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Cheers, gasps as Lafayette High band members learn they'll march in 2018 Macy's Parade

BY KAILEY BROUSSARD | Special to The Advocate

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Lafayette High Mighty Lion Band members cheer and throw confetti after the announcement that they were selected to march in the 2018 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City Thursday, April 13, 2017, at Lafayette High School in Lafayette, La.

Advocate staff photo by LESLIE WESTBROOK

Liam Jochum, a 16-year-old Lafayette High School percussionist, shed tears of joy Thursday after learning that he and his fellow Mighty Lion Marching Band members is among an elite group of bands selected to march in the 92nd Annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in 2018.

"I'm glad that I get to be a part of it because it's always been my dream," Jochum said. "The fact that it's the first time that Lafayette High gets to do it and I get to be a part of it is such a cool thing."

The band is one of only 12 collegiate, high school and military bands around the U.S. selected to march in the parade. It will mark the first appearance for Lafayette High, which had applied previously but not been selected..

Jochum, now a sophomore, will be 18 when he dons the band's kelly green, black and white uniform and heads for New York.

One source of inspiration for Jochum and other band members as they practice for their brief moment on a national stage is a large drumhead supplied by Macy's that will be installed on the band room wall. It has an orange/reddish star on a blue background, the symbol for the giant retailer.

Jochum's usual instrument of choice is the marimba, which is too large for marching, so he'll be shifting to the drumline.

"It looks like it'll be a lot of practice sessions, but a lot of us will be looking at that drumhead hanging in the band room and reminding ourselves that we are good enough for this," he said. "We work really hard and we always strive to do better than we did the previous year."

Scotty Walker, LHS band director, along with Wesley Whatley, creative director for the iconic Thanksgiving Day parade, surprised the band with the announcement in the school auditorium during classes, hiding the details from most school administration, faculty and students.

“Macy’s is a national historic treasure,” Walker said. “Everybody’s heard of Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. It’s just really special to be a part of it. It makes you very proud of all the students that have come through here, the students that are here now and certainly the students that are going to be here in the future.”

Lafayette High School’s marching band was selected as one of 12 bands from collegiate, high school and military bands around the U.S. The spectacle showcasing gargantuan balloons, glimmering celebrity figures and tantalizing float designs attracts millions of viewers yearly. More than 3.5 million spectators in Manhattan and around 22.3 million NBC viewers watched the procession in 2015, according to Forbes Magazine.

Whatley said the ensemble was chosen based on its résumé, including technique in past marching band shows, accomplishments in marching and music and how its members can “well represent their state.”

“Their ability to flesh out, to tell a story through their music and marching is just second-to-none,” he said. “We’re really pleased that they’re coming for the first time in 2018.”

Whatley said the selection committee was impressed with the band’s 2016 competitive show, “Twisted,” which chronicled jesters’ trickster antics through eerie selections such as Alberto Ginastera’s “Danza Finale” coupled with the color guard’s portrayal as the band’s malevolent puppet masters.

“We felt that they told the story through the music in a really stunning, intricate and sophisticated way,” he said. “That’s the kind of storytelling that we look for from Macy’s parade performances, and we know our audience is really going to respond to that on Thanksgiving morning.”

Walker said he was confident the band’s latest production would draw the parade organizers’ attention.

“I knew our show was really, really good and it would appeal because of the jesters,” he said.

The LHS band has had a history of national appearances: the 300-person band placed 12th in Music for All’s Grand National Championships among more than 90 bands from around the U.S. in 2007, as well as 11th in 2012. For 14 years, the Mighty Lion Marching Band has held Louisiana’s Showcase of Marching Bands Grand Champion title.

The band’s concert ensemble also makes appearances at Carnegie Hall every four years.

Taylor Lejeune, 16, a sophomore flautist, said although performing with the band can prove intense work, the payoff is the experience and bonds that come with the sizable task.

“It’s really cool to see the end result, seeing what other people do and what you do,” she said.

Mallory Domingue, 17, a junior clarinet player and assistant drum major, said she advises the underclassmen who will march down Manhattan to cherish the fleeting experience.

“Everyone says, ‘Don’t blink;’ you should really follow that advice because it’s going to go by very quickly,” she said.

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