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Leaders of the Pack

Keepers of the Pride

Spirit of Houston Band Pumps up the Excitement.

by Mike Emery

It's halftime, the Coogs are exiting the field for the locker room. Some fans are lining up at the concession stands for their favorite snacks, but hundreds more are still perched in their seats eager to witness the Spirit of Houston Cougar Marching Band sprint on field with their "untraditionally organized chaos."



Always ready to pump up the excitement, the Spirit of Houston Band, Cheer and Dance team exude university pride with every high-energy performance and appearance.

David Bertman (M.M. '98) has led the band since 2000 and has overseen its immense growth over the past decade. When he arrived at UH, only 87 musicians comprised the marching squad. Now, there are 280 members. Combined with the Dolls and cheerleaders, it has 350 students committed to promoting UH.

In addition to wowing Cougar fans, the Spirit of Houston is a parade favorite. It also brings its brand of school spirit to pep rallies and other UH functions.

In 2003, the band played to its biggest audience ever at Super Bowl XXVIII at Reliant Stadium. More than 71,000 fans were in attendance and approximately 144 million television viewers witnessed the Cougar Marching Band performing alongside Justin Timberlake, Janet Jackson and others. That performance was a high point for the Spirit of Houston, but it was not the group's creative zenith. According to Bertman, the Cougar Marching Band strives to make every show better than the last.

"It's hard to do that," Bertman says. "It's all entertainment with quality, so we try to add a twist in every show to draw the audience's attention. We always try to deliver a top-notch performance that will keep people talking about UH and the band."

The Spirit of Houston began entertaining audiences in 1946. Through the years, it has earned a reputation as one of the country's top university bands.

In 1969, the arrival of band director Bill Moffitt signaled a new era for the Spirit of Houston. With Moffitt's pioneering "Patterns of Motion" drill techniques and reworking of rock and pop songs into marching band numbers, known as "Sound Power," UH served as a model for other college band programs. He passed away in 2008.

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Bertman has followed in Moffitt's footsteps, energizing the student musicians, dancers and cheer squad. In turn, the student performers consistently invigorate Cougar fans with dazzling marching routines and brilliant musicianship.

For the university, the group is not just an entertainment machine. It's a symbol of Cougar pride, and one that continues to personify UH's energy, diversity and commitment to excellence.

“It's about pride,” Bertman says. “Whenever and wherever the Spirit of Houston performs, it's representing thousands of UH students and the thousands of alumni in Houston and around the world. That's what drives traditional college marching bands, and that's what drives us.”



David Bertman and the Spirit of Houston Cougar Marching Band perform at the Moores Opera House during the band's annual gala.