

The Great Transformation: A Recent History of the Carolina Band

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## **Abstract**

The marching band of South Carolina's flagship university was not always the emblem of school spirit and pride that it is today. Only ten years ago, the Carolina Band was seen by some as unsuitable alongside one of the most successful football teams in Gamecock history. Between the 2010 and 2011 seasons, this band seemed to miraculously transform into a true SEC marching band, one that was steeped in school tradition and characterized by engaging and high-caliber performance standards. However, this was no miracle. With the generous financial investment of the university, the legendary leadership of then-Director of Athletic Bands Dr. Rebecca Phillips, and the tireless work of the leaders and administrators within UofSC School of Music, the Carolina Band underwent a stunningly impressive transformation that truly earned it the title of "Mighty Sound of the Southeast."

This document was assembled through the collection of oral histories from important figures and students at the time of the transformation, as well as numerous articles and editorials from the Daily Gamecock as a gauge for public perception. As the Carolina Band approaches its centennial season in the fall of 2020, it is essential that such a transformative time in the life of the organization be recorded so that current and future members may appreciate the efforts of past leaders and set goals for continued success as the band grows in visibility on a national scale.

## Introduction

“Keep your seats, ladies and gentlemen! The University of South Carolina is proud to present the Mighty Sound of the Southeast, YOUR Carolina Band!” These are the words that ring through Williams Brice Stadium most Saturdays in the fall, a beloved time for Gamecocks around the nation. But the University of South Carolina wasn’t always so proud to present this band, which for a time was perceived to be anything but “mighty.” Rewind the clock about a decade. Rather than the striking white uniforms of today, marchers were clothed in heavy black and red attire. The band had not yet found its home at the Copenhaver Band hall, and instead travelled far off campus to rehearse on a dirt baseball field. The ensemble’s sound had yet to be “built for loud.” Ten years ago, the Carolina Band, while still deeply loved by its members and alumni, was hardly the well-oiled machine it is today. One could say that it had hit a bit of a low spot; low enrollment, low budget, low expectations, and very low morale.

Many Gamecock football fans look back at the 2010 football season as one of Carolina’s best. Under the legendary coaching of Steve Spurrier, stars like Marcus Lattimore, Connor Shaw, and Jadeveon Clowney led the team to great success with a nine-win season and a shot at the SEC Championship. One would naturally assume that a nationally ranked football team would have a marching band to match. However, the team’s success would serve only to shine a light on a Carolina Band that was desperate for a change. Through the collection and synthesis of oral histories, this document seeks to detail what happened to the UofSC Marching Band in the years surrounding 2011: what problems existed, how they were solved, and where the band is headed in 2020, its centennial year.

## Background

A member of the Carolina Band who began as a freshman member in 2008 and remained in the band for four years would have experienced the leadership of three directors. Dr. George Brozac became Director of Athletic Bands in 2006 and remained in the position until 2009. Under his leadership, the Carolina Band saw the design and breaking of ground for what is today the Copenhaver Band hall. Where was the band before that? Walk just a few blocks south of Blossom on Main Street and one may notice a nondescript brick building on their left. It may be nothing like the grandeur of “the Cope,” but for a while, it had to be home.<sup>1</sup> If one continues on this stroll down Main Street, they will quickly notice that there is zero outdoor rehearsal space for a band of 248 members. Where did they go to practice drill? A local minor league baseball team, the Blowfish, volunteered to share their space at the old Capital City Stadium on Assembly Street, which is just over a mile away from Williams Brice itself.<sup>2</sup> Dedicated members of two band service organizations on campus, Tau Beta Sigma and Kappa Kappa Psi, would offer rides to band members without cars so they wouldn’t have to take the long and dangerous walk from campus.<sup>3</sup> Rachel Myers, a freshman in 2008 and alumna of Tau Beta Sigma, recalled that “we had a lot of *fun*... the quality of our music was not great.” This was echoed by Ben Pouncey, another former band member who served as senior staff in 2011, who felt that a large population of the band prioritized having fun over performing well. It appeared that it was time for a change.

Change did come, and in 2009, Dr. Steve McKeithan took the reins. A publication from the Daily Gamecock on August 21, 2009 wrote of his arrival and quoted numerous students who mentioned an improvement in band culture and musical performance. A line of the article read, “McKeithan believes that the Carolina band will be the best the school has seen in years. He also

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rebecca Phillips (past Director of Athletic Bands at UofSC) in discussion with the author, February 21, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Tayloe Harding (Dean of the UofSC School of Music) in discussion with the author, February 28, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Myers (Carolina Band Member 2008-11) in discussion with the author, March 9, 2020.

said that he intends for the band to be the best in the SEC this fall.” Despite McKeithan’s best efforts, the goal of being the best band in the SEC would not be met that year, or the next. This would be highlighted on a national stage a little over a year later, when the Gamecocks made it all the way to the 2010 SEC Championship, hosted in the famous Georgia Dome. This day, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010, would go down in history for the brand new UofSC Director of Bands, Dr. Scott Weiss, as the “worst day of his life.”

Fans were delighted to see that the bands of both South Carolina and Auburn would be saluting the nation with a joint performance of the national anthem. On one side of the field stood a somewhat scruffy and small Carolina Band in heavy black and red (not garnet) uniforms. On the other, the fans saw the much bigger, much sharper Auburn band in shining white uniforms.<sup>4</sup> Under the direction of Dr. Corey Spurlin, the performance of the Auburn band was, as described by Dr. Rebecca Phillips, “higher, faster, louder, but with great quality.” Both the Carolina football team and band at the championship found themselves completely “outclassed.”<sup>5</sup> UofSC fans witnessed a band that played between every down, that engaged the audience in pregame and halftime, that connected with the fans, and played up-to-date stands tunes;<sup>6</sup> such a juxtaposition revealed all that their own band lacked.<sup>7</sup> A few weeks later, Carolina fans found themselves in a disappointingly similar situation in the same stadium at the Chick-Fil-A Bowl; the gamecocks proved to be no match for Florida State University’s football team *or* marching band.<sup>8</sup>

The Carolina Band and the rest of Gamecock Nation went home from the season with their hopes and dreams effectively dashed. The Daily Gamecock’s songs of praise for Dr. McKeithan soon turned to concern and criticism. An editorial released on February 7, 2011 wrote not of a band that was on its way to being the best in the SEC, but one that was being out-

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Harris Pastides (immediate past president at UofSC) in discussion with the author, April 4, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Phillips

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Scott Weiss (past Director of Bands at UofSC) in discussion with the author, February 28, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Ben Pouncey (Carolina Band Member 2008-11) in discussion with the author, April 9, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Harding

performed even by bands from far smaller schools outside the conference like Furman and South Carolina State. The Editorial Board wrote, “If you’re going to call yourself ‘The Mighty Sound of the Southeast,’ you need to live up to that name.” To top it all off, it announced that university president Dr. Harris Pastides told the Board of Trustees that he planned to form a committee to review the band. How did the band reach this low place?

### **The Investigation**

The University President essentially began a small investigation on the Carolina Band.<sup>9</sup> This came after a season full of poor performances that brought the voices of disappointed Gamecock fans not only to the School of Music, but to the ears of the President and the Provost themselves.<sup>10</sup> President Harris Pastides and Provost Michael Amiridis’ primary concerns included the unsettling amount of fan dissatisfaction over a number of poor performances, a lack of band engagement in the game day environment, and the fact that there was no pep band at all at the Vanderbilt game, which coincidentally was the only away game that the Board of Trustees attended during the 2010 season.<sup>11</sup> President Pastides also expressed particular concern for the students; he saw them arrive to games each week in yellow, non-air-conditioned school busses, wearing thick black and “Georgia Red” uniforms, and receiving little or no food or water.<sup>12</sup> Clearly there was a problem, and the wellbeing of students at his university was at stake.

Dr. Weiss and the School of Music Dean, Dr. Tayloe Harding, were asked to prepare a vision statement and plan for the committee.<sup>13</sup> Although an embarrassing and stressful ordeal to experience, Weiss and Harding came out on top with a deal to more than double the band’s budget, purchase numerous new instruments, and invest in a full set of brand-new uniforms. The expectations for the band had been set far higher than ever before, but this time,

<sup>9</sup> Weiss

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Kirk Randazzo (past band member, Professor of Political Science at UofSC, and the Voice of the Mighty Sound) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Weiss

<sup>12</sup> Pastides

<sup>13</sup> Harding

there was significant investment to back these expectations. Perhaps for the first time in years, improvement was achievable. While this does indeed stand as a great administrative triumph, it is more clearly an indicator of a band in great need, and with a great number of problems.

### **The Problems**

When asked what issues were present in the band that he wanted to change, Dr. Tayloe Harding immediately responded, “virtually everything.” Many individuals involved in the band’s transformation easily identified problems that could be categorized under three overarching concepts: **student treatment, performance, and student culture**. The phrase “student treatment” in this sense does not mean that there was a problem with how directors or administrators behaved towards students; the University of South Carolina has been, and always will be, an institution that places a high value on respect. What “**student treatment**” refers to is the resources in place that allowed (or didn’t allow) the organization to appropriately provide for the students. Leading up to 2011, the Carolina Band had by far the lowest budget in the SEC at the time.<sup>14</sup> When compared to the budgets of other SEC marching bands, for example the University of Alabama’s “Million Dollar Band,” it became clear how truly desperate the band was for proper financial investment, and how genuine the need was.

Such a shocking lack of funds translated to practically every aspect of the band’s operation. President Pastides, Dr. Weiss, Dr. Rebecca Phillips, who followed Dr. McKeithan as Director of Athletic Bands, and band alumna Rachel Myers all made it a point to mention that band members were transported to and from football games on borrowed Richland County school busses. To current band members, who are accustomed to an entourage of charter busses, the idea of rolling up to a Carolina football game in a yellow school bus is practically

<sup>14</sup> Phillips

unbelievable, and even embarrassing to think about. Further, current Carolina Band members, who also have come to expect nothing but the finest boxed meals that Firehouse Subs, Chick-Fil-A, Honey Baked Ham, and other favorite restaurants have to offer, would be shocked and dismayed at the lack of nourishment experienced by members a decade ago. Dr. Scott Weiss noted, “At half time athletics provided hot dogs for the band... and on a good week those hot dogs were fine. On a bad week, we had band members that would bring us up hot dogs that [had green buns].” Dr. Rebecca Phillips even recalled a local home economics teacher making sandwiches for the band before a big game so that they would be fed. At the game against Georgia in 2008, one of the hottest many at the time could remember, not only was the nourishment lacking, but the hydration was too. Band members were not given water during their pre-game activities, and upon arriving in the stands, they found that their usual Gatorade coolers full of water had not arrived. So many students fell ill in the heat that there weren’t enough alternate marchers to fill all of the holes in the halftime show.<sup>15</sup>

A lack of funds didn’t just impact the regular season. In fact, it was even more blatantly obvious when it came time for bowl travel. As previously mentioned, after the 2010 season, the Gamecocks were sent to the Chick Fil A Bowl, a major New Year’s Eve game played in the Georgia Dome. Weiss explained that when sent on a bowl game trip, the band as well as the football team is required to sign a contract which requires them not only to participate in the required performances, but also to stay in a specific hotel for a specific number of nights and with a minimum number of rooms. However, with a budget that was so low Dr. Weiss described it as “laughable,” it quickly became evident that the contract would have to be broken, as the given amount would not even be enough to cover the hotel bill alone, never mind food and transportation for the students. What could have been an extremely fun trip became an

exhausting whirlwind, in which the students had to get themselves to Columbia with no mileage reimbursement.<sup>16</sup> This is a stark contrast compared to bowl travel today, for which the band buys a plane ticket or pays for the mileage of every student that lives far enough away from Columbia or from the bowl destination.

The final branch of the “student treatment” tree involves the facilities in which they rehearsed. While the band did get to move into the brand-new, state-of-the-art Copenhaver Band Hall in 2010, the quality of outdoor rehearsal space was hardly improved. The new practice field came with a host of its own issues. With wires and debris sticking out of the ground, bugs everywhere, and enough mud to impede rehearsal for days after it rained, this poorly drained grass field seemed to present more problems than solutions.<sup>17</sup> Phillips, remembering the particularly rainy season of Fall 2012, mentioned that students would lose shoes marching through six-inch-deep mud, which of course was documented as evidence to support the band’s new campaign for a proper turf field at the time. Whenever the field was in particularly poor condition, the band would walk up the hill to the old indoor football facility, which presented its own issues; the field was only seventy yards long and it was deafeningly loud when the full band played. The field situation would not be improved for several years until Dr. Cormac Cannon, who became director in 2015, would successfully procure a turf field at the band hall in 2016.

The next primary issue, **performance**, while more straightforward, was tied closely with problems in leadership and was likely one of the more uncomfortable concerns to address. Dr. Jim Copenhaver started his career as Director of Bands at UofSC in 1976 and remained in the position until his retirement in spring of 2009. Copenhaver was extremely passionate about undergraduate music education, and in the seventies was nationally renowned as a marching band director and drill writer.<sup>18</sup> Towards the end of his career, failing health kept him

<sup>16</sup> Weiss

<sup>17</sup> Myers

<sup>18</sup> Weiss

from remaining very active with the marching band.<sup>19</sup> However, he was still loved and respected by the members of the Carolina Band, who thought of themselves as his family since he had never married or had children.<sup>20</sup> Upon his arrival at the UofSC School of Music in 1976, Copenhaver crafted a ground-breaking pregame show that completely wowed fans of the day. Thirty-plus years later, however, this show was quite tired and outdated. It had been written using techniques that were cutting edge in the seventies, when tastes and traditions were different, and when Williams-Brice Stadium was far smaller. By 2010, this long and primarily patriotic (as opposed to university focused) show lacked the interest or impact needed to engage fans and inspire school spirit and pride.<sup>21</sup> According to Dr. Phillips, by the end of his career, Mr. Copenhaver was not in a place where he felt comfortable with changing the program he had spent his life building. What resulted was a severe case of stagnation; the Carolina Band had found itself caught in a “time-warp.”<sup>22</sup>

After the pregame show, the band would make their way to the stands, where fan interaction and engagement continued at a minimum. In today’s Carolina Band, performance in the stands is extremely exciting, dynamic, and viewed as a critical means of impacting the game day experience. But ten years ago, this was not the case. The songs in the flip folder were outdated, there was no playing in between downs, and there were no traditions present to encourage fan or student participation in the energy of the game.<sup>23</sup> According to Weiss, it was in this “vacuum” that *Sandstorm* emerged; the athletic department was desperate for anything that would “get the fans going.”

As the game continued on and halftime arrived, the band would proceed back down to the field for its halftime performance. Shouldn’t this be the bread and butter of the band, the best chance for it to shine? Ideally yes, but it was found that even halftime performance quality was

<sup>19</sup> Phillips

<sup>20</sup> Myers

<sup>21</sup> Weiss

<sup>22</sup> Phillips

<sup>23</sup> Weiss

lacking. Dr. Steve McKeithan, a director from Texas with an impressive resume of drum corps and Bands of America success, was hired in the hopes of solving this predicament.

Unfortunately, as put by Phillips, Dr. McKeithan soon found himself “in between a bit of a rock and a hard place” during his time as director of the Carolina band from August 2009 to March 2011. When McKeithan was hired for the job, the board that selected him for the position included a number of local high school band directors who believed that the purpose of the marching band at UofSC was to teach music education students how to teach high school band.<sup>24</sup> What this meant was that the Carolina Band was operated as a sort of “lab high school band” and performed high school/drum corps competition-style shows.

This, however, presents a problem as the Carolina Band’s role is as an athletic band with the primary purpose of supporting the university’s athletic teams and building enthusiasm amongst the fans. Playing a three-part show including a ballad with a woodwind feature in the middle simply does not engage a college football crowd.<sup>25</sup> Harding, Weiss, and Phillips all echoed that McKeithan was and is an extremely talented musician, a great director, and an outstanding person. But unfortunately, his background did not align with university expectations. Even the students in the band were able to identify similar problems. Rachel Myers noted that most students acknowledged that the problems they saw weren’t even McKeithan’s fault. The band simply wasn’t heading in the direction they wanted, and they that some sort of change needed to happen.

The final overarching issue, **student culture**, was not one that could be solved immediately by a change in leadership or an increase in the budget alone. This was likely the most challenging and longest running project on the table. In 2010, member morale was extremely low; this is not surprising when one keeps in mind the lack of resources and of support

<sup>24</sup> Phillips

<sup>25</sup> Weiss

from gamecock fans.<sup>26</sup> This manifested itself in a band culture where there seemed to be no sense of duty.<sup>27</sup> The band and its members were missing a clear direction and had no true traditions under which to unify. This void of traditions left room for the emergence of several things which contributed to toxicity within the culture and a poor image of the band in the public eye.

If one were to ask a band member in 2010 what it meant to be part of the Carolina Band, according to Weiss, they likely would have replied, “friends, drinking, and the boogaloo.” When asked to describe some of the main elements of band culture during her time as a member, Rachel Myers immediately responded with “drinking,” followed by an embarrassed laugh. The majority of members today would be shocked to hear about the amount of drinking that occurred amongst the members even in the terrible heat of wool uniforms on an August game day. On the way to football games, many students would sit in the back of the hot yellow school busses drinking. Weiss even recalled dismissing numerous students from the band who were caught sneaking bags of alcohol into the stadium underneath their uniforms. However, any student who speaks to an older alumni when the alumni band comes back for homecoming will likely hear old stories of trucks backing up to the band field with kegs full of beer in the back for students to enjoy after practice (this was, of course, prior to 1986 when the legal drinking age was raised to 21). Considering this information, it’s not very surprising that this is the path Carolina Band culture took moving into 2010.

The *Boogaloo* was a favorite of band members to chant in the stands, but it was quite off-putting for conservative listeners with sensitive ears, to say the least.<sup>28</sup> This off-color humor was a major theme in Carolina Band culture. Bus entertainment on the way to games, along with the drinking, included hanging out the windows of the busses and yelling at passers-

<sup>26</sup> Weiss

<sup>27</sup> Harding

<sup>28</sup> Weiss

by.<sup>29</sup> This yelling sometimes was innocent and somewhat good-natured, but at other times it was quite offensive; while a timid freshman was yelling a simple “go gamecocks,” a seasoned senior may have been yelling something along the lines of “hey you with the ugly girlfriend, say go cocks,” or something else more profane.<sup>30</sup> It is no wonder that once the band entered the stands they were frequently met with annoyance and impatience from many of the surrounding fans.<sup>31</sup>

Most sections within the band were not united just by their instrument, but also by membership in their own sort of “club” or “association”. Naturally, membership in these clubs necessitated that one not only play their respective instrument, but that they complete a number of initiation requirements. Hazing had become a major problem in the band. Particularly notable culprits were the *Wad Squad* (drumline), the *Offenders* (sousaphones), and the *Wenches* (color guard).<sup>32</sup> The sousaphones were particularly committed to Offender culture; they had nicknames for each member which were actually used on a daily basis (and were usually inappropriate), created an official initiation ceremony, and assembled a hymnal of dirty songs which were sung on the bus on the way to and from each game.<sup>33</sup> The color guard (a.k.a. the *Wenches*) shared a bus with the sousaphones and were the sort of “sister organization” of the Offenders; the two groups infamously had frequent parties together with their own host of “traditions.”

This was a band environment in which a lack of direction, responsibility, and established tradition had resulted in a group that was missing one of the main components of a true ensemble: unity. It was a machine missing its engine, lying dormant as rust began to creep in. The perfect storm of 2010 revealed this rust to the public, and soon there was a much-needed demand for the fire that this once “mighty” organization had been missing for many years. With

<sup>29</sup> Weiss

<sup>30-31</sup> Myers

<sup>32</sup> Myers and Weiss

<sup>33</sup> Myers

the developing popularity of social media and growth of smart technology, it was becoming easier for students to share information instantly that had the potential to shape the public image of the band for the worse.<sup>34</sup> The problems present in the band, particularly related to student culture, needed to be fixed before the reputation of the band was damaged in such a way that would keep it from having the same chance at improvement ever again.

### **The Solutions**

When Drs. Weiss and Harding prepared a vision document for President Pastides' band investigation committee, one of the first things mentioned was the band's leadership. They wrote,

The Carolina Band has had three different directors in the last five years. Each has been dramatically different, and this has hurt retention a great deal. What is needed is visionary and inspired leadership that eventually becomes consistent as well.

As previously mentioned, it eventually became clear that this "visionary and inspired leadership" would not be found in Dr. McKeithan. Step one was to find this leader. Beginning a national search for yet another new Director of Athletic Bands posed the threat of taking too long, and then the band would be back at square one with a brand new leader that they did not know or trust; this made the idea of an internal hire much more desirable.<sup>35</sup> Dr. Rebecca Phillips came to the UofSC School of Music in August of 2007. Although her job had never had anything to do with the marching band, she had always been a fan and went with the band to every home and away game prior to 2011. With the recommendation of Dr. Weiss, Dean Harding called an emergency meeting with her in March 2011 to ask her to take on the position.

<sup>34</sup> Myers

<sup>35</sup> Phillips

While initially very daunted by the task, Phillips understood the weight of the present need and agreed to accept the position.

A meeting was called with all of the band members immediately. Myers, who attended this meeting, remembers receiving a cryptic email the day of the meeting inviting all of the band members to the band hall. She recounted that after they heard the news, “we all clapped and cheered and stood up- we were so, so excited... I remember skipping through the aisles of Publix [after the meeting] because I was *so pumped* that she was the new band director. I was so happy.” Ben Pouncey regretted that he couldn’t attend this meeting because of a rehearsal but was thankful that a friend could share the moment with him through a recording. As soon as Dr. Weiss made the announcement, the room erupted in cheers that went on for several minutes.<sup>36</sup>

The students had longed for real change for years, and with Dr. Phillips’ appointment as the new director, they knew that their voices had been heard.<sup>37</sup> Even better, along with this change came a new director that was already adored by students in the School of Music; Ben Pouncey stated that students at the time would have been willing to “follow her off a cliff.” Dr. Phillips had already established a reputation of kindness, approachability, and high expectations that made her a highly respected figure in the marching band, one that no one wanted to disappoint.<sup>38</sup> Almost immediately after her appointment, the university more than doubled the band’s budget in order to accommodate the expenses detailed within the drafted vision document.<sup>39</sup> Phillips essentially “hit the ground running,” as there was much that needed to be done in the spring before the season even began. She set a five-point plan into action, with hopes of achieving all the detailed goals within five years.

<sup>36</sup> Pouncey

<sup>37</sup> Myers

<sup>38</sup> Pouncey

<sup>39</sup> Harding

**Step one: grow the band to the size of 325 members.** The band had 248 members in 2010. However, about 100 of these were new members; this meant that *retention* was just as important as *recruitment*.<sup>40</sup> The vision document continued with a brief section on morale, including the statement, “if morale is to improve, individual band members must notice a difference immediately.” With a budget over twice the size of the previous one, it was much easier to take care of band members the way they deserved right away. Rachel Myers described with wide eyes the thrill each band member felt the first time they received a full catered meal, and the eagerness with which students awaited their beautiful (and much lighter) new uniforms. Bowl trips would never be the same, as it was agreed that in the future, the band would work directly with the office of Chief Financial Officer to determine an appropriate budget that would cover the band’s every need. In the winter of 2011, the band was provided with a budget over four times the size of the previous year’s to ensure that students would be completely provided for at every stage of the trip.<sup>41</sup>

On the recruitment field, Dr. Phillips tried practically everything. This required a utilization of her student leadership team very early on in the process.<sup>42</sup> Myers, a clarinet section leader in her senior year (2011), remembered visiting local schools in the preceding spring to talk to high school band students about joining the Carolina Band. Student leaders were also sent to summer band events across South Carolina and Gamecock Club events to talk to high school students and hand out informational materials and trinkets. Internal recruitment was also critical to the growth of the band. Phillips explained that she contacted the UofSC admissions office, who was able to give her the contact information of every single student at the University that had indicated participation in high school band on their application.

<sup>40-41</sup> Weiss

<sup>42</sup> Phillips

The Spring Game played a major role in both internal and external recruitment. An ad was placed in the Daily Gamecock's publication from March 29, 2011 inviting all students, undergraduate as well as graduate, to participate with the band in the annual Spring Game; dates and times were given, as well as an offer for free pizza and a t-shirt. Another article in the Daily Gamecock was published a few weeks later, on April 11, displaying a picture of 154 current and 32 prospective members (both current and incoming students) sporting their promised matching garnet shirts. Myers noted that the level of organization at this Spring Game event (as well as the free food and swag) came as a huge surprise, and proof that big changes were happening very rapidly. She stated,

“Usually it was just a last minute, ‘everybody get there, I don't know what's happening,’ sort of thing. But it was super organized- just in the spring, before the fall even started, we could tell there were huge changes... there was a lot of momentum that I hadn't felt before.”

All of these recruitment efforts proved to be very fruitful, very quickly. In 2011, the band grew to a size of 278 members; in 2012, about 320; in 2013, around 350; by 2014, with approximately 375 members, the band had significantly exceeded the original goal of 325.

**Step two: acquire new and unique uniforms.** Any band director who has dealt with the uniform process will be able to testify to the fact that ordering new uniforms is an extremely challenging task, one that takes a lot of time. The new uniform process was begun immediately that March, but the fruits of this investment would not be visible until the 2012 season.<sup>43</sup> The uniforms that the band wore through 2011 had a few major problems. Phillips, Weiss, Harding, and Pastides all made a point to mention that the shade of red on the uniforms was far closer to Arkansas or Georgia red than Carolina's characteristic shade of garnet; they all also

<sup>43</sup> Phillips

stressed that the uniforms were made of a very heavy black material that was completely inappropriate for the heat of the summer and fall in Columbia, SC. According to the band vision document,

The band needs a new uniform – one that conforms to the university’s color scheme and branding and is both lightweight and comfortable so that the students enjoy wearing it and can leave it on in the stands. Uniforms are approximately \$350 each, and by 2012-13 we will need at least 600 to outfit a 325-member band.

It continued that replacing all of the uniforms was a major expense which was *not* already included in the requested budget. However, the band asked, and the band received. President Pastides recalled with pride his involvement in the design of the new uniform; he remembered being taken aback by the striking look of the Auburn Band at the SEC Championship when they took the field in their crisp, white uniforms. As well as wanting to ensure that the students would be safe and comfortable in their new attire, he requested that the band consider an all-white base in the design. Ten years later, as the Carolina Band prepares to move into another brand-new set of uniforms, the all-white adorned with garnet trim and silver palmettos has become a signature look that simply cannot be let go of.

**Step three: perform a different halftime show every week.** As previously mentioned, the marching band failed to engage crowds at halftime because it was performing shows that were not meant for that kind of audience. There were only a few different halftime shows per season and the drill was at times too hard to be achievable; some weeks, when the band had just started rehearsing a new show, they wouldn’t even perform the whole thing.<sup>44</sup> They needed material that was faster-paced yet easier to put together, themes that appealed to a wider

audience, and drill that had the band play towards both sides of the stadium (and sometimes even the endzones).<sup>45</sup>

Another important element in improving the impact of halftime shows was adjusting the instrumentation of the band. Pre-2011, the band was extremely woodwind-heavy; a marching band that is low on brass, particularly low brass, is not going to wow the crowd with volume.<sup>46</sup> One of the things President Pastides remembered most about his negotiations with Dr. Phillips was her request for more sousaphones, as the band had few remaining in working order. The band vision statement noted that some instruments in the band inventory were close to thirty years old. This was another major expense outside of the normal operating budget in the band, but yet again, the band asked, and the band received. The results from this investment were very obvious the following season. Myers stated that once band camp arrived in August of 2011, students were changing instruments left and right. In fact, one of her sorority sisters, a piccolo player, switched to the sousaphone. The band even hired a GA dedicated specifically to teaching students how to play the instrument.<sup>47</sup> Myers commented that even though there was so much change occurring, “it was exciting because I could tell that we sounded different.” The fans thought so too; a Daily Gamecock article entitled *Larger Band Prepares for Louder Show* was released in August praising the impressive changes that had been set in action.

A final method of setting the band up for better halftime success was the reallocation of rehearsal time. Previously, the band had rehearsal three times per week, Tuesday through Thursday from 4:45pm to 7:00pm. According to the vision statement,

Without increasing the total number of hours, we are going to go to four shorter rehearsals per week. We believe that this will be more palatable to current and potential students and will be a more effective utilization of time.

Although a Friday evening rehearsal was indeed added, spreading out the time across four days helped Dr. Phillips keep up the energy and pace of practice each day, which better engaged students and helped them to accomplish more in the same amount of time.

**Step four: develop new stands tunes.** Weiss said of the band's stands performance, "The Carolina Band viewed its role in the stands as playing music during timeouts and quarter breaks, and it was stuff like... *Louie Louie* and *Hey Baby*, that kind of stuff. We were not engaged in the actual game at all." Not only did the band need updated stands tunes in the flip folder, but it needed music that would give it an actual role in the play of the game. Dr. Phillips and her colleagues developed a set of short downs cheers that aligned with SEC tradition. These included songs for first, second, and third down offense and for second, third, and fourth down defense, as well as a variation of the fight song specifically for touchdowns.<sup>48</sup> These downs cheers were proudly put on display at the Spring Game in April of 2011 and proved to be a very exciting surprise for students and fans alike.<sup>49</sup> The leadership of the cheer team played an important role in the development of these downs cheers, as they helped come up with the vocals for all of them and were leaders in teaching them to all of the fans. According to Dr. Kirk Randazzo, the Voice of the Carolina Band from 2010 to the present, they held training sessions with students to get them into the spirit even before the football games began.

**Step five: write a new SEC-style pregame show.** When Dr. Phillips was hired, she was concerned in her ability to contribute fully to the band because she had little to no drill writing experience. Thankfully, she was perfectly complemented by her new colleague Jayme Taylor, who was hired as the Assistant Director of Athletic Bands right after he finished graduate school at the UofSC School of Music. With his drill-writing expertise and Dr. Phillips' vision, a brand-

<sup>48</sup> Phillips

<sup>49</sup> Cassie Stanton. "New faces play at Spring Game," *Daily Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), Apr. 11, 2011.

new, and extremely complex, pregame show was ready for students when they came to band camp the following August. This show complied much more closely with SEC tradition and was a true celebration of the University, whereas Copenhaver's show was more patriotic.<sup>50</sup> It did, however, pay tribute to Copenhaver's original drill in *Go Carolina* where the band forms the word "CAROLINA" in block letters and marches back and forth down the field.<sup>51</sup> Not only did this pregame show feature new drill, but it also featured some new music developed by the band leadership with the help of composer and UofSC music professor Dick Goodwin. No more would the band scatter onto the field to the first set of the show.<sup>52</sup> From the very first step, the audience was hit with the power of *Gridiron Fanfare*. *Four-Corner Salute* achieved the goal of playing to all sides of the stadium from the very beginning. Later in the show, other new tunes like the *Alma Mater March* and *Go Carolina* would continue to fill band and audience members with excitement and school pride.<sup>53</sup>

This new show was not easy to learn in the slightest. In addition to having new music and exceedingly complicated drill to memorize, students came to band camp in 2011 having to learn a unique and physically exhausting new marching technique: high marching. Myers mused that students felt an even mixture of excitement at the new challenge as well as shock and dismay at having to work so much harder than ever before. However, she did add that all this hard work would be more than validated at the first game. Once the marchers landed in the tree and gates formation after finishing the first half of pregame, she remembered feeling elated and overwhelmed by the number of people giving a standing ovation. The band that had once felt like it was nothing more than a nuisance now had experienced the *impact* it could have on Gamecock fans; that experience in itself was a very powerful motivator for all of the marchers.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Randazzo

<sup>51</sup> Phillips

<sup>52</sup> Myers

<sup>53</sup> Phillips

<sup>54</sup> Myers

**Bonus Step: unify the band and solve the cultural problems.** Dr. Phillips and Dr. Weiss indicated to students very early on that inappropriate behavior would not be tolerated. Some strict rules were established, and students were being dismissed from the band frequently.<sup>55</sup> As previously mentioned, if one were to ask a student in the 2010 Carolina Band what it meant to be a member, they would have said, “friends, drinking, and the boogaloo”.<sup>56</sup> Much to some students’ dismay, the first things to go were the drinking and the boogaloo; what did that leave for them? Of course, friends were still there, but what had to happen was a major shift in the true meaning of being a Carolina Band member, and that was a much longer-term project.<sup>57</sup> Students needed to become stakeholders in the band and the product that it put out to its audience, and this was no easy task.

Students weren’t allowed to speak while parading into the stadium because the language was so filthy; the Offender hymn book was confiscated; the Boogaloo would never be chanted again; the charter busses taken to games didn’t have windows that would open so band members could yell at people.<sup>58</sup> Lack of effort simply would not be tolerated. One student with the audacity to wear an orange shirt to rehearsal on Garnet and Black Friday was sent home without hesitation when it was seen that he was just standing and not playing or paying attention.<sup>59</sup> One student was even left in California on a basketball band trip after he violated the newly enforced drinking policy and was late for the band’s flight home.<sup>60</sup> Students quickly learned that Dr. Phillips meant business. So many of the “traditions” that students had clung to for so many years were eradicated immediately, and yet the huge growth in numbers from year to year is proof that the students truly bought into the changes, even though it was like pulling teeth at times.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55-57</sup> Weiss

<sup>58</sup> Phillips and Weiss

<sup>59-60</sup> Myers

<sup>61</sup> Phillips

How, then, did Dr. Phillips get students to buy into the changes so successfully?

Utilization of her student leadership likely played a major role. One of the first things she did after being appointed as Director of the Carolina Band was call a meeting with all of the section leaders and captains, who had already been selected for the next season.<sup>62</sup> She asked them many questions about how the band operated, what they thought about certain procedures, etc. This seems quite simple, but to the students it was a surprise and an encouragement.<sup>63</sup> From the very beginning, the section leaders felt empowered; they knew that their voices were being heard and began to feel like they could have a true impact on the band.<sup>64</sup> In fact, it was out of this meeting that Dr. Phillips got the idea to figure out how to offer an in-state tuition reduction to out-of-state students in the band.<sup>65</sup> Once it came time for the season to begin, Phillips already had an influential group of students on her side to advocate for the changes to their peers and to be the eyes and ears that would help her better understand the students' concerns or confusion.

Students also were willing to sacrifice many of their old ways because of the clear investment that was being made in the band. With frequent full meals and air-conditioned charter busses all season, not to mentioned beautiful new uniforms on the way, many students immediately recognized that their role as band members deserved serious consideration.<sup>66</sup> Dr. Phillips also made a clear and concerted effort to unify the image of the band with the image and tradition of the university. This emphasis on performance and tradition, combined with the now overwhelmingly positive reaction coming from the audience on game day, provided a major boost in morale and pride to students.<sup>67</sup> They were immediately made stakeholders in the image of the band and the university it represented. Such investment in the students and in the band's role as an emblem of school spirit was more than enough to show students that the changes

<sup>62-63</sup> Myers

<sup>64</sup> Pouncey

<sup>65</sup> Myers

<sup>66-67</sup> Pouncey

being made were well worth the cultural sacrifices they required.<sup>68</sup>

The results of all of these cultural changes, while not immediately realized in full, were detectable from the very beginning. Dr. Randazzo remembered experiencing a drastically new level of energy in the band, one where the students were excited to do their job, behaved more professionally, and felt more secure in their band community. In 2010, he had taken over for the previous announcer, Pat Wiley, whose health began to fail after forty years of faithful service to the band.<sup>69</sup> With Dr. Randazzo as the new Voice of the Mighty Sound, the role grew energy and excitement; scripts from the Copenhaver era which were dated and low energy transformed to become bold, dynamic, and thrilling for both the voice and the listeners. Over the course of a few months, practically every aspect of the band changed dramatically. This rusty old machine didn't just get a new engine; it got a complete overhaul, a fresh coat of paint, and a full tank of gas that would propel it forward to success for years to come.

### **Moving Forward**

Different figures have different opinions of what exactly it was that made the true difference in the band. Dr. Harding will attribute it to the University's financial investment while his old colleague Eric Hyman, who was the athletic director at the time, asserted that it was completely due to Dr. Phillips' leadership. Dr. Phillips herself gave full credit to the effort of all the students and the cohesiveness of the band staff, which included administrative assistant Andrea Pouncey, Assistant Director of Athletic Bands Jayme Taylor, and other top-notch staff members working with the band's auxiliary groups. However, anyone involved in the band's transformation, except for Phillips herself, will testify that Dr. Rebecca Phillips was an extremely

<sup>68</sup> Myers and Pouncey

<sup>69</sup> Weiss

critical unifying force in the whole process. Prior to becoming Director of the Carolina Band, Dr. Phillips already had a great number of responsibilities as a music education teacher and as director of one of the concert ensembles.<sup>70</sup> For the sake of the program and the students, Dr. Phillips added the marching band to her already full plate and continued to succeed “with flying colors” in all areas of her job.<sup>71</sup>

Late in the fall of 2012, the second year of the *new* Carolina Band, Dr. Phillips’ outstanding leadership had caught the attention of other universities in the United States and she was offered another position. However, the idea of losing her was unbearable to the Board of Trustees, as she had become to them a true Gamecock hero.<sup>72</sup> In order to keep her at UofSC, the university raised the band’s budget once more; with this second increase, the budget was then more than *triple* what it had been in 2010. She decided to stay for a few more years, but as stated by Dr. Harding, “as great as it was being the director of the Carolina Band, it was like being offensive coordinator of the football team. If you want to be head coach somewhere, you go to be a head coach... So she left, and there was nothing we could do about it.” An article from the Daily Gamecock released in March of 2014 announced that Phillips had accepted the position of Director of Bands at Colorado State University. Many feared that the Carolina Band was sunk, and that no other director could maintain the ensemble as she had.<sup>73</sup> But thankfully, Phillips left the band in a position where it was poised perfectly for continued success and growth.

The School of Music set out on a national search to fill the big shoes that Phillips left behind. The 2014 Carolina Band continued on the path to achievement with Jayme Taylor as interim director and Steve Meyer as interim assistant director. When searching for a new director, Dr. Weiss stated that they had some very specific goals in mind. They were seeking

<sup>70</sup> Phillips

<sup>71</sup> Randazzo

<sup>72-73</sup> Harding

someone who would have the biggest impact possible on the band culturally; someone who would give the students a sense of ownership in the ensemble, who would make it feel not like the director's band but rather the *Carolina* Band. The marching band had also reached such a level of success in the public eye that it had grown in size beyond its maximum capacity and reached a sort of critical mass. This new director needed to be someone who could continue to develop the success of the band in such a way that allowed it to become more *selective*, so that while the numbers would intentionally decrease just a little, the talent and the impact of the band would continue to increase.<sup>74</sup>

When Dr. Cormac Cannon interviewed for the job, it became clear that he was the person to achieve these goals. He began as Director of Athletic Bands in the fall of 2015 and was later joined by a new assistant director, Dr. Tonya Mitchell-Spradlin, in 2017. Under their leadership, the band that had become truly “built for loud” further developed into a band that was built for so many more things, namely community. Today, if one were to ask a member what it means to be in the Carolina Band, that student would immediately be able to articulate the core values that the Mighty Sound so proudly lives out every day: *spirit, community, and performance*, intentionally in that order.

After several successful years that saw the band make waves on a national level, Director of Bands Dr. Scott Weiss decided that he had served the band program to the best of his ability, and knew that what the band needed in order to avoid any degree of stagnation was someone new in the position to provide fresh perspective and leadership.<sup>75</sup> Dr. Weiss moved on to be the Director of Orchestras in the UofSC School of Music, and another national search began. This search would reveal that Dr. Cannon was again the individual with the vision to carry the program forward towards continued success. There arose again the same fear as before- could

there possibly be anyone else capable of leading the band like Dr. Cannon? Cue one final national search committee. This group of leaders within the School of Music sought primarily to continue the good work that had been happening in previous years, but also wanted a director that would maintain the level of community within the band while raising the bar in the realm of performance. This director's task would be to continue working toward achieving the perfect balance between the band's three core values. In the fall of 2019, Dr. Jay Jacobs was welcomed in as the new Director of the Carolina Band. It became clear to the students very early on that this was a leader overflowing with ideas, energy, and a true commitment to making the Carolina Band the greatest marching band in the country.

### **Goals for Continued Success**

As articulated by Dr. Tayloe Harding, the Carolina Band is already a source of great pride for Gamecock fans across the nation; it is also a particular point of pride for the School of Music, which sees in the Carolina Band an ensemble that truly represents all of its values. He wishes to see members of the band continue to dedicate themselves to the hard work that comes with being in a major college marching band, and hopes for them to realize that this work has a truly immeasurable impact on members and fans alike. For the band to continue to progress, the students must truly see themselves as stakeholders in the band and commit to upholding its image and values.<sup>76</sup> Dr. Randazzo, as both an alumnus of the band and a current member in his own unique position, fears that in a season of such great change and uncertainty, the University administration and the band members will take previous successes for granted and lose the fire that got them there. He charges band members with the task of pushing forward despite the long transition period (and the current malaise of the football team). Dr. Harris Pastides, while no

<sup>76</sup> Harding

longer president of the university, remains an avid fan of all the athletic teams and the marching band. He takes incredible pride in the band and even stated, “I probably received as much credit and adulation from fans for the marching band change as I did for any other single thing that I did as President of the university.” His only wish is that the band would work to appeal to all generations of watchers present in Williams-Brice stadium and specifically request a show featuring some of his own favorite music, like Motown or big band.

When assessing the achievement of a group that has become so successful on every level, it can initially be a challenge to set goals for improvement. It may even seem like the band couldn't possibly rise higher and the only place to go is down. However, in a time of great change and transition such as this, the amount of potential present is immeasurable. With a still relatively new Director of Bands and Director of Athletic Bands, not to mention a new university president, it is critical that current members of the band do exactly what those of the 2011 band did: *buy in*. Change can be incredibly difficult, but it can also be incredibly beneficial if all parties involved put their best foot forward in trusting the change. Moving towards the centennial year of the Carolina Band is an opportunity not only to celebrate one hundred years of existence, but also to celebrate a century of school spirit, of thrilling music-making, and of members who could hardly love anything more. A lot of people have loved this marching band for a long time, no matter what state it was in. It may be hard to imagine a Carolina Band that is any better than it is now, but members of the 2020 ensemble must march this year not for themselves, but for the individuals that will be part of the band in its *bicentennial*. That Carolina Band could be far better than anyone now can even dream, but it will only get there if every member plays every note and takes every step as if the band still has a long way to go.

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