

Drumline

By Peggy DiMercurio



The Drumline is considered the heart of the marching band, setting the tempo for the band members as they march across the football field and morph into their formations. With snare drums, bass drums, toms and cymbals, the drumline taps, bangs and booms out the beat that keeps the band moving. The 2002 movie *Drumline* shined a spotlight on the role of the drumline at a fictitious HBCU.

“We are the heart and the soul, without the percussion section the band doesn’t move, doesn’t come alive,” said Big Brother Ironman aka Sean played by Leonard Roberts in the movie. “We are the pulse, and without a pulse you’re dead, and that’s why we’re the most important part of the band.”

Drumlines have a military background that stretches back centuries to the time of the Crusades. On chaotic battlefields with limited line of sight, the drumline was used to communicate orders, set the pace for marching and to intimidate the enemy. Back at camp, drummers marked the time of the daily activities of the soldier’s life.

The colonists brought their drummers to the New World. The militias could call the drummers in times of need. When called to service, the militia drummers banded together to form drumlines. With only a drum and sticks for protection, the drumlines marched into battle communicating orders to the soldiers.

Military drumlines evolved into military bands, which became a source of pride and entertainment throughout the country, as well as a way to raise money. Brass bands and marching bands became very popular through the late 1800s and into the early 20th century, becoming a part of college tradition when The University of Notre Dame marching band strode onto the football field in 1887. John Philip Sousa, “The Marching King,” and his Sousa Band toured the U.S. and the world from 1892 to 1931, playing over 15,000 concerts. Today, military bands have taken on a more ceremonial role.

Marching bands are still a part of high school and collegiate life, performing in parades and sporting events as well as battling it out in regional and national competitions to see which band is the best. With a multitude of instruments, variety of music, choreography and showmanship, colorful uniforms, flags and props, marching bands are still major crowd pleasers. And the drumline keeps the beat.

Sources

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