

Transcription from Community Information Session

At Outpost Performance Space, June 25, 2016

Hello, my name is Spenser and I'm the executive director of Arsenal Performing Arts. First off, I'd like to thank everyone for being here today to talk about our plans for the organization and our debut season. I wanted to start off just briefly talking about the organization itself before we move into the actually enjoyable part of the talk- the drum corps part.

The Organization

At this point in time, Arsenal Performing Arts has been incorporated with the state of New Mexico and is functioning as a non-profit corporation. Currently, we are working to become a 501(c)(3) organization and are working on the filing with the IRS. It is a very (tedious) process- there's a 32 page form you have to fill out, and they double check everything (and are extra careful because of the Patriot Act).

All of our organization at this point has been structured to be something that's going to last. There are at least three different efforts that I know of that have tried to create a drum corps here in Albuquerque that have failed, because they hadn't taken the time to structure the organization fully before getting into it. There was a corps a few years back that had purchased all of the instruments and was even rehearsing with the kids and it folded before they even left for their first show because they didn't have a good (structure) in place. We'd like to think that we have it (the organization) structured in such a way that we can continue to function now and far into the future as well.

Really fast I'm just going to go through our board of directors so that you know the people who are leading the organization. The first name on the list is Charlie Richardson, who is our president. He is the president of the Sandia Band Boosters and he has been working with that organization for a number of years and he has around ten years of experience with non-profit band (and school) booster organizations. The second name on this list is Dr. Linda Smith who is our vice-president. She is actually also on the board of the Arizona Academy of the Performing Arts which hosts the Academy Drum and Bugle Corps. She's a big drum corps fan and she sponsored Drums Along the Sandias when it was here a number of years ago. The third member is Gwen-Marie Lerch, who is our secretary. She has over twenty years of experience with the non-profit sector; she made her living as a non-profit consultant and is now going back to UNM to learn even. She actually marched with Madison Scouts before they became all-male because they were briefly co-ed -for I think two or three years- before becoming all-male again. Stan Keith is our treasurer, he is an administrator and a manager at Music Mart which is one of our Sponsors, and Dr. Susan Lewis was an early member of the Santa Clara Vanguard. She was a member of their colorguard and she went on to become a judge for DCI in Texas.

The Staff

Now I'm going to introduce our staff. First we have our percussion caption head, Mr. William Kramer, who's here, so if you'd like to introduce yourself Will-

Will Kramer: “Hi, my name’s Will, and as you can see I graduated with my performance degree last fall and I’m currently going through teaching certification to teach music in the state of New Mexico. I work with a great number of high schools and middle schools in town. Currently I’m with Rio Rancho, West Mesa and I write for Eldorado. I also play contemporary performance- I was just here (in Outpost) performing, so I do other things as well as drum corps. I spent three years with the Blue Knights and it was a life changing experience, so I want to help create good experiences for the next generation of drum corps aficionados.

Spenser: “Thanks Will. A good deal of our staff couldn’t be here tonight because they’re working with other corps, or in Taron’s case he’s actually at a wedding. Taron Kouri is our brass caption head- he works with Sandia Marching Band and he’s also the band director at Jefferson. He marched Troopers for two years as a baritone player.

Edwin is going to be leading up our color guard. He also marched troopers and he’s currently Associate Band Director at La Cueva and head of color guard there, and also a color guard instructor for the University of New Mexico.

Another member of our percussion staff is Valentino “Tino” Leyba. He is head of percussion studies at Onate High School and he will be working primarily with our cymbal line, but he’ll also be helping out Will as sort of an assistant caption head.

Trey Ortega is another member of our percussion staff. He’s actually back there filming this, or rather streaming it on Facebook so those that aren’t here tonight can still get the information.

Mark Gallegos is another one of our percussion techs, and he along with Trey are co-directors of Percussion at La Cueva high school.

Moving on to our vis staff, Ziggy Garcia, who is actually currently with the Colts drum and bugle corps. Before that he was with the Blue Stars and is currently brass and vis caption head at Volcano Vista high school. He marched two years with the Bluecoats.

Daniel Sault, who works with Sandia, is going to be writing our drill and working as a vis tech.

Tyler North, who is the band director of Sandia, will be writing our brass book. At the last staff meeting we sat down and pretty much drafted our entire show and at this point we’re just waiting for licensing rights for the arrangements. For those that are familiar with North’s shows, or rather Sandia’s shows, they’re usually pretty interesting. They don’t necessarily follow the normal scope of music and we hope to follow the same path with Arsenal.

Another really important member of the staff that I felt needed to be recognized because of all he’s done for the organization is Neil Sparks who is our webmaster and our graphic designer. He built our website from scratch, he did all of our logos, he set up the registration, he’s done all of it. Without him we wouldn’t be where we are now.

The Plan

Alright, so now, what you actually came to hear; the plan. The plan is relatively simple; it's to field a DCI SoundSport team for the 2017 season. We're following a strategy that was basically exemplified by the Guardians Drum and Bugle Corps. They're a new organization out of Texas that are now in their fourth year of operation and are already heading to Indianapolis to compete in DCI championships. What they did was they started off as a SoundSport team, and they used the SoundSport team to gauge interest of community members and also to slowly grow their program before becoming Open Class. They were Open Class by the second year of operation, expanded their tour the third year, and now they're going to the championships. It's very exciting and it's something we hope we can follow.

So what is SoundSport? SoundSport is DCI's newest program. It's essentially a new set of rules for ensembles that allows you to compete at a smaller level than Open Class or World Class that allows you to grow your programs locally before attempting to tackle a national tour. On the screen are the rules for SoundSport, and what you might notice is that in many ways they're the same (basic performance) rules as drum corps, only smaller. You're dealing with a smaller performance area, you're dealing with a smaller performance time, so shorter shows, and you're dealing with small teams, not 150-member ensembles. SoundSport says you can have a membership of 5 people and still compete- which we're hoping to have a lot more than that, obviously, but if worse comes to worse we still have the means of getting started.

So these are the numbers for our first season. We'd like to have 50 members, split between brass and battery percussion. You can see the specific numbers there, you'll notice that we're not actually having drum majors and that's because with a smaller performance space, and a smaller ensemble and less intensive drill, we believe we can get by without a drum major. However, should we receive significant interest and get more than 50 members – if we go up to say 100 members- we would audition for a drum major because at that point it would be necessary.

All of our brass instruments will be borrowed with the exception of our contras, which I will get to later. We've already made a deal with La Cueva where we will use their entire set of battery drums in exchange for us putting new heads on them and new hoops on the bass drums. It's great that we have a full set of drums right off the bat, especially because they all match and because two of our techs actually work with La Cueva, so we have a nice open relationship with them regarding the use of this equipment.

For this first season we will not be fielding a front ensemble, because the front ensemble is the most expensive part of a drum corps. Each of those instruments is expensive in its own right, and all of the accessories – cymbals, crotales, temple blocks, snare drums- everything that you have to attach to it makes it more expensive, and having a front ensemble is really what requires you to have an equipment truck. So by not fielding a front ensemble for the first year we're hoping to (avoid) all of that expense so that in the year following we can add (a front ensemble) on to the program and have it be functioning without being too much of a financial drain.

Part of that SoundSport rules is that they really encourage musicianship over showmanship, and because of the small size of the (performance) field, it really limits how effective a colorguard can be. With that in mind we will not be fielding a colorguard for the first season. It will be strictly a brass and battery percussion ensemble.

For the first season members will be purchasing their own uniform- it's simple and it's affordable. A full set of uniforms costs between 25,000 and 30,000, which as a new organization we are simply not able to afford to make that purchase. Basically what we're hoping to have is a simple yellow polo with a white color and then a black hat. We're still undecided if we want black slacks, what kind of shoes, but this for sure will be the top. And members will purchase this and they will own it, so you get to keep it at the end of the season, which is kind of cool.

Clinic/Audition Schedule

So here's the rough schedule of our clinics and our auditions for the season. Our first clinic is July 9th, but there we're going to kind of take a back step and wait until high school marching band season has come to a close because we don't want to be stepping on anyone's toes with our clinics interrupting football games, competitions, that sort of thing. So our next clinic won't be until November. Audition camp will be the next month, hopefully in December. Callbacks in January, and from there we will have a monthly camp up until the summer where we will have a week of rehearsals before we leave for our first show.

Tour Schedule

The tour is going to be relatively short, we're hoping to have at least two shows but we're open to having more as the schedule becomes available to us. We're definitely going to have a farewell performance, where we perform for the community, play through our show, play our concert charts. The big show that we want to go to is the Southwestern Championship. As a SoundSport team we perform before all the drum corps, in the Alamodome, so our little corps goes out into the big dome and plays, and then all of our members gets tickets to the show. So after they've performed, they get to go sit in the stands and watch 24 drum corps. Definitely a lot of bang for your buck. You get to perform and then watch a bunch of drum corps. Your tuition will take care of all it- it'll take care of the bus to get out there, it will take care of housing, and it will take care of meals on tour.

The other thing that SoundSport offers is the chance to compete virtually. Basically, you perform and record it through a high cam in the high box at a stadium or on a scaffold, and then you send that in to DCI and their judges evaluate it. And they're starting a new program this year in that SoundSport teams are actually ranked internationally, where it's actually a competitive event and you'll be ranked directly against other competing ensembles. Which is pretty neat because we're from New Mexico, recording our show, and we're being ranked against the other SoundSport teams all over the United States. There's a bunch of SoundSport teams in China, in Japan, Taiwan, Mexico, South America, so it's basically a world-wide ranking for us which would be pretty cool off the bat. It would be a good way to compare our progress to other programs, and to kind of give our students the chance to say "hey, this corps in china that you've never heard of? Yeah, we're better than them." It's a good motivational tool.

The last show, the last event would be early August, and we'd play the show again, play our concert tunes, and have a barbeque for everyone. And we'd somehow figure out a way, maybe get a big projector screen in a park or something, and stream DCI finals for everyone to watch.

Sentinel

The other part of our organization is Sentinel Winter Guard, because we're not going to be fielding a colorguard with the Drum Corps, we still wanted to keep those kids involved and to help that colorguard program grow. So we're starting a separate program called Sentinel under the Arsenal banner, and the goal of this program is to give colorguard students the chance to continue working on their technique after the marching season is over and into the spring. Initially this program is going to be pretty small- we're hoping for sixteen kids, starting off. Really, the goal here is that Sentinel will eventually grow to be a training platform for our colorguard members, so that we can train them through the winterguard and then they join the drum corps later on.

So here's the schedule for the July Clinic- it's pretty straightforward. We pushed the camp start time back to ten o'clock because we have several people coming from Las Cruces, and we wanted to give them time to drive up. It's going to be a two block day, the first block is going to be spent in subsectionals for the percussion, so we're going to have snares, tenors, basses, cymbals, and then we're also going to have high brass and low brass. Then we're going to break for lunch- unfortunately we can't provide lunch because we don't have a food truck or the means to feed 50 to 100 kids at this point. After lunch we will return and do two hours of full battery rehearsal and full brass line rehearsal and then we're going to bring everyone together for a full ensemble rehearsal that's going to be open to the community.

Currently, we are working on getting the rights to 'La Suerte de los Tontos' in order to arrange that as a brass and percussion piece. The Blue Devils did that in 1980, it's a very crazy jazz chart with lots of Latin percussion and it should be a lot of fun. So if you're registered for the clinic you should be receiving music for that pretty soon.

Long Term Plans

Our goal at this point, the light at the end of the tunnel, is to be open class. That is to be a fully functional, competitive drum corps. So to be Open Class we have to take our brass and percussion ensemble, we have to attach a front ensemble, we have to attach a colorguard, and we have to be able to move that entire group all over the country to compete. So the plan, initially with the SoundSport team, is that it's only going to be 1 to 2 years, depending on how the brass and percussion program grows. If we have a lot of interest from the community, if we have a lot of people contributing funds to us to purchase this equipment, we could feasibly be Open Class as early as 2018. However, it's more than likely that we will have to wait until 2019 or 2020 to be a fully competitive drum corps. But at the same time, (our members, even as SoundSport) will still be playing drum corps music, touring, playing drum corps shows, and being judged by DCI judges until the point where we become Open Class. Our goal is to be Open Class within three years.

Our second goal is the establishment of additional Arsenal Affiliate Programs. We consider Sentinel Winter Guard to be an affiliate program in that it is another program provided by Arsenal, under the Arsenal brand. Our long term plan involves the creation of several ensembles, but each time a new ensemble is established, the old one will not go away. So when we become Open Class we plan on maintaining the SoundSport team. We plan on having a full Open Class Drum Corps, and the SoundSport Team, and the Winterguard.

The reasoning behind this is (clear). If you look at the Blue Devils, a lot of people see the Blue Devils and they see Blue Devils A, the corps that wins the world championship every year. The reality of the situation is that the Blue Devils are three drum corps. They have their A corps, their B corps, and their C corps. You can march Blue Devils from the time you are eleven years old until the time you are twenty-one. Ten years of training for any one student in any one style will yield an exemplary performer, and that's what we want to do with Arsenal. We want to use the SoundSport team as a training and recruiting platform for the main corps. Plus, because the SoundSport team will be travelling to the Southwestern championship, it's an opportunity for those students to perform in the same stadium as the A corps, and then see the A corps perform that night; we think that would be a really cool experience for students who are new to the organization.

Third, and one of the most important things we'd like to see, is the return of the Drums Along the Sandias DCI show. Now the staff and I, and the board of directors and I, have sat down and discussed this, and it's simply not feasible to have the show return in 2017. There's too many financial and political hurdles to get over. But once we are established as an organization, once we have interest in our ensembles and the activity, we believe it's not only possible but necessary to get this show back, to give our students the chance to perform in front of the home crowd. So we hope that will happen on the same timeline as our evolution to Open Class. So the first year we intend to compete as an Open Class corps will be the same year that Drums Along the Sandias returns.

Brass Line

I'm going to take very briefly about our brass. We've found something really good. A normal marching contra, which is a bell-front, shoulder-mounted tuba, is 5,500 dollars, that's from the Jupiter Company. The contras we've been able to get from Wessex are 1,600. Going with Wessex means we will be completely self-sufficient with our brass line at a third of the price of any other brass manufacturer. We can field a corps of 80 brass members for 80,000 dollars through Wessex. Additionally, Wessex has already shown that they'd be willing to work with us. Our brass staff have play tested this instrument and we noted that it had the tendency to go sharp due to the heat of New Mexico. On talking to Wessex about it, they've decided to help us out by providing longer tuning slides to enable us to tune in desert conditions. The fact that they are already willing to work with us and tweak their designs and help us means that we will be able to forge a strong relationship with them, a relationship that will be paramount to our success in the future.

After tonight we will be launching our capital campaign. The amount that we are trying to raise is 20,000. This amount will help us cover the cost of our contras, our drum heads, drum sticks, stick bags, the insurance, the IRS filing, the state filing, and all of the other fees that are associated with forming a new drum corps. This amount will help us push forward with this first year before we go on to attack bigger things.

Something that I forgot to mention earlier is that all percussionists attending the clinic will receive a pair of drum sticks, and all brass members will receive a pair of gloves, because we really want to start standardizing the equipment that the corps uses. We're hoping initially to use IP sticks and mallets, Remo drum heads, Wessex brass, and we haven't yet decided on battery or front ensemble equipment, but we're leaning towards Mapex and Majestic. We'll definitely keep you updated as we move forward with that. However like we said, we're hoping to borrow everything for this first season, with the exception of the disposable equipment like sticks, drum heads, etc.

At this point I'd like to open up the floor for any questions that anyone might have.

Q: "How much will tuition cost?"

A: "SoundSport doesn't allow their teams to stay in schools, which is how DCI corps really cut their costs. Because we might be staying in a hotel, that leaves our costs kind of up in the air, but we hope to keep tuition between 400-500 which includes the trip to San Antonio, lodging, the uniform, and the training camps.

Thank you, and if there are any additional questions, feel free to email us at contact@ArsenalPerformingArts.org.