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“I’m not nervous. I’ve played in front of a crowd that big before at the Gator football games. This time, the only difference is that I’ll be performing in London,” said Stephanie De Simone, a junior who is a musician in the Gator Pride of the Sunshine Band. “Okay, so, maybe I’m just *a little* nervous.”

De Simone, along with more than 200 others who are a part of the University of Florida’s marching band and color guard, will soon be traveling to London, England, to perform at the 2012 Summer Olympics.

De Simone has been playing the French horn since third grade and has played the mellophone in the UF marching band for the past two years.

Band directors Jay Watkins and Chip Birkner were asked to submit portfolios of the band, which included CDs, DVDs and printed music material, in early March 2011 as part of the audition.

Later that year, in September, the band received an official invitation from the city of London to perform at the Olympic “live sites” run by Live Nation, according to De Simone.

From July 22 to July 31 the UF Gator Band of 2011 will be traveling to London, sightseeing and playing at venues across the city. However, these are minimal compared to the two main performances, which will occur on opening day.

The band is scheduled to play at Victoria Park, which is right next to the Olympic Stadium where the torch will be lit. It will also perform at Hyde Park for about 80,000 people. In addition, sections will also break of into ensembles of about 15 to 25 musicians to play at smaller venues at other times throughout the week.

“I’ve been practicing this music since the day it was given to me, right before Summer A started,” De Simone said. “I’ll be prepared to play in front of 80,000 people, and so will the band.”

De Simone said that the band would not be practicing over the summer because of too many complications with students having to be elsewhere besides Gainesville. The group together had one practice before the spring semester ended and will have only one other, an all-day rehearsal the day before they leave.

Many students will not be able to attend due to the high cost of \$4,000 per student. The band matched students who put down \$500 the first month, leaving students to raise the remaining \$3,500 on their own.

Although the entire band will not be able to go to London, Katie Cairnes, an alto saxophone player in the UF band, said that she’s not worried about the sound because a very good representation of the band will be attending, and there will not be any missing instruments.

“The band directors have been taking care of the donations. From the start, they told us that we wouldn’t be holding carwashes or cookie sales or any fundraising like that,” De Simone said. “This is a college band, so they told us that they weren’t going to treat us like we were in high school.”

The band’s journey to London will cost close to \$1 million, mostly due to the cost of getting the equipment, such as the instruments and uniforms, there and back, according to Cairnes.

Any donations that exceed the cost of the trip will be divided equally among the students after the trip. Any donations for the entire band can be given at www.ufbands.ufl.edu.

The band directors have been consistently calling sponsors, according to De Simone. Donations were slow when the trip was first announced last year, but the band is still accepting donations up until the time of the trip.

“Typically, from my experience, donations come in on top of the hour and at the very last minute possible,” De Simone said. “I found this out because of my donation page that I linked to my Tumblr and Facebook accounts.”

De Simone and Cairnes are just two representations of how excited the UF band is about this opportunity.

“I never travel, and I have never been to Europe. It was worth me getting a job and saving my money to do this, because when am I ever going to have the chance to be this close to the Olympics again?” De Simone said.

Some of the highlights of the trip for De Simone will be the tours around London, the sightseeing and the “Wicked” Broadway show.

“I don’t think any of us were expecting it, but this is something I’ve waited my whole life for – an opportunity like this,” De Simone said.

Most of all, De Simone is excited for the admission to the Olympic event. “I hope I get to see gymnastics. My cousin, Lenika De Simone, was a gymnast for Spain in the Beijing Olympics. Since then, I’ve always been an avid fan of the sport.”

Cairnes said, “I think I’m most excited about being a part of the Olympics and just getting to share that experience with people who I consider my family.”

“I think we’re just all excited to be a part of such an honorable event,” De Simone said. “It really hit me how much of an honor this is when my band directors told us that we were the only group from the United States chosen to play at the official Olympic events this summer.”

Sources:

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www.ufbands.ufl.edu