



Stepping up the *sound*

Big Red Band director Kimberly Mieder instructs members on the 50-yard line during the pregame performance period of the football game against Newsome. (Photo by Nadiya Fakhar)

By Nikki Ferrera
Life Editor

The band room is packed. Packed with students; packed with instruments; packed with energy.

"I want big sound!" Big Red Band director Kimberly Mieder yells over the rustling of moving bodies, flipping papers and quick bursts of brass sounds.

It's almost 6 p.m., an 90 minutes before the start of the

football game against Newsome. It's the first home game of the year, and so, for the first time, the band will perform its Dazzling Divas halftime show in front of a home crowd.



Two hours earlier, anyone passing through the walkway near the cafeteria -- maybe even anyone in the 500 Hall

or near the trophy cases -- would have been treated to sporadic noises echoing from the H Patio.

Groups of students sat around the tables, or on the bench-like, low wall that surrounds the patio. There were the occasional students who lingered in the center chatting in groups of two or three, waiting for an afterschool activity to start or maybe passing time around campus until their parents picked them up.

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Band members perform during the halftime show, which features songs from Etta James, Donna Summer and Whitney Houston. (Photo by Jimmy Herd-Bond)



Senior Katelyn Ellwood becomes emotional as she and her fellow seniors reminisce on their years in band to underclassmen during freshmen initiation on the night of the seniors' last first home game. (Photo by Victoria Russo)



Drum Majors Rachel McKay and Anthony Green do their take on the traditional halftime show dance. "I help command a fantastic band filled with fantastic people and fantastic talents and minds," Green said. "I can vouch for everyone in this band. They're all such hard workers and I love leading them." (Photo by Jimmy Herd-Bond)

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But the most prominent group of students, the ones who were clearly identifiable in their red, black or gray "Dazzling Divas" T-shirts, were the band members who remained at school rather than going home before rehearsal started for the night's show.

A few flipped through their blue Springboard books or large binders, trying to get homework out of the way as soon as possible, while others had their instruments out and were preparing for the game. There was little uniformity in the notes these students played. Most mainly practiced independently as others looked on, some clapping to the beat of the tempo their friends made.

Amid the people and sounds, some students took a moment to describe the band's relationship. "We're probably the greatest band in the land - no, we're definitely the greatest band in the land," said junior Lane Griffin. "We form a great bond together, and we kind of have to because we have to mesh well together to make good music."

Sophomore Emani Aikens agreed. "It's really fun. We're always doing something new and it's like a family."



Before long, all the non-band students had either left campus or relocated. The large, maroon door of the band room constantly whooshed open and closed, signaling the arrival of even more musicians to the H Patio; a couple were already in full uniform, hat and all.

Whether they left for home or happy hour at Steak'n Shake, by 5 p.m., nearly all the band members were back. The H-Patio was still filled with band students, but this time, it was clearly for a reason other than the laid-back practice that characterized the previous two hours. Band freshman and seniors (or in some cases, section leaders who weren't seniors) stood circled around the chained-off H for a special ceremony: freshmen Initiation.

At the feet of these uniformed "band freshmen" (any first-year band member) were

red paper bags. The bags remained unopened as seniors went around the circle, giving the freshmen words of wisdom or personal tales of how band changed the past three years of their life. Some described band as being their saving grace, others the reason that they stayed at Hillsborough or the one thing that really allowed them to come out of their shell and be themselves.

"They're making me start," said onlooker Tarsheta Jackson. The band parent, mother to junior Robert King, let out a small, almost embarrassed, laugh and quickly fanned her tearing eyes.

Jackson wasn't the only one who got emotional during the initiation. Several of the seniors began crying as they told their story or listened to a friend's. "It moves people and it moves me and I'm so proud to be in this band," said senior Sarah Rehl.

Drum Major Rachel McKay offered the final words of advice, more to her fellow seniors than any of the first year band students. "Enjoy our last first home game!"

With that, the freshmen were able to open

their bags, a couple of which had been blown over by the wind. In each bag was a ribbon with the student's class on it, and section leaders went around, pinning the ribbon to their section members' jackets and instructing them to wear it the rest of the night. Group hugs were abundant as seniors and freshmen alike enjoyed this small time among their friends and band mates.



"Everyone get inside, it's time for warm-ups!" yelled McKay and fellow Drum Major Anthony Green. Drum beats traveled through the open band room door and in to the patio.

Within minutes, the band room was full, and nearly everyone had begun playing synchronized scales. A few students still hurried into their seats to get started, as McKay and Green conducted at the head of the room and Mieder silently took roll.

Scales progressed to pregame tunes such as The Star Spangled Banner and the Alma Mater, finally leading way to the opener of the

halftime show, Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody."

"Picture where you are on the field," Mieder said as students marched in place and balanced on their toes while they played the song. "Play it all the way down. Move your bodies to the drill."

"Forte! Piano! Piano! Forte!" Mieder instructed when the music finishes, her 10 years of experience as the director of the Big Red Band allowing her to pick up on flaws that an untrained ear wouldn't detect. "Please remember to do this tonight. We need to master these dynamic nuances."

The band continued through the rest of their Dazzling Divas set, which was picked by Mieder and pays tribute to the late vocalists Whitney Houston, Etta James and Donna Summer.

Then they moved on to choosing the songs they would perform in the stands before and after the halftime show, with Mieder approving or denying each choice.

Suddenly, the air conditioning in the room went out. "This happens every time," Mieder

said and rushed out the door to try to get it turned back on.

"OK guys," McKay said, "We're going to run through a few more."

"You're going to run through more," someone called out from the opposite side of the room.

Mieder re-entered the room and instructed everyone to move to the air conditioned cafeteria where they could "relax before going out there." Soon enough, the relaxation period was over and it was time to leave for the field.



Band members and Dancerettes created two massive lines outside the cafeteria and made their way through the JROTC Hall, on to the track and finally the center of the football field as the audience in the stands cheered. After playing the pregame songs, the band filed onto the stands. Drum majors stood at the front of the group on high, silver podiums. Every once and a while, the rest of the crowd would begin to sing fight songs, but regardless of where the chants originated, the band always sang them the loudest and

with the most liveliness.

While students went through their song, parent volunteers started taking out bright red plumes from a gray container on the side of the stands. They called the kids to come down, and one by one, parents placed the plumes on top of everyone's hats. The parents worried whether there would be enough plumes for everyone, but by the end, there's one left.

The band made a large oval-shape on the side of the track, playing a three minute warm-up and getting in the last chances to rehearse the numbers before the show.

"Beautiful. Bring it in," Mieder said after the final note of "At Last."

The notion that this band is a family is prevalent among its members. And all night, that notion was never clearer than during the pre-halftime huddle. As everyone packed in tightly around one another, arms in and extended toward the center of the circle, their collective excitement couldn't be missed. It was clear how much work they put in for, how much they cared about, the next few minutes of the night.

"See that crowd out there?" asked junior

Shawn Joseph to the huddle. "They're waiting. You know what they're waiting for? The Big Red Band!" The air momentarily filled with a ferocious barking noise. The band again took up a two-line formation and marched around the field. It's halftime.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it's show time!" said an announcer. "You've seen the rest, now it's time to see the best."

The audience automatically started clapping and cheering, whooping and hollering and didn't stop the entire performance. The band didn't miss a beat. The mock choreography they did in band room hours earlier was nothing in comparison to their full effort. They oozed exhilaration. People in the crowd chanted along with every fight song and moved along with every body roll. They continued clapping even as the band left the field and entered the concession area for their third quarter break.

When they got back to the stands, the band played their last selections of the night, including the crowd favorite "Jump on it."

With that, they were done, and the Big Red Band left the football field the same way they entered it -- in two single-file lines.