Drake University Bands
125 Years of Excellence
1881-2006

Prologue

I first heard Drake’s concert band on tour in 1969. On the podium was Don Marcouiller, legendary director of bands at the university for more than three decades. The music of Grainger, Mendelssohn, and Ginastera was virtually intoxicating.

On this, the 125th year anniversary of the university, I became nostalgic and inquisitive. When did Drake’s band begin? What factors led to its development? Besides Marcouiller, who else led the bands? What is known about these leaders, their contributions to the program, and students? Finally, what is the program like today?

Nathen Jones, former Drake flute professor, wrote a history of the university music department in its first half-century with limited information about the earliest bands. What about the last seventy-five years? Here is the rest of the story.

The “Band Boys,” 1881-1898

In the beginning, sounds of music were heard at Drake. When the university opened in 1881, the catalog described a curriculum in voice and piano. At the same time, a band led by a student was likely formed. Still, no written account of Drake’s band surfaced until four years later when The Delphic, the student “magazine,” announced: “the band boys are learning to play some fine pieces.” John Drake, son of the university’s namesake Francis Marion Drake, served as student leader of the first known university band. He also “alternated” between playing B-flat clarinet and E-flat cornet. Other versatile members of this fourteen-piece group played more than one instrument as well! Here is a description of John Drake’s band from the April 1885 Delphic:

The band is doing fine work and is an honor to the college. The boys are very generous with their music, often giving open-air concerts and serenading the people of University Place and Des Moines. The band boys will give a concert and social on Thursday evening, April 16. All are comparatively new men, except J.A. Drake, who was an old member of the famous Centerville band; E.W. Woodward, a former member of the Pella band; and J.F. Beeler of the Highland band of Highland, Kansas. An excellent program has been prepared and a good time is expected.
The “band boys” played for commencement that spring and were well received. The next thirteen years, however, were inconsistent. In 1891, the band was declared “invisible,” and the question was asked, “Where is it?” Finally, in 1898, there was an answer.

**Introducing the Drake Band, 1898-1909**

The “college brass band” was introduced in 1898. Frank Held was hired as director of the band and teacher of mandolin and guitar. He maintained a private music studio in Des Moines and was also a part-time faculty member of the university.

A debut concert by Held’s group was presented and new equipment was acquired. Growth followed, with more performances scheduled and increased numbers of players added to the band. By faculty permission, a credit was assigned to band students with the expectation that they should be “punctual and regular in attendance.” A call was put out for more clarinetists, a piccolo player, and “slide” trombonists.

In 1903, Elmer Kaye Smith was appointed director. Claude Prusia was cornet soloist in Smith’s group of twenty-seven pieces. The first known Drake band program appeared in the 1904 *Quax*, the student yearbook. Selections listed were an overture, *The Bohemian Girl* by Balfe, waltzes by Bennett and Hall, the cornet solo *Flirtations Polka* by Barnhouse (with Prusia as soloist), and marches by Alexander, Dalby, Emms, Bell, Barnhouse, and Zickel. In 1905, new “suits” were ordered for personnel to wear and performances in 1906, 1907, and 1908 were pronounced “splendid,” a “decided success,” and a “hit.” Drake band directors in this period were George F. Peters, Fred W. Swanson, and Ray Godden.

**A Period of Expansion, 1909-1924**

Enthusiasm was evident when John Beeston was named director in 1909 by Drake’s fine arts dean, Holmes Cowper. Beeston was a well-known musician throughout the state, with notoriety stemming from lyrics he wrote to the “Iowa Corn Song.” Beeston was born in England, educated at Trinity College, London, and studied with George Miller, bandmaster of the Royal Marines. Later, Beeston became one of the most popular organ builders and designers in Iowa.

In 1911, the Drake concert band appeared on tour in Kansas and the next year the marching band played at football games. Band members received an “emblem of honor” in 1913. The emblem was in the form of a ‘D’ (similar to D’s awarded letterman football players). Soon after, the band appeared at a Missouri vs. Drake football game in Columbia, Missouri.
Although the university men’s union published an acknowledgment to the band in 1914, oddly enough the ensemble came to a “sudden end” in October. A local circus inspired the group to reassemble within several days, and when the question was asked: “Shall Drake have a band?” the answer was “Yes!” A revitalized Drake band led the way to hear Billy Sunday in Des Moines. Almost immediately, the band drew up a constitution with plans made for the 1915 season.

“Open-air concerts” were held, performances were given in chapel, and the band paraded the streets at the May breakfast. Bandsmen were awarded sweaters as further incentive. In the fall, thirty-four members returned to play in the band led by Cecil F. Cheverton. John Vecci and John Herman succeeded Cheverton.

Curtis Gregory, director in 1917, recruited players of more mature quality enabling the band to become a popular organization on campus. Charles Bushman led the 1923 Drake “military band,” also designated as the 351st infantry reserve band of the United States. Succeeding Bushman as directors were J. Worth Allen and Gail Fitch.

The Drake Band Matures, 1924-1937

Alonzo Leach, one of the more effective directors of Drake’s band, was appointed to the position in 1924. His musical training was completed at the Gilliland Band School and Chicago Musical College. Leach was editor of the *Hawkeye Musician* and a member of numerous instrumental ensembles, including Karl King’s band. He operated a music company in Des Moines for forty-five years, was a founder and secretary of the Iowa Bandmasters Association, and also directed the Ga-Zig Shrine band in Des Moines.

Increased activity occurred during Alonzo Leach’s tenure. His ensemble organized an honorary society, appeared in south central Iowa on tour, played at a Nebraska vs. Drake football game, and received new uniforms. Most significantly, a tour to Europe was scheduled. Irving H. Grossman, band manager, made the announcement about this in a May 1929 *Delphic* article. According to the press release, a party of four hundred was to have departed on tour the first week of July 1930. High school musicians throughout Iowa were to participate in a group of fifty players with “special rates” of $450.00 offered. On the itinerary were concert dates in France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, and England.
For reasons unknown and yet suspected, the tour apparently did not occur. Regrettably, no other record can be found. In the first two years of the Depression, the sum of $450.00 may have been too steep for most young musicians. Because Alonzo Leach was no longer director, this transition may not have lent itself to such ambitious travel plans.

Even so, the Drake marching band made its first appearance in 1929 at Chicago’s Soldier Field for a Notre Dame vs. Drake football game. The Bulldogs played the Irish that year before nearly 50,000 fans. Drake led 7-6, entering the fourth quarter. At the final gun, the Bulldogs had played their closest game of the series, finally succumbing to Knute Rockne’s team, 19-7. According to the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, “those who came to Soldier Field Saturday afternoon with the expectation of seeing the nationally famous Notre Dame team romp through the formality of playing a football game thrilled instead to the wonderful game battle staged by the little team from Des Moines.” Archival game programs are currently listed for as much as $795.00!

Following Alonzo Leach was Gunnar Malmin, noted choral director and author, who later served as music professor at Dana College and Pacific Lutheran University. A Des Moines dentist and 1912 Drake alumnus, Dr. A. Paul Atkins, was appointed director in October 1930. Atkins resigned in November 1931.

Harry Warfel, former band director and clarinet professor at the University of Nebraska and a member of Sousa’s band, was named Drake’s band director in December 1931. Leading the Drake bands in 1932 was Harold Woolridge, who was also a clarinetist and soloist in Sousa’s band during the 1921-1928 seasons. In 1933, Harry Warfel returned to the podium and awarded thirty-five bandsmen sweaters and caps. Women were not allowed in the marching band in 1935, an issue that led in part to an all-women marching band at Drake three years later. In one of his last appearances, Warfel’s band presented a tribute to Stephen Foster.

**The Bird Years, 1937-1954**

Following Harry Warfel in February 1937 was Gordon Bird. Bird’s tenure marked the first time stability in leadership of the band was attained. Moreover, he may have been one of the most academically accomplished directors in its history. His philosophy of university band
conducting engaged students in a comprehensive program. Bird’s students not only experienced
large ensemble performance but they also rehearsed chamber music and studied composition.

According to Dr. Bird:

A comprehensive program in the band department was expected. We learned about all
aspects of such a curriculum at Drake in our music education courses and throughout our
academic experience. Regular performances by faculty members were on Tuesday
evenings and weekly general recitals featuring students were on Wednesday afternoons
throughout my undergraduate days at Drake. Having these performances, some with
student compositions on the program alone, helped stimulate us as we listened to our
professors and helped motivate us to get ready for our own appearances. In short, a
comprehensive program was part of the “scene” in my student days at Drake, and I made
certain it became part of the curriculum when I became director of bands.

Gordon Bird was born in Fairmont, Minnesota. He was inspired in music by his
grandfather, who was influential in beginning Fairmont’s city band in the late nineteenth century.
An uncle bought Gordon his first cornet and later financed his Drake education. Guy Donnelly,
Bird’s high school band director, also encouraged him to pursue a musical career. Gordon Bird
was originally attracted to the university by a Drake staff recruiter, although the first time Bird
saw the campus was when he enrolled in 1932. In his freshman year, room and board was $4.00
a week and the charge for tuition was $115.00 each semester.

Bird was graduated from Drake in 1936. The next year he served as assistant band
director at Drake and taught brass lessons as well as instrumental methods. Bird was also
employed as a part-time band director at Linden, Redfield, and Dowling high schools near Des
Moines. He resigned from Linden and Redfield when he became Drake’s director and remained
at Dowling until 1942.

At first, Gordon Bird was the only full-time faculty member in the band department. A
part-time clarinet instructor, J.B. Snyder, who had been concertmaster of the band at Drake,
provided assistance. In one of its first performances under Bird, his marching band played at a
Notre Dame vs. Drake football game in South Bend featuring “airplane stunts” at halftime. The
sum of $300.00, issued by Drake’s business manager, funded students who carpooled to Notre
Dame. They received $5.00 for the trip with the hope that Bird would “see them in South Bend
on Saturday at 2:00 p.m.” Everyone arrived on time and returned safely making the venture memorable and rewarding. NBC sportscaster Bill Stern commented, “They’re a boost and a credit to any school; one of the best to ever play and march across the field.”

Tours were launched in Gordon Bird’s first year as director to help recruit new personnel and get ready for campus performances. The inauguration of a formal dance sponsored by the band was announced in 1938 as well as radio broadcasts on KRNT, MBS, and WOI. A Mutual Radio Network broadcast featured Drake’s concert band playing Sousa’s U.S. Field Artillery March, a transcription of Egmont Overture by Beethoven, Francis Pyle’s American Gothic, and Marine’s Hymn.

During his early years at Drake, Gordon Bird earned a master’s degree in music from Northwestern University where he played principal trumpet in the summer band. His doctoral degree in education was awarded at Columbia University, where he studied with Harry Glantz, principal trumpet in Toscanini’s NBC Orchestra. Bird also supervised music student teachers, many of these Julliard students. Later, he was president of the Iowa Music Educators Association and vice-president of the North Central division of the Music Educators National Conference. He organized and served as president of the Central Iowa Bandmasters Association as well.

A Drake variety show called “Kollege Kapers” expanded into a musical comedy in the late 1930s. Drake’s band sponsored the show under the baton of Bird. These productions attracted students throughout the student body. Beyond financial return, Kollege Kapers helped cultivate a bond among band personnel. Gordon Bird recalls that:

performances of Kollege Kapers were held in the Auditorium. The idea of Kollege Kapers was a “winner.” In fact, two of the leads in a production of Kollege Kapers from my period, Bill Lee and Ada Beth Peaker (who were later married), landed in the movie version of The Sound of Music. Ada was a nun and Bill was the singing “voice” for Christopher Plummer, who starred opposite Julie Andrews.

University service was also provided in Bird’s development of massed bands at Drake Relays. Dr. Bird was a member of the Relays committee, composed of university personnel and prominent citizens from the Des Moines area. Bird remembers this about his Relays experience:

I remember one year at Drake Relays, Karl King appeared as guest conductor. We rehearsed where Cowles Library is now located. And, it rained! Band uniforms seemed to shrink before our eyes. Another time, Ronald Reagan was grand marshal, and I had the honor of having lunch with him. The tradition of Relays is an important part of what Drake stands for.
Women band students at Drake proposed that an all-women marching band be considered in 1938. With Gordon Bird’s approval, this marching band was created and it appeared regularly throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s. While few groups like it were in existence in the country, members of the all-women marching band bought their own uniforms for $25.00. The only time they could find to rehearse was 7:00 a.m. “These young ladies were dedicated,” Bird recalls.

In this same period, an African American all-women band was stationed at Fort Des Moines. Allied with the Women’s Air Corps, it was the first and only black military band in the United States. Sherrie Tucker (“Swing Shift: All Girl-Bands of the 1940s,” Duke University, 2001) reports that these WAC’s spent some of their limited pay on music classes at Drake.

In 1941, the 85-piece Drake band played a winter concert featuring works of Liszt, Herbert, and Strauss. In the same year, summer band concerts were scheduled with twenty performances in the fall and spring. Mickey Lipman and Kenneth Kincheloe directed Drake’s band while Gordon Bird was leading Air Force bands during World War II in New Mexico and Texas. Sgt. Bird assumed leadership of these service bands conducting fine players from Iowa and Boston as well as Hollywood studio musicians. His memory of this period is sharp.

*We* were the entertainment. Our bands were not only military but diverse ensembles able to play in a variety of settings. Some weeks we played four dances in one night, paraded the next day, and performed transcriptions of great overtures from the orchestral repertoire the following evening. I grew dramatically as a conductor. The kinds of music and sorts of places we played forced me to consider the full gamut of band music. This development led to my becoming versatile, comfortable, and successful in virtually any arena in the band world.

Drake professor of piano Paul Stoye was a featured soloist with the concert band in 1942. The ensemble continued its series of tours including the 1949 trip of over a thousand miles. In the late 1940s, the band performed music of Gershwin on KRNT and on WOI, accompanying soloist Leroy Bauer.

Harold Hines conducted the Drake bands in 1949 and 1950 while Gordon Bird was on academic leave. Hines also served as director of bands at Southern Illinois University and director of the 543rd Army Air Force band in Winter Field, California. He finished his career as associate professor of music at Arizona State University.
The Drake varsity band played a tribute for Dad’s Day in 1949 and the next year a concert at Fireman’s Day in Atlantic, Iowa. A scholarship gift from donor Paul Monroe three years later paved the way for support of Drake band students for decades. Monroe first encountered Gordon Bird when Monroe’s son, James, was a classmate of Bird. Paul Monroe asked Bird if he could use some money to support the bands. Bird replied, “Of course, and what else do you want to know?” Initially, Paul Monroe gave $10,000.00, largely because of his respect for Dr. Bird and his wife.

Gordon Bird invited former directors Beeston, Leach, and Atkins to guest conduct Drake’s band at a pops concert in 1953. John Beeston led *Sempre Fidelis* by Sousa and Beeston’s own *Iowa Corn Song*. Alonzo Leach conducted *Americans We* by Henry Fillmore and Paul Atkins directed Sousa’s *U.S. Field Artillery March*.

Comments by Atkins and Beeston were made too. Atkins recalled performing as a student under John Beeston and playing in a highly acclaimed radio performance by Drake’s band. In addition, Atkins paid tribute to servicemen abroad referring to the Sousa march he conducted. Beeston remembered his twenty-eight-piece band, the May festival on campus, his teacher-student relationship with Paul Atkins, and playing bassoon in the Des Moines Symphony Orchestra. Beeston also marveled at the continued progress of the Drake music program and referred to his *Iowa Corn Song*, recalling that on parade in Washington, D.C. his band played it 111 times! Other distinguished guest conductors of Drake’s band in the 1940s and 1950s were Mark Hindsley, Ray Dvorak, Glenn Bainum, Clarence Sawhill, and Karl King.

In a climactic Drake performance in 1954, Gordon Bird and his band appeared in a National Music Educators National Conference concert. This may have been Dr. Bird’s finest Drake concert and proudest moment. A transcription by A.A. Harding of Franck’s *Psyche and Eros* was performed. Other items were *Brazil* by Barroso, arranged by Drake student Dick Wilson, a transcription of the Shostakovich *Fifth Symphony-Finale*, and *Edged Night* by revered Drake composition professor, Francis Pyle. Nathen Jones, Drake professor of flute, was soloist in *Edged Night*. William Billingsley’s *Symphony for Winds and Percussion*, a student piece, was also performed. The highlight of this program though was Eugene List who played the Tchaikovsky B-flat minor *Piano Concerto*. Gordon Bird recalls that:

Eugene List had been invited to perform at the Potsdam Conference during World War II by Harry Truman. After the war, Mr. List was in demand as a guest artist. One of the piano professors at Drake suggested that the band make an attempt to secure him for a performance series.
In keeping with his music education philosophy, Bird’s Drake band performed original works by Francis Pyle’s graduate students later in 1954. Selections were *Symphony for Concert Band* (Jack Oatts), *Mosaic, Variations for Piano and Wind Instruments* (John Sanders), *A Japanese Symphony* (Loren Olson), *Concertino for Trumpet and Band* (Allen Clingman), and *Concert Overture* (Robert Howe).

The same year, Gordon Bird left Drake to accept a position at the Monroe Company in Colfax, Iowa. Bird considers his Drake days “marvelous” and he “loved every minute.” During his era, the Drake band enjoyed tremendous support from dean of fine arts, Frank Jordon. As many as three hundred undergraduate and graduate students studied music at the peak of this period. To address their needs, four full-time members of the band department had been added with several part-time instructors assisting. The program under Bird witnessed the introduction of graduate music offerings closely aligned with the fifty-piece Drake summer band. The Drake-Des Moines Symphony and a summer music camp for high school students also emerged. Most of all, support from other areas in the music curriculum was evident. The choral department, for example, welcomed band students in performances of *Messiah*, performed to capacity audiences of four thousand at Shrine Auditorium (KRNT Theatre) in Des Moines.

Bird returned to university band conducting at Northern Illinois University after he left the Monroe Company. In reflecting on his teaching career, Dr. Bird wrote:

I am very proud and gratified to have been associated with the many students who I have been privileged to teach. To single out the successes of any one or more individuals might be unfair, but there were many who became music teachers at all levels including university, a number were professional musicians, and many others who played because they loved music and bands.

**The Marcouiller Era, 1956-1987**

In 1956, Don Marcouiller succeeded Daniel Martino who left Drake after two years to accept a position as professor of music education at Brigham Young University. Marcouiller grew up in De Pere and Green Bay, Wisconsin. He was motivated in music by his mother, a violist, and his older brother, a trombonist. He first chose the baritone, later switching to trombone, playing his brother’s trombone. In high school, he was drum major of the Green Bay Packer Lumberjack marching band. According to Marcouiller:
My tenure with the Packer Lumberjack band was not what you would note in an obituary! The band marched before games and played the *National Anthem*, but marching was not its forte. A fine performing ensemble, it was composed of professional musicians from northern Wisconsin. This afforded me the opportunity to play the baritone in a quasi-professional setting.

In those days, baton twirling was predominately a male activity and I performed at every Packer game in Green Bay and Milwaukee during my junior and senior year of high school. Twirling became female dominated in succeeding years. Therefore, I try assiduously to keep that "skeleton in the closet."

Don Marcouiller enlisted in the Navy in 1944 and served as the drum major and a baritone player in Great Lakes Naval Training Center bands. Similar service followed in the Fleet Music School and Destroyer Base in San Diego, while fifteen months of his Navy career were spent in a Navy band in the Pacific Theater, in Adak, Alaska. He notes that, “Strangely, in godforsaken Adak, I had the opportunity to study with Robert Marstellar, a superb trombonist, who was a member of the Adak band. He performed in the San Francisco Symphony before the war.”

After being discharged, Marcouiller returned to study at the University of Wisconsin. He chose Wisconsin because he was impressed with renowned UW band director Raymond Dvorak. Marcouiller served as the Wisconsin drum major while pursuing a music degree and played in the university concert band and orchestra. When Emmit Sarig replaced Ray Dvorak during recuperation from a train accident injury, Marcouiller became an assistant director of the Wisconsin marching band. With encouragement from Sarig, Marcouiller was also named director of the Madison Boy Scout Drum and Bugle Corps. The acclaimed Madison Scouts attained high marks in the "general effect" category under Marcouiller’s leadership, a ranking that continues today.

In 1951, Marcouiller was named director of the marching band at Wisconsin. He and the UW band made their first appearance at the Rose Bowl parade and game in 1953. Marcouiller recalls the bowl trip taken by rail, with a basic block of 140 bandmen, cost $50,000.00. Madison winter weather forced all rehearsing to be done in California on the campus of Occidental College in the rain, on a muddy field. According to Marcouiller:
We cast caution aside and marched up field to *The Saint Louis Blues*, reportedly scandalizing one prominent Big Ten band director accustomed to traditional marches and fight songs! Our Rose Bowl experience was diminished by the knowledge that we were the first Big Ten team to lose there, seven to zip, to Southern California. We were consoled by believing we won the halftime, at least, by a similar score!

After earning a bachelor’s degree, Marcouiller was named director of Madison’s Edgewood high school band. His Edgewood bands won first place awards in Class D, C, B, and A in contest performance. He recalls Edgewood fondly and remembers that when he began teaching there the band budget was only $45.00 a month. In spite of such meager financial support, a group of Edgewood parents organized a band parents association that helped increase enrollment from nineteen to over eighty students. During these years, Marcouiller also completed a master’s degree in music from the University of Wisconsin.

After that, Marcouiller originated what then was a new concept of precision marching that became a model for bands throughout the United States. A description of this method is contained in his *Marching for Marching Bands*, a text that he recalls evolved “in the rain and mud of the Rose Bowl practice field.” Marcouiller developed pleurisy shortly after the Rose Bowl trip and finally contracted tuberculosis. During a year spent in a TB hospital he completed the manuscript for his marching bands book. Marcouiller doubts if it would have been written without this hiatus. According to the author:

> Experience with corps and school bands tweaked my interest in projecting the best elements of corps performance into the University of Wisconsin marching band. It resulted after years of development in the "unit system" of marching maneuvers discussed in my text, *Marching for Marching Bands*, published by William Brown, in 1958, and later released in paperback by Belwin. The system was introduced at the University of Wisconsin and developed at Drake University.

When he arrived on the campus at Drake, Don Marcouiller made a “splash.” Students soon referred to him as “Chief.” What led him to Drake? According to Chief:

> When I first heard of the Drake position, I assumed I would have to travel east to find the school. After the confusion with Duke was solved, I realized I was already familiar with Drake Relays, but I knew little about the school. I was surprised to find that the number of music students at Drake was nearly twice that of those at Wisconsin at the time. It was a quality school with an excellent faculty. When Ray Dvorak was asked to conduct at the IBA convention in spring of 1956, I traveled with him to Ames and continued on to an interview at Drake. We moved to Des Moines in August.
In his first year at Drake, Marcouiller announced that the marching band would sport a “new look,” a remake of the cap and cross belt idea from Wisconsin. “Guidons” (small flags carried by bandsmen) were added to enlarge ranks and add color. The concert band debuted in October that year and later accompanied renowned pianist Eugene List in two performances, one on television. All List accompaniments came from the United States Military Academy at West Point. An all-women concert band conducted by Robert Weast, assistant director, was formed in 1956. Drake also had a drill unit led by students called the “Toreadors,” a group of twenty-four women that performed at basketball games.

The band presented a “forward look” in 1957 and 1958 while completing a three-state tour and playing a concert in “stereophonic sound.” In 1958, Don Marcouiller conducted the Iowa all-state band and his Drake band at the Iowa Bandmasters Association convention. An all-women drill unit was organized for the Drake marching band in 1959. The following year, Eugene List returned for another concert, and Marcouiller called his Drake bandsmen the “greatest bunch on campus” in 1961.

Drake’s concert band played for an arts festival in 1962, and the next year the ensemble appeared at the South Central Iowa Band Association convention. Another “new look” was presented when Marcouiller and his marching band presided over the largest band day at the university up to that time. In 1964, the Drake concert band appeared at the Iowa Bandmasters Association convention. Conflicts with commencement ceremonies prohibited the band from appearing more often at IBA during Marcouiller’s period.

Tour performances in 1964 and 1965 were effective in recruiting talented students. Together with veteran Drake marching bandsmen, freshly enrolled musicians made their first appearance on national television in 1966 at halftime of a Chicago Bears vs. Detroit Lions game. Throughout the next two decades, the marching band played at football stadiums in Green Bay, Chicago, Kansas City, and Minneapolis. Televised professional football game appearances offered the band national exposure and students the thrill of performing before full stadium crowds. They were gratified that on a broadcast in the late 1960s a sports commentator called the group “one of the nation’s finest.”

Tryouts for an all-women flag unit in the marching band were held in 1969. The following year, Drake’s concert band and wind ensemble played at the College Band Directors National Association conference, the Iowa Bandmasters Association convention, and the
convention of the Music Educators National Conference. Selections performed were Francis Pyle’s *Trumpet Concerto*, with soloist Robert Weast, Drake professor, *Masquerade* by Vincent Persichetti, Peter Mennin’s *Canzona*, and *Drammatico* by W. Francis McBeth.

In 1971, the marching band at Drake admitted women for the first time since 1956. In a September 1971 issue of *The Times-Delphic*, Marcouiller cited two reasons for restructuring the band. He asserted that interest in a “co-ed” band was growing and that by then many women were choosing instrumental music as a college major. Although Marcouiller said the marching band had been unpopular among women in the middle 1950s, a female member of the 1971 band stated, “Girls are just as capable as male members in performing routines.” While male band members of the period were “fiercely proud of the all-male tradition,” the marching band appeared at a Chicago Bears game and the Pioneer Bowl in 1971 with men and women marching side-by-side. In the end, the co-ed band was a success and met with little opposition from staunch male members.

Drake’s marching band set a goal to become comparable to similar groups in the Big Ten. Many long-time band admirers thought this was accomplished in the early 1970s. With the opening of Harmon Fine Arts Center in 1972, the bands finally acquired a suitable rehearsal site. Throughout the first century of their existence, Drake’s bands had practiced in a variety of campus settings, including the Field House, Memorial Hall, a building marked “Orchestra and Band” (formerly a storage facility), and Missouri Hall. Rehearsal sites for the marching band in Des Moines have been a park at 17th and University, Franklin Field at 55th and Franklin, and a practice field near Drake Stadium.

During Don Marcouiller’s period all works that Vincent Persichetti wrote for winds and percussion were programmed. Persichetti’s *Parable for Band*, commissioned by Marcouiller, was performed in the new fine arts center in 1973. The composer presented the band one of the first published copies of the score with the inscription, "For Don Marcouiller and the Drake University Band, in appreciation for a delightful premiere of *Parable*, Vincent Persichetti.”

In 1974, Vincent Nelson (Drake class of 1969) was director while Don Marcouiller was on sabbatical leave. Upon Marcouiller’s return, his transcription of the Halsey Stevens *Clarinet Concerto* was premiered in 1975, with soloist James Luke, Drake professor. Other premieres of works during Don Marcouiller’s tenure were *Concerto Guibilante* (Francis Pyle), *Prometheus Overture* (Beethoven-Marcouiller), *Concerto for Clarinet and Wind Ensemble* (Halsey Stevens-
Marcouiller), *Concerto for Trumpet and Wind Ensemble* (Francis Pyle), *Concerto for Bassoon and Wind Ensemble* (Ray Luke-Weast), and *Concerto for Piano and Wind Ensemble* (Beverly Henkel).

Marcouiller invited guest conductors Col. Arnald Gabriel, Frederick Fennell, and Vaclav Nelhybel to lead the Drake concert band during his tenure. Also, Kenneth Bloomquist, Richard Floyd, Thomas Lee, Martin Mailman, James Matthews, W. Francis McBeth, James Neilson, Richard Thurston, George Wilson, and Clifton Williams were guest directors. Soloists with Marcouiller’s bands were Robert Nagel, Harvey Phillips, Leonard Sharrow (Toscanini’s bassoonist), and Leonard Smith.

In 1979, Drake’s concert band and wind ensemble appeared in Madison, Wisconsin, at a College Band Directors National Association convention, and Don Marcouiller returned to the podium to serve as guest conductor of the Iowa all-state band. In 1980, Marcouiller created the Adventureland-Drake Relays festival of bands in Des Moines. This leadership continued in his years of retirement until 2005, allowing him to continue musical influence throughout Iowa. While he was at Drake, Marcouiller served as president of the Des Moines Civic Music Association, the Iowa Bandmasters Association, and the North Central Division of the College Band Directors National Association. His fraternal affiliations are with Phi Beta Mu, Pi Kappa Lambda, Kappa Kappa Psi, Omicron Delta Kappa, and Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia. He is also an elected member of the prestigious American Bandmasters Association.

Beyond these distinctions, Don Marcouiller served longer than any other director of bands in Drake’s history. Admired by students, staff, and alumni, he made an indelible mark on the campus. His concert bands, wind ensembles, and marching bands were recognized across the country. The *Des Moines Register and Tribune* and the *Green Bay Gazette* noted that Drake bands under Don Marcouiller were among the “nation’s top-five collegiate organizations” of their time. He has devoted memories of his career, but finds “they all blend together in a feeling of gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of the lives of many young people, brilliant colleagues, and an outstanding university!”

Marcouiller’s philosophy of music education is captured unmistakably (with his trademark use of punctuation marks) in the following excerpt from *The School Musician*.

When one is asked to state his or her convictions concerning music education all the truisms, adages, pronouncements, and "pearls of wisdom" we have enunciated in a lifetime of classrooms and rehearsal rooms flash through one's mind … "the universal language," "consumers of music," "lifelong aesthetic appreciation" … The list goes on … all convictions, all commandments.
The value of music education seems explicit in the term itself … music is unavoidably a part of every life, be it the life of a consumer, a student or a professional musician … and education … the process of sharing one's love of music with others. Music is the value and education is the process. We conductors and teachers of music rejoice that we have the opportunity to be a small part of that process!

**The Drake Band Enters the 21st Century**

Robert Meunier was chosen to succeed Don Marcouiller in 1988. As director of bands and associate professor of percussion at Drake, Muenier is founder and conductor of the wind symphony as well as director of the marching band and percussion program. These organizations continue the proud tradition of excellence of the band program, with players drawn from the finest wind and percussion students at the university. Meunier is dedicated to performing the highest quality literature from chamber wind works to contemporary band repertoire, and his wind symphony maintains the long tradition of annual Drake band tours to regional cities.

Music making, particularly singing, was an important part of Meunier’s family life in Grafton, Wisconsin, as was listening to big band music with his father. These musical influences shaped his career. Regarding his experience as a young musician, he recalls:

> When I was between fourth and fifth grade, much to the initial chagrin of my parents, I began playing the drums in the band. My mom recounts how I began as a percussionist because it only cost $1.98 for a pair of drumsticks and a drum pad! I enjoyed drumming but did not play any mallet percussion instruments until I entered college. When I began high school, I joined the band and choral programs.

The Grafton band program entered competitions sponsored by the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. These competitions involved concert band performances, parade marching, field shows, and a military style inspection. I remember my first concert band rehearsals as an entering freshman in summer band. The repertoire was Holst’s *First Suite in E-flat*, Vaughan Williams’ *Toccata Marziale*, and William Schuman’s *Chester Overture*. These selections remain among my favorite works in the band literature.

Meunier earned an undergraduate degree in music education from the University of Mary in North Dakota. While at Mary, he had altered his major to music education with a performance emphasis and became a practice “fanatic” on the marimba and vibraphone. He began listening to Bach, Stravinsky, Debussy, and Bartok as well as Miles Davis, Weather Report, Chick Corea, and Herbie Hancock. This stimulated Meunier to pursue orchestral and jazz playing and later to apply to graduate schools in percussion performance. Becoming a band director was not even on his list of options and was “the last thing” he thought he would ever become!
After he completed his degree in North Dakota, Meunier accepted an assistantship at the University of Wisconsin as the drum-line teaching assistant with the marching band. This added a third area of experience to his musical skills. At Wisconsin, Meunier studied percussion with James Latimer, assisted Michael Leckrone with the marching band, and worked as a graduate assistant for Richard Davis in the jazz program.

In 1982, Meunier applied for nineteen college music vacancies and received rejection letters from the same number of search committees, including the position of assistant director of bands at Drake! Following this impasse, an interview for the adjunct percussion teaching position at the University of Minnesota-Duluth was offered him. During his year at UMD, Meunier taught percussion, assisted with the marching band, and was assigned to the jazz program. He also worked for Schmitt Music as a road representative to school music programs and performed with the Duluth-Superior Symphony Orchestra.

Meunier taught at Iowa State University in 1983 and 1984. At Ames, his assignments were in studio percussion, percussion ensemble, jazz ensemble, marching band, and concert band. Before arriving at Iowa State, Meunier had never held a baton other than in a conducting course. In 1984, Meunier won the job at Missouri-Western State College, as a one-year sabbatical replacement in studio percussion. He taught percussion majors and assisted with the marching band. It turned out to be one of his most rewarding positions.

In 1985, Bill Mack at Missouri-Western urged Don Marcouiller to hire Meunier for the Drake visiting assistant director of bands position. Meunier was charged with marching band, jazz ensemble, and percussion at the university. Drake restructured the music department in Meunier’s first two semesters under Michael Ferrari, recently appointed president. Ferrari also made dramatic changes in athletics that year while Drake considered discontinuing its status in Division I football. With rumors spreading about the team’s future, the marching band paraded in front of the president’s box at the last football game of the season shouting this cheer: “We like band and we like Bob, so come on President Ferrari, let him keep his job! And the *team*, keep the team!”
Meunier was reappointed in 1986 while the Drake football program was discontinued for a year before it moved to Division III. Nevertheless, President Ferrari earmarked special funds to maintain the marching band without a football team. That year, the marching band performed at high school festivals and a Kansas City Chiefs football game. Don Marcouiller took a sabbatical leave in fall 1986 and Meunier became acting director of bands for the semester. Marcouiller returned in the spring and retired in May 1987.

Before Don Marcouiller left though, he had taken Meunier “under his wing.” He gave Meunier time with the concert band, worked with him on score study issues, and ensured a smooth transition in the Drake band program. According to Meunier, “I cannot thank Don Marcouiller enough for his help during that time of my career. I was determined to continue the legacy of excellence in the bands that he had spent his career building and nurturing.”

Meunier was named visiting director of bands in 1987 with the national search for the position held in 1988. His teaching responsibilities were a combination of the director and assistant director duties. Meunier conducted the wind ensemble, concert band, marching band, and jazz band. He also taught studio percussion, music education courses, and jazz history. In addition, Meunier was busy administering the program and helping to establish again its relationship with high school students in Iowa.

In 1988, Robert Meunier was appointed director of bands at Drake. About his preparation, he admits:

Candidly, I was not ready to assume the conducting responsibilities of the position. Don Marcouiller had done an excellent job of teaching me the “ropes” of the administrative side of the job, and my ears were up to the task from my jazz background, but I was an awful conductor who knew less than most high school band directors about band repertoire and even less about wind band pedagogy! I don’t know why I didn’t pack my bags and either pursue another percussion position or go to doctoral school, but I didn’t. I think more than anything, the Drake position was a challenge and I have never been someone to walk away from my weaknesses. And suddenly, I had fallen in love with band conducting!

In spite of these limitations, it was Meunier’s jazz ensemble that appeared at conventions and was a primary recruitment tool for the bands in his early years. Meunier’s jazz ensemble performed at the Iowa Music Education Association convention in 1989 and the Iowa Bandmasters Association conference in 1991. These appearances enhanced visibility of the Drake band program and reestablished credibility in Iowa. As a fitting reward, the jazz ensemble won the “outstanding jazz ensemble award” at the Elmhurst jazz festival in 1991.
Next, Meunier attended conducting symposia at the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music, under Eugene Corporon, and at St. Olaf College, where he worked with John Paynter and Mallory Thompson. This study helped develop his conducting technique and understanding of band repertoire and pedagogy. Meunier was awarded tenure at Drake in 1993 and planned a sabbatical leave to begin a doctoral degree at the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music with Eugene Corporon. However, Corporon left CCM in 1994 and became director of bands at the University of North Texas. Meunier chose to follow Corporon to UNT where he also served as a teaching fellow.

Meunier’s last Drake concert before leaving for UNT was a 1995 performance at the Iowa Bandmasters Association conference. Works on this program were Percy Grainger’s Molly On the Shore, Weber’s Capriccio and Rondo, featuring Drake professor of clarinet, Clarence Padilla, Joseph Schwantner’s From a Dark Millenium, and The Purple Pageant. In a salute to Don Marcouiller, “Chief” returned to the Drake platform to guest conduct Passion and Paint. The program was very well received by members of IBA and demonstrated that the band program was “alive and well.”

Drake’s administration agreed to triple the amount of scholarship offers to incoming music majors in 1998. According to Meunier, this is the “most significant event” to occur during his tenure to date. While the bands had attracted a number of quality students, it had been difficult to compete with state institutions for music majors because of the cost of Drake tuition. In 1997, there were eighteen instrumental music majors in the Drake band program. By the next year, a wind symphony and a concert band evolved. The symphony had forty instrumental majors in 1998 while the overall quality of the program made a quantum leap forward in less than two semesters. Gifted freshmen supplanted many juniors and seniors that year.

The symphony demonstrated a vastly improved Drake band program at the Iowa Bandmasters Association conference in 1999. What had been polite applause from the association at the 1995 concert was replaced by a standing ovation. The program featured Clarence Padilla performing Artie Shaw’s Concerto for Clarinet. Frank Techili’s Blue Shades, Dan Welcher’s Zion, and Joseph Schwantner’s In Evening’s Stillness were also performed. A reputation as one of the premiere bands in Iowa returned to Drake overnight.

With bands from Indiana University, Michigan State University, and DePaul University, the Drake wind symphony played at a College Band Directors National Association conference in 2000. Selections performed were Nancy Galbraith’s Danza de los Duendes, Morton Gould’s
Derivations for Clarinet and Band, featuring Clarence Padilla, the world premiere of Drake composer William Dougherty’s Accumulations, Grainger’s Ye Banks and Braes O’ Bonnie Doon, Dana Wilson’s Dance of the New World, and the American premiere of the Fanfare from Yasuhide Ito’s A Jubilee Symphony. A performance at the National Saxophone Alliance was also an extraordinary opportunity for the wind symphony to emerge on the national stage, with soloists Kenneth Tse and Drake’s saxophone professor, James Romain.

In recent years, the symphony has undertaken a recording project. According to Robert Meunier:

This gives our students a “real life,” professional recording experience before entering the music profession, and affords them an opportunity for tremendous growth while preparing them for their futures as musicians. It is an important portion of our recruiting efforts to attract high quality music majors to Drake. It also extends Drake’s reputation to national and international circles by providing excellent reference materials for the band world.

The Easter Symphony, made in 1998, is a live recording of the combined concert band and wind ensemble with the Valley Singers and Vocal Arts Ensemble performing David Holsinger’s magnum opus. This last appearance by the band program before its expansion was a benefit concert for a scholarship fund played in memory of the late Drake music chairman James Cox. A live recording, released on Vestige of the 2000 College Band Directors National Association performance by the wind symphony at Central Michigan University was also produced. Angels and Demons was released internationally in 2001 on Mark Custom Recording. It features Nancy Galbraith’s With Brightness ‘round about it, Bugs by Roger Cichy, Kah (Out of Darkness) by Dana Wilson, and Down Longford Way and Molly On the Shore, each by Percy Grainger. This recording appears on the list of New Releases to Buy, published by Shattinger Music in 2002.

In 2003, the wind symphony produced Homage, listed on the Mark Records Master Recording Series. This internationally released recording features a variety of band and wind chamber music, including Homage by Jan Van der Roost, Serenade Op. 1 by Vincent Persichetti, Blas Atehortua’s Music for Winds and Percussion, Escapade by Joseph Spaniola, Eric Whitacre’s October, and To the Lost by Robert Meunier.
*To the Lost* is a tribute to those who perished on September 11, 2001. According to the composer:

The instrumentation of the work follows an orchestral wind and percussion model with the addition of contrabass clarinet instead of contrabassoon. There are no euphoniums or saxophones in the instrumentation, not because of dislike of the instruments; rather, they just never came in because they didn’t fit the texture I was hearing! I wrote the piece specifically for the wind symphony knowing who would be performing each part. I attempted to feature each student’s strengths as a musician and to push the overall capabilities of that year’s ensemble.

Another disc entitled *Impressions* was produced in December 2005, on Mark Custom Recording in New York. It features the American premiere recording of *Sinfonietta* by Netherlands composer Jan Van der Roost. *Impressions* also presents the American premiere recording of *Fanfare* from *A Jubilee Symphony* by Yasuhide Ito, Greg Danner’s *Nebula*, Aaron Copland’s *Down a Country Lane*, and *To Walk with Wings* by Julie Giroux. The wind symphony has also recorded G.F. Handel’s *Concerto for Winds*, arranged by Larry Daehn, *Burlesco* by Timothy Broege, for Daehn Publications, and *Wind Dancer* by James Colona, for C. Alan Publications. These promotional recordings have been distributed to public and private school band programs throughout the country.

Robert Meunier has performed with the Bismarck-Mandan Symphony, Duluth-Superior Symphony, St. Joseph Symphony, Cedar Rapids Symphony, San Angelo Symphony, Des Moines Symphony, and with orchestras in churches and at universities. He has also appeared with television and recording personalities. Meunier writes:

Gigs with star quality performers are always very enjoyable. I grew up watching the Smothers Brothers, Don Rickles, Robert Goulet, and Red Skelton on television and listening to the Temptations, Moody Blues, and Styx. To be on stage with them later in life was exciting for me and amazing to my parents. Those jobs led to a lot of parental bragging in Grafton. The gigs are always challenging and filled with many laughs. I still chuckle about being a cult hero after my performance with the Moody Blues because I played the gong solo!

Currently, Meunier is completing the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in wind conducting from the University of North Texas. He is a past-president of the South Central Iowa Bandmasters Association and the Iowa Chapter of the Percussive Arts Society. Meunier is also a member of the College Band Directors National Association, Iowa Bandmasters Association, Pi Kappa Lambda Honor Society, and an honorary member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia.
As he reflects on his Drake career so far, Meunier says: “I am most proud of our graduates who have gone on to lead successful, rewarding careers and productive lives. If I have played a role in that, then I have accomplished what I’ve set out to do.” In the years ahead, Robert Meunier wants to focus on “continued growth of the quality of our bands and success of recruiting students.” He hopes to “sustain the recording project and cultivate relationships with band composers for the premieres of their works.” He would also “like to see the wind symphony begin to tour on an international scale and return to the national stage as a performing ensemble at band conventions.”

**The Drake Bands Tradition**

Sounds of music continue to be heard at Drake. Performers in Drake’s bands have shared the thrill of presenting concerts to discriminating, appreciative audiences. The tradition of this program, established first by a student-led ensemble and guided throughout the last hundred years by eminent directors, appears intact. A number of directors launched this heritage, yet only three men have conducted the bands since 1937. The university owes directors Gordon Bird, Don Marcouiller, and Robert Meunier more than it can repay. What is the outlook for the bands at Drake? The horizon appears radiant.
Sources: The Delphic and Times-Delphic, 1885-1999; Music at Drake University, 1881-1931, by Nathen Jones, 1964, University of Michigan Microfilms; Drake University Archives; Drake University Catalog (1881-1882); Drake University Quax, 1902-1994; Drake University Subject Index at Cowles Library; Drake University Website, and Interviews with Gordon Bird (July-August 2005), Don Marcouiller (September 2005), and Robert Meunier (September-October 2005).

Special Appreciation: Drake staff members Mark Stumme and Claudia Frazer (Cowles Library) and Emily McMahon (Harmon Fine Arts Center) deserve much recognition. Without their help this project would not have been possible to complete. I appreciate their generosity, good nature, and attention to detail. In addition, Paul Morrison, resident university historian at Drake, provided essential clues to and assistance in a variety of aspects of this research, most notably my introduction to Gordon Bird in DeKalb, Illinois. Above all, I owe a great deal of credit to Gordon Bird, Don Marcouiller, and Robert Meunier for spending considerable time in reflection and appraisal in the interview process. And to Don Adams and Clarence Padilla and their staffs, I say many thanks.

Thompson Brandt is a 1975 alumnus of Drake University, where he played principal clarinet for three years in the concert band and wind ensemble under Don Marcouiller. While he was a Drake student, he was elected to the university senate and was a member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, Omicron Delta Kappa, and Pi Kappa Lambda. Dr. Brandt earned a master’s degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1979 as well as a second master’s degree and the doctoral degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1985. Currently, Dr. Brandt is dean of humanities and social sciences at Highland College in Freeport, Illinois, and music director and vice-president of the Freeport summer band. He has also written Sousa in North Dakota (Bismarck: North Dakota History, Journal of the Northern Plains, 2000), Harry S. Truman’s Musical Letters (New York: Edwin Mellen, 2001), and The Jane Addams Papers (2001), Sousa in Freeport (2003), and Karl Henry Kubitz of Freeport, Illinois (2004), all published by Stephenson County Historical Society in Freeport, Illinois.