and Becky & Malcolm Fox were the first members to organize the band. The premier halftime performance in 1964 was caught on film, and later inscribed on one of the archive Alumni Band DVDs. The organization began to grow larger and more popular as the years passed, and today, can proudly claim a membership of over 3000 members.

On Friday nights before a scheduled performance those members who can attend early, now gather for a music rehearsal and business meeting in the current

Longhorn Band Hall, which is the only portion of a building on the University of Texas at Austin campus that is named after an organization.



Checking Out the Music on Friday

The halftime show sheet music is checked out, donated instruments are acquired (if not owned), and the rehearsal begins. In between numbers, announcements are made about the Saturday performance, a business meeting is held, new officers are elected, and scholarship checks are given out in person to present Longhorn Band students. A major annual goal of the organization is to provide thousands of dollars to worthy students, which are given by the former band members and other generous donors. The meeting ends with the playing of the “Eyes of Texas”. Although both are now retired, former directors Moten Crockett and Vincent DiNino still attend regularly to conduct musical selections.



Friday Night Rehearsal

Saturday morning often starts as early as 5 or 6 AM depending on the time of the Longhorn football game. The alumni marching band meets for coffee and donuts on an outdoor football practice facility prior to entering the adjacent inflated big bubble covering an indoor football field. Approximately 650 to 850 have to enter the bubble through a revolving door one at a time, so it takes some time to assemble the group. Inside, the halftime show is charted and the section leaders meet to form the show. Each participant is assigned a space on the field and the practice starts with a walk through without music. Once the formations are established, the rehearsal is done with instruments playing. Marching down the field, the band is instructed to take 6 steps to the five-yard markers to insure everyone arrives at the respective yard line markers at the same time, keeping the columns and lines straight. The rehearsal is done in a remarkable 2 hours or so.



Lining Up in The Bubble

Next, the alumni band moves to the outside field to join with the Longhorn Band in assembling the combined part of the halftime performance. After about 2 practice runs, which take another hour or so, the show rehearsal is complete. All then return to the band hall for a large barbecue, and to check out orange vests that are to be a big part of the uniform at the game. Those who march on the field are instructed to wear white shirts and black pants to complete the total outfit for halftime.



On the Outdoor Practice Field

Prior to game time, a big scheduled event is the march-in from the band hall to the tunnel leading into Memorial Stadium. By lining up 6 musicians across, the marching column appears to be at least an eighth of a mile long as it winds its way into the entry chute of the stadium playing, traditional Texas fight songs, “Texas Fight” and “Grandioso. “ Inside the stadium, The Alumni Band is normally seated near the south end zone occupying approximately 850 seats, which would normally sell for about \$64,000 to paying customers. However the seats are free for the alumni group, thanks to the generosity of the athletic department, and family members are able to purchase surrounding seats through the Alumni Band.



LHAB In the Stands

At halftime, the band curls on to the field from the sidelines, and begins its part of the show following the Longhorn Band performance. Later in the program, the two groups perform together. The entire field is often completely covered with over 1000 musicians playing in unison. When the halftime show is completed, the Alumni Band returns to the assigned seating area, and is served complimentary soft drinks, apples and water. At the final gun, the football game comes to an end, and it's all over till next year. However, smaller groups do gather across Texas for pep bands at University functions throughout the year, but the big bash is always in the fall at Austin. Also, because the University of Texas supports the Longhorn Band with many thousands of dollars each year, the pep bands often perform for various campus functions.



Wall-to-Wall Longhorn Alumni Band

Photo by Kent Kostka



A Final Result and Tribute to Vince DiNino with the LHB Photo by Kent Kostka

I have been playing in this group for longer than I can remember. What is truly amazing is that these musicians are lawyers, doctors, dentists, accountants, engineers, scientists and from many other professions willing to give up their time not only to perform on the field, but also make monetary donations for scholarships. Members range from the twenties to the eighties in age. In fact years ago, Carl Widen, who was over 100 years old never failed to attend the Longhorn Alumni Band meeting until his death. And what is remarkableCarl was one of the original 16 who formed the very first Texas Longhorn Band in 1900.

As mentioned earlier, I am always asked how the band got started and what they are all about. This summary is an attempt to explain much of the background and origination of a truly unique group of musicians. Although there are now many similar alumni bands on college campuses, the Longhorn Alumni Band of the University of Texas at Austin is largest and proudest and one of the very first organizations of its kind in the entire world. Also, this unique group will probably survive for many more years after us older University of Texas grads are gone.

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