

PLAYIN' IN THE BAND

These heroes of halftime reveal their traditions and prove there's more to marching than meets the eye

From the stands at halftime, they look like an Etch-a-Sketch. In a wave of sound and color, rapid patterns flex and flow across the field. Flaming batons fly through the air, whirling in sync with bright flags and the sound of the bass drum.

But marching band members know there's more than patterns and songs that make them unique. A distinctive breed, they tolerate and even revel in humiliating initiations, garish uniforms and enough school spirit to provoke nausea.

The bands' demeanors vary as much as their types of marching styles; some maintain a traditional approach while others specialize in dancing and Hollywood-style theatrics. And despite their differences, they're a vital part of the pageantry, pomp and circumstance that is college football today.

Being in the band at Stanford U. means mauling and brawling on the field.

The band scatters from one formation to the next instead of marching and pokes fun at other bands for their serious marching styles. In one show, the group formed two straight lines passing through each other. One band member "accidentally" bumped another and the entire band broke into a fight complete with swords and light sabers until everyone was dead on the field. Talk about a sweet way to vent hostilities; imagine what it's like to party with them.

"Band is something to break the daily routine and relieve the stress of everyday life," says Casey O'Hara, a senior who manages Stanford's band. "It's something to look forward to on weekends — you get to waste a whole Saturday at tailgates and at the game."

At Texas A&M U., band members look forward to Saturdays, although one of their routines borders on the impossible.

Military precision is the key to the band's stepping style, even when they perform the "impossible drill" in which members form an incredibly dense rectangle in the center of the field.

"We have four people in the same place at the same time, coming from different directions at a 45-degree angle," says Ray Toler, director of the band. "The computer couldn't plot the program; it's the personal give-and-take that allows it. I think that's why they call it impossible."

At Florida A&M U. people attend games just to see the band, known for a special step called "The Rattler." The band gives speed new meaning by running 280 steps a minute — a little more than four steps a second. "It's very strenuous, but you get your energy from the roar of the crowd," says Shepiro Hardemon, section leader of the flag corps. "The crowd makes you want to march forever."

Being in that crowd is awesome, too, says Ellis Dean, a junior at Florida A&M.

"It's like controlled pandemonium. It looks like they're all running — scattering — but they all know exactly what they're doing. It's wild."

After psyching up the crowd through controlled chaos, the band is known for moves that could make John Travolta retire his dancing shoes.

"We do 2 1/2 to three-minute dance routines," Hardemon says. "We teach them in a day, but it takes a week to have them perfected."

That perfection is crucial, especially if the band is in a movie or on a TV show.

The U. of Southern California group — Hollywood's band — has performed for productions, including *The Naked Gun*, *Doogie Houser* and *L.A. Law*.

"For the movies you have to do take after take and that makes for a long day," says Stephen Ortiz, manager of the band. "But you get used to it. It's fun interacting with the stars. We don't do it enough to get bored."

And they don't look bored either — band members wear everything from huge fuzzy hats to sequined, metallic-trimmed jackets providing for, if nothing else, some fashion amusement.

The USC uniform features gold helmets and a profile of an ancient



EDWARD CROCKETT

By ALLISON HARTSOE, *The Post*, OHIO U.

Trojan stitched in gold braid on the jackets.

"We view ourselves as gladiators going into battle," says Art Bartner, director of the band.

At Princeton U., band members wear plaid orange and black jackets and boaters (straw hats). Members have worn the boaters since the band's inception, and in 1955 the plaid jackets were a move away from formality, says Wolff Dobson, drill master of the band.

"The worst thing we do to new members is give them the jackets," Dobson says.

And Ohio State U.'s white cross belts have caused them trouble at least once.

"It was quite a few years ago, but one time an alto horn player hooked onto another player's cross belt during an OSU show," says senior band member Javan Dotson. "He dragged her all the way to the top of the 'O' in the 'Ohio' formation," she says.

But complications produced by unruly uniforms can't crush what really provides the bands with a sense of purpose — traditions.

Each band is broken into instrument divisions, and often it's the section traditions that bond a group of members.

The tuba section undoubtedly is the craziest group in many bands. Their

behavioral disorders may stem from a shortage of oxygen to the brain acquired while playing the huge instruments.

The U. of Nebraska tubas take a day to be different when they climb 98 rows of stairs with their instruments and conduct section rehearsals at the top. At Stanford, the tuba players paint the inside of their white fiberglass sousaphones with pictures. When the Ohio State band travels, one bus is the singing bus, led by the tubas.

But USC's Ortiz, a six-year band member, says being a tuba player isn't a fun and games. "It happened during Notre Dame show about three years ago," he says. "She was a short woman — the tuba looked as big as her — but she marched as hard as the big guys. The wind caught the top of the bell [of the sousaphone] and threw her back. She had to struggle out from under the tuba and run to catch up."

But then that's par for the course for a group of students that doesn't mind donning plaid jackets and bell-bottoms and "dying" mid-performance for the sake of tradition.

"In high school people said, 'Oh those band fags,' but in college people think you're a celebrity," says OSU's Dotson. "When you have a band jacket on people look up to you."