Matt Smith

Cyclone Marching Band Oral History Project

Interviewed by Jay Chapman

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Time stamps reference the video recording.

**MS:** Matt Smith

**JC:** Jay Chapman

[00:00:00]

**JC:** This is Jay Chapman, an interviewer for the Iowa State University Special Collections and University Archives Iowa State University Cyclone Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band Oral History [Project]. Today is Tuesday, March 5, 2024. I'm interviewing Matt Smith via Zoom. Matt, welcome.

**MS:** Good to see you again, Jay.

[00:00:29]

**JC:** So, let's just start off with--maybe tell me a little bit about your early life, maybe where you grew up, your family, and that sort of thing just to kind of get us to get a feel for you and how you ended up at Iowa State.

**MS:** Oh wow, that's uh--that's a sort of question, [laughs] in some ways. I basically spent my formative years, from fourth grade on--I grew up in Fairfax, Virginia, which is a suburb of Washington, DC. It was a tremendously wonderful time to live outside of DC in terms of probably being more affordable back then. In terms of education, went to a really great high school and had musical opportunities that I'm very blessed to have received from the quality of my high school band program and my private teachers. Just fantastic opportunities that were available not only through the schools, but through the youth orchestra I was in, and some other opportunities. That was really instrumental--no pun intended--in my musical development. I attended the University of Memphis for one year because I was hoping to go into audio engineering. But I soon realized that I did not like that because all the courses I wanted to take were in music education, because they dealt with conducting, and learning the instruments, and working with people.

So, I said, I will transfer, and I had some connections at the University of Illinois, so I transferred to the University of Illinois. Then after graduation, I moved back east and began my public school teaching career in Maryland, Western Maryland, in a town named Boonsboro. I laughed when they told me where the interview was--that was actually about an hour away from where I grew up. Taught there for a year, and then moved to Baltimore County and taught in the northwest corner of Baltimore County, right outside of Baltimore City. Did that for three years. One of the cool things about that was if the traffic was perfect, I could be from my school to Camden Yards [Oriole Park at Camden Yards, stadium of Major League Baseball team Baltimore Orioles] in about twenty to twenty-five minutes, so I became an Orioles fan for a little bit. They were actually good at that time. They're good now, but they had about twenty years of rough, rough baseball there in Baltimore.

I taught in Baltimore for three years. As a public school teacher. I knew that I wanted to go back to school full-time to get my master's degree. As an undergraduate, I saw the graduate students who worked with our band program at the University of Illinois. I thought that was the coolest thing. I wanted to grow up and be a grad student. I was fortunate enough to go to the University of Michigan and work as a graduate student assistant while I did my master's degree in music education. Worked with the Michigan Marching Band and did that for two years. After that, they offered me a one-year faculty position, and you don't say no when the University of Michigan offers you a faculty position, even if it's for one year. So, I did that. I was supposed to start my doctorate at Michigan State University, but that got put on the sideline because I was then offered a position at Baylor University. The draw at Baylor was the marching band director there was a Michigan grad who actually was the first person I met at Michigan, but he left Michigan [and] went down to Baylor, so I was working with him. Jeff Grogan [Jeffrey Grogan, presently Professor of Music and Director of Orchestral Activities at Oklahoma City University] is his name. And also, Michael Haithcock [presently Professor Emeritus of Music at University of Michigan], who wound up being a Baylor only for one year. Then he became the director of bands at the University of Michigan. There's a weird pipeline between Texas and Michigan for sure. Spent two years at Baylor. I was married at the time. My wife Melissa and I wanted to get back to the Midwest eventually. The Iowa State job came open. Strangely enough, one of my best friends [David Cann] growing up in high school was on the [materials science] faculty of the engineering school at Iowa State. So, it was really kind of weird the way this all played out, but in fall 2002, I started at Iowa State.

[00:05:24]

**JC:** Sure. Well, that's great. That's a long road traveled. [laughs] So, which bands were you involved with at Iowa State during your years there?

**MS:** At Iowa State, I directed the marching band, of course, and the men's basketball band, and conducted the symphonic band. I also taught marching band techniques and lab band. I think that was all I did for teaching. Once in a blue moon, Mike Golemo [Michael Golemo, Director of Bands and University Professor of Music (1999-present)], the Director of Bands, would invite me to guest conduct the wind ensemble from time to time. So yes, but marching band, and symphonic band--and men's basketball--were the primary components of the position.

[00:06:09]

**JC:** Sure. Getting into the specifics of marching band, can you describe your process of selecting a show, rehearsing the music, getting the drill put together--just basically putting it all together and getting ready for the performance?

**MS:** Well, what I would often do is start the year before. I can't remember if I started this from the get-go when I was at Iowa State or if I developed it after just a couple of years, but I would always have an informal evaluation form for the marching band of, “Do you have ideas for shows for next year?” and some other things. “Are you coming back?” and “What would you like change? What do you want to keep the same?” I’d always look at what shows people wanted to play. Without a doubt, you're always going to get John Williams [American composer famous for some of the most recognizable film scores of the twentieth century]. You're always going to get Disney. Every year. But you would find some neat other ideas from time to time, either a show theme or some songs that you put together into a theme. I would look at that to develop a show idea. I would look to see if there's any particular anniversaries or celebrations that year. Is anything special happening, like is it an Olympic year? Or you'd also look at pop culture. I also had some friends who were outstanding arrangers, and if they had some good shows that I thought would be neat for the students, I would go that route. So, those are the components that I would incorporate into actually selecting a show. You also then look at this football schedule to say, Okay, is this going to be a one-week preparation? Or a multiple week preparation? If it's multiple weeks, then you can maybe play harder music or give them more drills to learn. So, all those factors come into play when it comes time to create a show.

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**JC:** So, once you get to game week, or maybe even, like you said, maybe a couple of weeks, where did you practice? How did a game week work for you?

**MS:** The interesting thing is that I'm always looking two or three weeks ahead. So, hopefully, I have everything in place so the week of is just plugging in the pieces--like plugging in the people, plugging in the everything during rehearsal. You construct rehearsal so it works. When I was at Iowa State, we rehearsed over by the water tower, by the Engineering Building and the Design Building [a field between Howe Hall and the Design Building]. We had a grassy field there, which, as I understand, now has a has a building on it. It was nice because there was a little adjacent parking lot. You could park there. We had a concrete slab made prior to my arrival there because there was a scaffolding that was used, and eventually, bad things happened there, and so they stopped using it by the time I arrived. We had a scissor lift that we--I think was rented each season, or it was bought and stored at campus facilities. We used the scissor lift, and we had a platform. Sometimes when I started doing shows that would face the other direction, we would have to drive the scissor lift across the field or around the field using the sidewalk. It goes about half a mile an hour, and you would just *put, put, put, put, put, put, put* this scissor lift to get to the other side of the field.

Other things about that field were, it was famous for not having adequate drainage. There were marching rehearsals where students were in like five, six inches of water and it looked like a lake, you know, by the back hashes on the left side of the field as I looked at it. The Iowa State students are just awesome and troopers, and they just, Okay, here it is. This is what we're marching in. They took it so well. That's where we rehearsed. The last few years that I was there, they were planning on building this new building, so we were moved up to—I don’t even know what direction it would be--the north side by the trees and the cemetery [Iowa State Cemetery]. My last year or two, we were at that site. They put a cement platform there, and hooked up the electricity, and all of that. I understand that now they now can use the building adjacent to it for storage, but we weren't able to do that. So, the sousaphones walked back and forth, and the drum line walked back and forth with all their equipment every day. The other thing is being on grass, by about the third week of the season, the yard lines didn't exist and there were just ruts in the field from doing eight to five up and down the field during band camp. Fortunately, there was a great agreement with the Athletic Department, and they realigned the field like every other week during the season. We were really blessed for that because having to paint lines on a field is absolutely miserable.

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**JC:** Yes, definitely. How long were rehearsals typically?

**MS:** Oh, jeez. I want to say--because of my current position, we rehearsed two hours three times a week--but at Iowa State, I want to say we rehearsed everyday Monday through Friday for about an hour and fifteen minutes to an hour and a half. And that was actually fantastic for two reasons. One, overall retention. You get more reps every day. I found that I was actually able to do more in terms of drill and stuff when I had that setup, a five day a week setup. The challenge particular to Iowa State was that Tuesdays and Thursdays, a lot of your engineering, and tech, and science majors had labs. So, anything you did on Tuesday, anything you did on Thursday, you had to review on Wednesday and Friday. So, you did just a smidge of learning of new stuff on Tuesday and Thursday. This was back before we used apps for teaching drill. On Monday, we would have the drill charts copied, and then the staff member would haul the Xerox box, copy the paper box full of the drills out to the field, and all of that. This is before people were using PDFs on cell phones and the Ultimate Drill Book app and everything. It was all hard paper. Hard copies.

[00:13:05]

**JC:** So, when you end up with a show at the end of the week, were there any that were special or unique at Iowa State, something that you remember more so than others?

**MS:** Oh. I'd have to go back and honestly look, but I do remember at least one thing--a couple of things. One was--this was kind of a transitional moment--it was my second or third year. We were doing a Disney show. So, this would have been around 2003, ’04, ’05, somewhere around there. Now, prior to that there was kind of a feeling among a lot of college band directors, myself included, that we don’t do pictures. We do forms, formations. We make things, and we move them, and they might be abstract, but we don’t do that picture stuff. That was done in the forties and fifties. We're above that [Chapman laughs]. Well, for poops and giggles, I said, “You know what, let's do some pictures.” We did a medley from *Beauty and the Beast,* so I made a teapot. We did “Under the Sea,” so I think I made a fish. I sort of animated it, like I tilted the form or whatever. Made a few pictures. Did a Disney show, made a few pictures. And the crowd went *nuts*. The students in the band came off the field, and they were blown away by their reception. So, I learned a real valuable lesson that day. Or a few lessons. One, it's about how the students feel, and they felt a greater appreciation for their efforts with that show. The crowd loved it. The crowd loved seeing stuff that made sense to them. Now, keep in mind over the last ten or fifteen years, Ohio State and a number of other bands—Ohio State went really crazy with their pictures and animation on the field. I mean, they're fantastic. So, a lot of other bands started doing this too. I'd like to think that we were kind of more on the front edge of that revival of that. The students were so thrilled with the applause that they received. I said, “We're on to something here.” I would rather do a show that is more entertaining for our fans than the--I think some mindsets at the time were, “We're going to do this killer show. It's going to have hard music. It's going to have a great drill. Hard drill. And hard this, hard that. We're going to show how hard we can work, and it's all going to pay off.” Joe Six-pack, in the audience, eating a hot dog and watching the band, doesn't care. They want to be entertained. That helped devise my philosophy of marching band at that time--I still use it to this day--and that is college marching bands are about three things: supporting the team, entertaining the crowd, and having a good time. You don't have to make it harder than that. Students want to be in band. Very few are there because they have to be. They want to do this. They want to feel appreciated. They want to play music that they like. They want to play music that makes sense to them, and it's easier to teach stuff that they know, rather than some abstract thing. So, keeping that in mind, that kind of really solidified my direction going forward.

**JC:** Right. How--

**MS:** I will say a few other things that stuck out. We did a gladiator show that was really popular. I distinctly remember after Iowa State came out with the new logo. They got rid of the “bird in the blender”--old people will know what I'm talking about. But like the logo that's on your shirt--it might have been with the Alumni Band--but at some point, early on in that process, I made that, and I think it was during a night game. I made that logo with the band. I still have a picture of it framed up. I was really proud of taking that new logo and getting it on the field for the first time. I was really happy about that. Yes, and I made some tweaks to pregame as well. You know, for a lot of schools, pregame is iconic. It's what they remember. The floating ISU, oh my gosh. I remember after I got the job, I got some videos and I didn’t really have--I might have had a set of drills, but it didn't have a lot of instructions and everything. So, I remember having a VHS machine and watching--or I think it was VHS actually, might have been DVD--but pressing play, pause, rewind, play, pause. Because when you first see that floating ISU, you're like, Oh my gosh, my mind's blown away. How do they do that? Then you just watch it over and over again, and I have some mock drill charts and I'm like, Okay, this block of people does this. This block of people does that. And actually, writing out the counts and the mark times and grouping the members of the band so that when you're up there teaching it, you can do it.

One other thing--sorry, I'm going to ramble if that's okay--when I was first hired, the very first game I had was the Eddie Robinson Classic in Kansas City. So here I am, the new guy. I have one week from [when] we start band camp--I'm the new guy, we start band camp. One week we're performing at Arrowhead in Kansas City. I've got to have band camp, teach new people how to march, we've got to learn a new show. I don't think we did pregame at that game. I can't imagine that we did, but if we did, that's even more of a miracle. But to get a halftime, and band camp, and a trip in one week versus Florida State, which we almost won--there is some suspicion about the last call, by the way. That was a huge thing, and I think that played to my favor because no one had time to complain about the new guy. It was, We just got to go. We got a performance. We got to go. That was one thing we had to survive. But I think every generation of band students, they all have their fondest memories of shows. If someone tells me a show now like a dance show--we did one or two of those that were hits. We did some Latin stuff that was a hit, you know, All that. That's what you want to gravitate to. Students remember those really great shows and they remember the really miserable days and trips that they had. Either it was raining or snowing or whatever. They remember the miserable things because it was bonding opportunity, and they remember those high points as well.

[00:20:59]

**JC:** You talk a little bit about trips. Can you talk about what it was like, especially your first year there. How do you take a band of three hundred people and ship them off somewhere?

**MS:** You worry about, Where are we staying? How do we get there? How are we going to eat? How are we going to practice? Oddly enough, I think I emailed out to try to find a school to rehearse at. I vaguely recall having one answer or work out, and I still know the director who's now retired. I think we rehearsed in—no, no, no, no that was a different trip. We rehearsed for that first game at Center High School in Kansas City. The director there--she's now the director of the Marching Mizzou [University of Missouri Marching Band]-taught there for a few years, hosted us. One of the administrators at the school at the time was a KU [Kansas University] alum, so I still see him from time to time at games. Then she went and got her master's degree at Kansas and her doctorate at Georgia, and went on the college teaching route, and she's now the director of the Marching Mizzou. Amy Knopps is her name. It's just a small world. How these things work out. Amy brought her band up to share a concert with Doc Golemo’s [Dr. Michael Golemo] Wind Ensemble my second or third year there as well. So, we rehearsed at Center High School. I remember that. I think it was Amy's first year at that high school. I think it was her first teaching job. So, “Yes, I'll have a college band come rehearse here. Sure!”

[00:23:03]

**JC:** Obviously, going to any Robinson classic in Kansas City is an obvious trip. How did you choose where to go for other years?

**MS:** Let’s see. For trips—I’m trying to remember. We didn’t take the full band on too many trips when I was there because of finances. We did four bowl games during my time there, which was great. Four out of eight years, we did bowl games. We took pep bands to Nebraska. I remember traveling to Nebraska. I don’t know. Oh, I do remember a very pivotal trip. We went down to KU. For those of you who don't know, I'm at KU now, oddly enough. This was during. I think, Gene Chizik’s [Iowa State Football Coach (2007-2008)] first or second year. Might have been Paul Rhoads [Iowa State Football Coach (2009-2015)], I can’t remember. But, it was one of KU’s really phenomenal years in the 2000s. I mean they *obliterated* us on the football field, football wise. We came out. Had the band. The band had been growing so we were over three hundred for one of the first times. We did a *Pirates of the Caribbean* show, and we took the field to boos. Their football team was great so the stadium was *packed*. We took the football field to boos, being who we were. We did a *Pirates of the Caribbean* show. It was a great show. Phenomenal arrangements. Students loved it. We had some pictures. We made a big pirate ship, skull and crossbones, all that fun stuff. We left to a standing ovation. That was extremely powerful. That was amazing. Our students really responded to that. That was a unique, unique, trip.

This wasn't trip-related, but I remember the first time we beat Nebraska—in, like, decades. That was cool, doing it at Jack Trice. We had some great bowl trips. The first year we went to Boise [Boise, Idaho]. That was interesting because we actually went skiing. We took a small band, about seventy-five, on that trip. We had a free day, so we went skiing. Went to Shreveport [Shreveport, Louisiana], went to Houston [Houston, Texas]. I can't remember where the other where the other trip was, but we went to four bowl trips during my time.

[00:26:11]

**JC:** Sure. Well, maybe now [to] shift gears just a little, can you talk a little bit about the style of marching that you did and how that played out with the students you had?

**MS:** I didn't really change much in terms of marching, I don't believe. What I probably did was modify the high step for clarity. I was really big into teaching pedagogy like, What exactly are we defining? How exactly is the toe point? Exactly where does the knee go-- in a high step? What's the shape of the leg? What's the shape of the bottom half of the leg? Where is the thigh? Is it forty-five degrees? Is it perpendicular to the ground? So, I think I spent a lot of time refining the style. We obviously did a corps style. We did a high step for some things. Then there's the swing cadence and stuff. That's still popular. That's great that students still do that from time to time.

In terms of fundamentals, I didn't really change much from what we were already doing. Maybe just clarified and refined it through the teaching. Any marching band director is going to have a system of teaching that they use, be it, I'm going to teach, and the drum majors will demonstrate, or I'm going to teach, drum managers will demonstrate, then the leadership will demonstrate, then everyone's going to do it. Then we'll go off into small groups and clean it. Those things evolved over time in terms of a sequence of instruction for the fundamentals. But it didn't change much. I knew we're not going to change cycloning on the field. We're not going to change the floating ISU. Things like that. I tried to keep pregame the same and iconic. One thing I did change--I don't know if they still do this where they spell out Cyclones at pregame--was prior to my arrival they kind of oozed into “Cyclones.” I put them in a preliminary set that doesn't have any sort of distinction other than everybody's in a separate form. The *C*s are the same. Then in a series of four counts, one, two, three, four, it explodes into “Cyclones.” I thought that would have a neater impact, visually, for pregame. I think I brought in “God Bless America” for a time. Pregame’s one of those things that you want to have on autopilot. You want to teach it once and you want to be done with it because you want to spend most of your time working on your halftime show and your stand tunes and all that other stuff. So, you want to just make it so that you teach pregame, and then you can just revisit it later in the week for ten, fifteen minutes, or once or twice, and then be done with it.

[00:29:28]

**JC:** You talked about traditions, or the pregame being a tradition. Are there any other traditions--not just on the field, but maybe off the field--that you can think of or remember that were interesting or unique at the time?

**MS:** The drum major dismissals were always a hoot. Sometimes inappropriate, but they know who they are, [Chapman laughs] and what they said. The march to the stadium, which I understand has changed a lot because of the new alumni facility [ISU Alumni Center] and also all the construction that's happening around the stadium. Things have to change, so traditions have to change. But the march to the stadium was always neat. During my time, we were in the stands and then we got moved over closer to the Jacobson Building [Jacobson Athletic Building]. I was involved with that switch. What was cool there was being closer to the student side, and now I know that that's changed. But I think that had a real positive impact on things.

The students used to have a dress-up day on game day mornings. I don't know if they still do that, but that was utterly insane. I remember one year--I think it was Eric Prosise [Industrial Technology (1999-2004)]-one of the students came in. It was duct tape day, so he had a full-blown duct-taped mock uniform. That was quite impressive. We had bathing suit mornings and Scott Szurek [ISU Electrical Engineering, 2004] came in at bikini once that made everybody go away. The dress-up days were a hoot. The dismissals. Overall, even more than that, I think about the camaraderie of the students. I think what Iowa State has is unique and rare, and it's there for a number of reasons, but there's just great students there. There is great band students everywhere. That's true. But a lot of bands have their own identity and the Iowa State band’s very much like that, and I think that's one of the reasons why the Alumni Band is so strong. Another reason it's strong is it's not a lot of music majors, at Iowa State. It's a lot of engineers. It's a lot of non-majors. So that culture is a little different. Especially having taught at Iowa State and KU, I've kind of seen the land-grant side of things, and I've seen the flagship, if you want to call it, side of things. So, I've seen both sides, the pluses and minuses to both. But creating a culture takes time and some people like to say that the bands gravitate to the culture established by the director, and okay, if you want to think so. But I do feel strongly that part of my responsibility—my job was to create an environment where students want to be there and be successful. So, in the large scheme of things, I think that worked. At the same time, I know that nothing is forever, and when I leave some place or I think about the future of something, I don't want things to regress, I want them to continue to grow. It's not sincere if you don't feel that way. So, I'm thrilled with how things have gone over the last twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years since I've been at Iowa State. It's continued to grow, get more exposure, the Sudler Trophy and all that stuff. Super thrilled. Whenever I come back Mike Golemo and Christian [Christian Carichner] and the alums, they treat me so well. I get choked up, you know. Doc’s had me conduct the national anthem several times. It's so special to go back there and see old friends and work with the students, even.

[00:34:06]

**JC:** Sure. So, how was the process of getting students to join the band? What was that like when you were there?

**MS:** Probably much different. I think I know what goes on now. I've been blessed at Iowa State and Kansas where recruiting can be as involved as you want it to be, but it doesn't always have to be. Iowa State we got mailing lists of things. This was before the technology was as rampant as it is now. I think we got mailing lists. Didn't really make phone calls. Mailing lists and posters. Then we would get the word out. I would take June--and that was the big orientation period where students would come to campus--as I'm sure they still do in June. Spend the day. We would have a booth in the Great Hall at the Union [Memorial Union] and stand there and talk about the band to prospective students. Now, for those who knew they wanted to be in the band in advance, they would arrange a time to audition with me an hour or two after that. So, that session would end at noon. “I'll see you at one. We'll have you come audition for us.” If somebody wasn't prepared to do that--I'm talking woodwinds and brass only. Drumline was separate. Color guard, separate. Twirlers, separate. If they didn't and I was just talking to them and they're like, “Oh, it might be fun.”

“Okay, great. Come see me at one o'clock. I have an instrument for you already in my office. Just sanitize this mouthpiece, whatever. Here's a copy of the fight song [“ISU Fights”]. Play me two scales, a chromatic scale, and read me the fight song.” Now, most years we didn't have to cut anybody. There were a few years where we did have to cut some folks, unfortunately. That sounds terrible. We made selections in the summer based on their playing ability. That way if you came to campus, you knew you were in the band. The drumline had their auditions earlier that week. So, we knew the band was set when we started band camp. So, that's how we made our decisions. I'm very proud of the fact that when I left Iowa State, we were at the largest in its history. I know it's exploded since I left, and that's fantastic and I'm thrilled about that. But that is one little source of pride I do have, is that we grew a lot during my time there. Actually, we didn't have to grow that much. We just consistently hurtled over three hundred and stayed in the three-twenties for my last few years there.

[00:37:02]

**JC:** Sure. How did you make selections for your drum majors?

**MS:** I think I kind of kept a similar process when I was here. A lot of people want to make drum majors a really, really, really big, multifaceted, long period of time event with all sorts of things. You can do that. In the end I don't know if your results are going to be that different. So, I believe if I recall, I changed the format to having it in the fall, probably after the regular season was over. If I recall correctly, we had a paper application. Those who submitted the paper application were interviewed. During that interview, you would also have to conduct to a recording. So, I'd give you a couple pieces to prepare. You would conduct to one of those that we would tell you that night. So, an interview and a conducting audition. From there we would pick finalists. Those finalists, in front of the full band, I believe, had to do a marching demonstration. They would have to conduct the band, on the ladder, and they would have to answer some questions in front of the band on the spot. I think that's the process we used, if I recall correctly, because it's one that I brought here. The students in the band were allowed to provide comments. I expected them to circle three names. I think I still have this policy, if you have circled two names, or one name, or four names, I'm not counting it because I want to see the team. I want to see the team you're voting for as well as the individuals. I want to say, the assistant director and I already would, either Gary Kleptach [Adjunct Assistant Professor of Music, Lecturer (2000-2009)] or Natalie Steele [Natalie (Steele) Royston, Assistant Marching Band Director (2008-2010) and Marching Band Director (2010-2011)], we would go through the go through the sheets. I would never say that it's a student vote because—sorry, I don’t agree with that--those people are going to be working directly with me, with our staff, so I want to make sure we're comfortable with them. You might find some things out about people based on the comments that the students write that you would have to do some homework on. You know, “I heard about this person doing blah blah blah.” You got to check on that, and weigh how serious that is of consideration. That's how we make the decisions for the drum major. We definitely consider the student input, and in most cases, what we selected aligned with the students’ selections.

[00:40:13]

**JC:** You touched on this a little bit, I think, but the culture of the band, do you think it was driven primarily by students, or was it by the staff, was it the drum majors? Or was it really a mix of those kinds of things?

**MS:** I think a mix, I think. One of the things I preached is that your representing the band. You're representing the music department. You're representing Iowa State University. When we leave the state boundaries, you're representing the people of the state of Iowa. I take that very seriously. The traditions that the school has, especially the Alma Mater, we are the greatest caretakers of those traditions. There's no organization that has a greater impact on those than the marching band. Not the football team, despite all the work they do, the athletic teams, the spirit squads. They do a great job too. We've got the numbers. I think that is one of the most precious things that we have to embrace. So, I think we did a really good job maintaining. During my time there I was a custodian of that culture and those traditions as it relates to the band. I think that has a big thing of it. The social fabric of the band, the Friday night parties, and the student leadership, I think, was extremely powerful and, most of the time, extremely positive. There's always going to be some glitches. With every director, there's going to be transformations in the social culture of a band. There just always are. You know, in my time there, that's when Facebook started. My Facebook account was created by a marching band student at Iowa State. The one I still use. There's elements that are ugly that you have to have to address. There's some elements that are ugly that are hard to beat until people graduate or times change, society changes. It's very different teaching marching band in 2024 than it was in 2004. Very different. I think it was largely driven by the students. I'd probably say a majority. I'd say probably over 50 percent of the students. Some me, some the institution, and some things out of their control change. The climate at Iowa State changed when Jamie Pollard [Director of Athletics (2005-present)] got hired. It was radically different on that campus with Jamie Pollard, so Iowa State hit a home run when he took over that Athletic Department. We felt it--I felt it and saw it in the meetings I had with athletics. Those are just some examples of things.

[00:43:30]

**JC:** Can you talk a little bit about where there is a difficult time? Not everything goes smoothly. Not getting into, in some cases, too much detail, but something that was maybe a bit of a challenge for the band?

**MS:** I don't think it was much of a challenge, [but] I remember one thing we changed over time was we had this *terrific* drumline culture, but I felt like it reached a point where we needed to hire a drumline instructor because we didn't have a drumline instructor. Barry Larkin [Associate Professor of Music (1991-2009)], who was our percussion professor for many years, he kind of oversaw it from a distance, but the students were largely self-run, self-governed, and all that. I felt at one point, we need to have somebody that the students see as their authority figure, and yet given the strong personalities and high talent level, they needed somebody they respected. So, hired Scott Szurek to come in, and a few other people from time to time assisted. But we did some of that.

Early on in my tenure--like I was talking about earlier, this was pre-Facebook-- there was an email forum that--I didn't have exposure to it--I knew that it was becoming, largely, a complaint board for the band. I just said, “Is this helping us?” I spoke with a few people about it, “Is this helping us? No, it's not.” I think a lot of bands still face things like this. Anonymous group text or anonymous apps and stuff like that. You have to deal with that sometimes. But if it's not helping, of what value is it to the band, and if it's not valuable, it's destructive. You have to address some things like that. I don't know if I want to bring up any dark memories, but there's things you occasionally have to address with students. Fortunately, some of the tough moments evolved into practices that were, in the end, a very positive way of doing things. Either a solution, or I'm going to change the way I do things because this is not working. Or, Bad things have happened here so I'm going to put in a system that prevents that. Or, I'm going to change how I address this. I'm going to change how we look at things. I'm going to change procedures so that we're not either providing opportunities for people to do bad things or providing avenues for those bad things to be magnified. Or, Maybe I need to put in a procedure that's more fair to students. There are things like that we've done. So, students, don't think that we don't read the comments, because we do. We like to learn from it. I do remember one person one time asking, “So, is this your marching band, or is this our marching band?” This is early in my tenure. Cause you know, the new guy, I'm making changes.

I said, “It's Iowa State's marching band. We're here for this part of it, but it's the school's band. So, there are things I have to do to guide the band. That's what a director does. So, you can't always have students running everything. “Then you have Stanford.” [Chapman laughs]

[00:47:22]

**JC:** Were there any performances that you had or special events that you did, outside of bowl games or on the field--you talked about being representatives of Iowa State, just kind of naturally, but were there any cases where you actually went out and represented Iowa State in some way?

**MS:** Man, Jay. I would have to look at my calendars from those years. You know--

[00:47:51]

**JC:** A time they asked you to perhaps play for a donor event or bring a pep band to this thing because we want to do some sort of ISU foundation campaign, something along those lines?

**MS:** I think we did one in Des Moines once. I could be wrong. Geez. That's a toughie. I would honestly have to look. We would go every other year and play in Cedar Rapids. That was always a great event. I hope they still do that. I think the last time I heard, they were doing it and rotating between UNI [University of Northern Iowa] and Iowa and Iowa State. That was a great event. To do for goodwill. Playing in a marching band competition, I think we did a few of those. One time I think--lordy, I want to say one year we went up and did something like in western Minnesota, or it was just someplace really off the grid. It was one of those where we rode on the bus for three hours, played the gig, rode on the bus for three hours, and that was it. And I'm like, Was it worth it? Probably meant a lot to those students there. One performance that my wife Melissa will always remind me of--Melissa was the high school band director in Boone--and for many years was also our color guard instructor. She said “Hey, how about if you have the band come and play at a football game. In Boone.”

I don't know why I said yes, but I said, “What the heck. Why not?”

And she said, “We'll make it worthwhile.” Whatever. Her family-- they had a concessions business in Illinois in the summers, and we worked at their concession stands for many, many years in the summers. Well, her uncle was the director of a parks district so she worked it out that Hy-Vee brought one of their huge grills. Her uncle worked the grill and made steak sandwiches for everybody in the Iowa State Band. Then we performed at the Boone football game. There would be times where we would visit, even when we lived in Kansas now, where we'd see friends from Boone, and they would still remember that performance. The night the Iowa State band came to Boone. Things like that are real special, of course.

Aside from Cedar Rapids and that, we didn't do a lot. I think we played at the Ankeny marching competition once or twice. We didn't do a lot of other travel. I think budget was a restriction. Athletics, if they really wanted us at an away game, they would send us. Of course, we would go to Iowa. I think one year, we went to Iowa, and we couldn't perform because there was so much rain that the field was saturated. Also, one of my first years at Iowa was the year that Doc got hit by a deer. He was somewhere else walking—I think with Myron Welch, the Director of Bands at Iowa at the time. They went to whatever Iowa does for their pre-pregame stuff outside of the stadium, like in some other building or gym or something--field house, whatever. When Doc got to us, so we could march into the stadium, he said, “Yes, I got hit by a deer, running across—” it just scooted out of the shrubbery across the path they were running, and he got clocked by a deer. So that was an interesting moment that we talked about a lot.

[00:52:00]

**JC:** Well, shifting gears a little bit again to uniforms. Can you talk about the uniforms that you used while you were there?

**MS:** Sure, so when I got there, we were already in the midst of the “bird in the blender” era. When it comes to college marching bands, I'm a traditionalist. I like a traditional uniform that *lasts*. Well, Iowa State gets a new logo--hey, that's cool--and re-does the red, the cardinal, which was a whole another controversy because, well, it's the same one as USC [University of South Carolina], but no one in town can match this color so we're either wearing red shirts or we're wearing purplish red shirts. But we can't get the Iowa State red. Only Nike has the Iowa State red. So, it took about two years to finally get the funding and convince, “Hey, we're still wearing the old logos. You want us to change?” I was in the cycle of designing a new uniform, when I actually had the offer to go to Indiana and leave Iowa State, so I didn't get to see things through its fruition. I knew that I wanted a classic look. Now, personally, I heard it was athletics that said that they wanted a red and yellow uniform, cardinal and gold uniform. Honestly, I wasn't a fan, and here's why--because those colors don't pop off the field. The newer uniforms pop better off the field, especially at night. White pops. If you have a dark top, it doesn't pop. So, I was still along the lines of, “We're going to have a white top.” I'd like the white top and cardinal pants. Just update the logos and stuff like that. That's just me. I'm an old traditionalist with marching main uniforms. So, I did the same thing here when it was time to get uniforms. I switched back to a previous right iteration of the uniform that they had more in the eighties and nineties because it pops more off the field with the color scheme.

[00:54:41]

**JC:** You talked maybe a little bit about this, but how would you say that the Iowa State marching band has changed over time from what you saw before you came in and then after you've gone?

**MS:** From what I know, the obvious things are is it's way bigger. It's way bigger. I know that Iowa State, for spell in the 2010s, had tremendous growth spurt. I don't know where they are enrollment-wise, but I knew that it pushed thirty-five, forty thousand, if I'm not mistaken. That's huge. That's really huge. So, I knew that the numbers exploded. That's fantastic. I heard they changed the audition process where they actually bring people in, audition for a few days, and then either make cuts or they now have the Storm. Is that what they call it, the Storm?

**JC:** State Storm.

**MS:** Cyclone Storm or the Storm. Which is a great use of students who may not make the marching band or former marching band numbers. I know that when I got there, one change that I saw as absolutely necessary was--we had two directors and we had a band manager. It was Dan Royer when I first got there. Poor Dan had to do everything. Attendance, [inaudible] maybe—*everything*! So, one thing I changed was we're going to have student staffs for, like, equipment, uniforms, all this stuff. Because Iowa State doesn't have a graduate program in music, whereas most other schools do, they have graduate assistants working with their marching band. So, I selected four or five people to serve as a staff. They put on the coat and tie, or like apparel, and served as the staff. That's a tricky thing because these are still undergrads that you're asking to kind of separate themselves a little bit. You know, that's a little tricky, but I thought it was absolutely essential. Plus, it gave them a lot of great experience in running things, and they were proud to do it. I'm very grateful for all of the people who served in that capacity, especially the ones early on because that was a new role for them, and they didn't know what to necessarily expect.

But going back to your question about changes, I've seen changes in auditions, I've seen the change in size, I've seen the change in the way that they do things. I think with Iowa State’s success in football and basketball, that has really increased visibility a lot. Winning the Sudler trophy was [a] tremendous honor. The expansion of the stadium. The expansion of Big Twelve athletics. All that's had an impact in some way, shape, or form.

[00:57:58]

**JC:** Are there any kinds of things that wanted to share that I haven't asked a question about yet?

**MS:** Oh boy, I feel like I've covered a lot. I think it's a special place. The students there are unique. They have a unique bond. Like I said, the social fabric was amazing when I was there. It had some downsides too, but overall, largely positive. I think that's what drove a lot of the students. The pride that the fans at Iowa State-- the alumni have. The passion. At the time I was there, women's basketball was like the number three in attendance. Always. After UConn [University of Connecticut] and Tennessee [University of Tennessee]. That's really special. I wish I was there during better basketball. In eight years, I went to one NCAA tournament. That was rough. I worked with tremendous people.

Mike Golemo, Gary Kleptach, Natalie Steele. Or just tremendous students. Opportunities at Iowa State that aren't necessarily at a lot of other schools because there aren't a lot of music majors, so a lot of the non-majors get tremendous opportunities to be in leadership. When I was at Iowa State, I think I only had one or two music majors that ever served as drum majors. That's tremendous. Iowa State will also have very fond memories because that's where my children were born. I would go to Boone to pick them up in the afternoon from daycare or preschool and I would drive them home, get a snack, then we'd load up in the back of the car, and they'd go to marching band practice. I would sometimes back into the stall and pop open the back of the back of station wagon or whatever, and they would have their toys in the back of the car. Or set out a blanket and then my wife would come join us after she was done with school and work with the color guard. So, our kids kind of grew up on the practice field. That's a very fond personal memory that I have. And still, seeing some of the people that we keep in touch, with the relationships we have. I have nothing but fond memories of Iowa State. It was a lot of firsts for us--first time I ran my own college marching band, bought our first house there, had our kids there. So, nothing but a lot of fond memories and appreciation for the opportunities I had at Iowa State.

[01:01:05]

**JC:** Great. I really appreciate [you] taking the time and meeting with us and answering our questions.

**MS:** Sure. This is a fantastic project, and I wish you the best of luck. Someday, I hope to go back and see some of these done by some of the people who came before me and after me. That's really special. Thank you, Jay.

**JC:** Right. Thank you.