

## **Pride of Maine Black Bear Marching Band**

Orono, Maine

The university marching band is an important facet of American vernacular musical expression. It is today a highly structured and disciplined form, but one that quickly adapts to popular musical trends. With a rich history dating back to the 1880s, The University of Maine's Pride of Maine Black Bear Marching Band is one of the finest examples of the collegiate marching band, drawing on both contemporary and classic repertoires to inspire and entertain.

Since ancient times, mobile musical groups have been a part of the pageantry and public display that kings and potentates employed to enhance their power and influence, impress visitors and created fear in enemies. Eventually these "first marching bands" became important to martial groups in battle. They regulated the functioning of armies in the field by keeping time during marching and maneuvers, communicating orders and generally bolstering morale. The origins of European and American march music can be traced to the military music of the Ottoman Empire. A feature of this music was the extensive use of percussion, such as cymbals, which served to frighten opponents. Europeans were first exposed to Ottoman military music in the early 1700s. By the early 1800s a vogue for Turkish marching bands swept the Continent, reaching the United States via France and Germany in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. This newly-introduced military march music tradition largely replaced the fife and drum corps that had been attached to U.S. military units since the Revolutionary War.

The early university marching bands were modeled after American military parade bands. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, "March King" John Philip Sousa, director of United States Marine Band from 1880 – 1892, toured this professional military band, performing many of his own compositions. This ignited a national movement of community and school-based marching bands, which received a major boost after World War I by the introduction of band music into the public school systems.

It was during the same period that football took hold in the collegiate system, and providing a venue for university bands that would become a ubiquitous component of the American collegiate experience. These groups typically performed standard military march arrangements at half-time. Larger university bands began to break from this military style, and in 1907, Purdue University was the first to create letter formations on the field out of musicians. Other schools soon followed. By the '30s Big-Ten bands abandoned the military style altogether and developed fast moving, choreographed half-time shows replete with baton twirling, giant bass drums, and even singing. This style dominated the marching band system until the early 1980s when the "corps-style" band gained widespread popularity.

The modern drum-and bugle corps evolved concurrently with the university marching band, and drum corps marching style and music exerted a profound influence. In the late 1970s larger university bands adopted the "glide-step" used by corps-style bands. Marching with a fluid heel-to-toe roll instead of a high step promoted a still upper body that allowed for greater musical control while moving.

The Pride of Maine Black Bear Marching Band was founded as a cadet-core attached to the schools ROTC program in the mid-1880s. For much of its history it was a student and community organization known simply as the “Black Bear Marching Band.” It wasn’t until the 1960s that the school hired its first full time director. Pride of Maine is known the country over for its fight song, the Maine “Stein Song.” A pair of University students, inspired by a German drinking song, wrote it in 1902. By 1907, the Stein Song was adopted as the school’s fight. Famous crooner and former U. Mainer Rudy Vallee recorded an adaptation of the song that became a national hit in 1930.

In 1994, percussionist and longtime Maine resident, Christopher White took over the helm of the Black Bear Marching Band. One of the first things Mr. White did was to add the moniker “Pride of Maine” to the group’s name, and to convert it to a primarily corps-style band. He has built upon the band’s deep musical foundation and works closely with its nearly 100 musicians to ensure that the repertoire is exciting and relevant. As he says, “If the audience doesn’t get it in ten seconds, they are going to go buy a hotdog.”