

A musical journey

The Beat Goes On Marching Band makes a historic trip to Shanghai

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The clash of cymbals, the blare of brass, and the thunder of drums — all Oregon style — echoed across the broad boulevards of Shanghai this fall, thanks to Portland-based The Beat Goes On Marching Band.

"It was just so cool, it really was," says support team member Ken Kane.

It was an experience of a lifetime for the 122 volunteer musicians, color

guard and twirlers — ranging in age from their 20s to 82 — who not only marched in the massive Shanghai Tourism Festival Parade televised to an audience of 220 million Chinese, but also because band members actually found themselves performing on top of China's most notable landmark.

"It's a pretty weird thing to be playing 'Louie Louie' on the Great Wall of China," Kane says.

Along with musicians from 24
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Photo courtesy of The Beat Goes On Marching Band

The Beat Goes On Marching Band was the largest and only band representing the United States during the nighttime Shanghai Tourism Festival Parade, televised to an audience of 220 million in China.

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bands from around the world, The Beat Goes On Marching Band was the largest and only band representing the United States in the huge nighttime spectacle. The American participants were hosted in-country by the Chinese government. A \$50,000 cultural grant from the U.S. State Department, along with fundraisers here, helped defray travel costs.

As for their musical repertoire, Band Director Steve Tolopka says, "We may be a marching band, but we are much more likely to lean toward rock 'n' roll and Lady Gaga than John Philip Sousa.

Perhaps the most popular tune played by the band, especially for the older crowd, was a Chinese song the musicians learned for this occasion. It was the theme song from a Chinese TV show popular back in the 1980s called "Over Mountains and Valleys." The song is equivalent to theme songs from old American TV favorites like "The Rockford Files" and "Hawaii Five-O."

Besides multiple performances in Shanghai and Beijing,



Photo courtesy of The Beat Goes On Marching Band

Members of The Beat Goes On Marching Band had the unique opportunity to perform on the Great Wall of China during their summer trip overseas.

the band also enthusiastically was received in Suzhou, one of Portland's sister cities. They played beneath a huge electronic billboard which read "Welcome Beat Goes On Band, from Portland U.S.A."

Band members felt they scored well in diplomacy, endearing themselves to the Chinese, despite having been told in advance that Chinese

people don't like physical contact.

"We found that not to be the case," Kane says. "We got hugs, people shook our hands, and they danced with our twirlers. We just found the Chinese people to be far more effusive and excited about us being there than we were expecting. It made the whole trip wonderful."

Even the language barrier was easily overcome. "I've never smiled as much in as short a time as I did over there, because smiles and music were the mediums of exchange," Kane says. "It was facial expressions and music."

Wherever the band goes, good times seem to follow. It has performed before a standing-room-only crowd on a

Of note

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cruise to the Bahamas, at the Seattle Seafair, Canada's Calgary Stampede, Vancouver's Christmas parade, in San Francisco, and at Plymouth Rock. The band now has an eye on the 2017 presidential inaugural parade and next year's San Antonio Fiesta.

The band does not perform in Portland's Rose Festival Parade because many of its members are also members of the One More Time Around Again Marching Band, which is a popular Rose Festival staple. But it still has frequent performances in the Portland area, including a concert at Hamilton Park last month on National Night Out.

Musicians are often those who played in their high school bands and haven't picked up an instrument in years, but decide to get themselves up to speed musically so they can get involved.

"If it was fun for them in high school, it is probably going to still be fun for them now," Tolopka says. ■