

Katy Marching

Katy families enjoy big sounds under the Friday night lights of Rhodes Stadium

Written by Noreen Stavinoha

Select Photography by Suzi Issa



With shiny instruments gleaming beneath the bright lights, percussion perfectly marking the time, and drum majors striking up a beat, fans are sure to be wowed.

Fine-Tuning Their Talent

Halftime performances are just long enough to give competing football teams a break, but in those minutes, upbeat music fills the air and precision marching bursts with school spirit. The first game's program is about four minutes long, with the length of each program getting progressively longer until the last game has a full eight-minute show that really highlights the band's progression. Behind those performances is a whole lot of hard work. In fact, Katy ISD's young musicians commit to nearly 100 hours of dedicated

practice each football season. While their peers are still enjoying their summer vacation, band students are in the band hall and on the field, learning the music and marching formations that will constitute their program. This year, Katy marching bands will perform exciting themes ranging from "Starlight" at Mayde Creek High School to "Escape" at Morton Ranch High School to "The Led Zeppelin Show" at Seven Lakes High School.

Freshmen have learned to read music and play together in junior high, but now they must perfect some serious coordination skills. Instruments must be held at the same height, and feet must march in time with the music while following the proper formation - skills that require much practice. To top it all off, students must memorize

Spartan band members perform during halftime at a local football game, never missing a beat

Bands

On any given autumn weekend during football season, Katy ISD high school marching bands ignite the field during halftime with sensational music, dazzling formations, and show-stopping performances.



Photo by Dee Bleivins

new tunes. Fortunately, they can count on dedicated band directors and help from returning upper classmen who have already mastered the art of performing in a marching band.

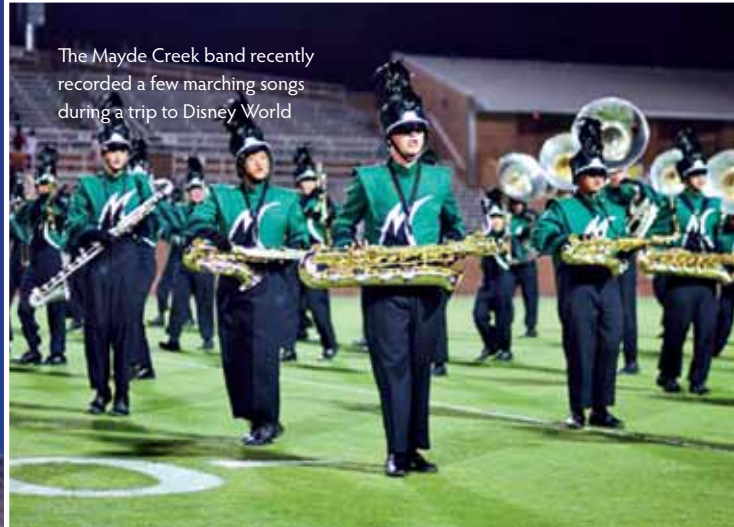
Working Together in Harmony

Each of Katy ISD's six marching bands ranges in size from between 200 to 300 students representing the student body as a whole. They come from diverse backgrounds and abilities, and it's the band director's job to unite all of their unique talents and personalities into a coordinated body that produces performances at the highest level.



Photo by Barb Boyett

Cinco Ranch band students gear up for a halftime performance during a game against the Katy Tigers



The Mayde Creek band recently recorded a few marching songs during a trip to Disney World



Members of the JET band and Spartan band enjoy a close bond, teaming up to perform in the Sugar Bowl and winning the inaugural KatyOne Award for team work

Photo by Suzi Ilesca



The Morton Ranch High School band recently finished first in the Texas Honor Band Area Competition



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Dedication is a must for everyone. "There is a great sense of belonging [and] a sense of family," says Chris Bailey, director of Taylor High's JET band. "[It's] a place for students to find their niche." Matthew Koriath, a drum major and trombone player at Morton Ranch High, notes the challenges and rewards of being part of marching band. "It isn't easy, but it's worth it, because of all the events you get to be part of and all the friends you make," he shares.

Flying Colors in Competitions

Once football season is over, the marching competitions begin and each band has the chance to show off. In preparation, marching bands are broken down into several smaller units according to ability. One of the first events of the competitive season, the Katy Marching Festival showcases all of Katy ISD's marching bands, among others. State competitions at regional and area levels follow, with Katy marching bands consistently shining in their ratings. Last year, the Morton Ranch Maverick band finished first in the Texas Honor Band Area Competition, where bands submit tapes of their UIL concert program for review by director judges. The accomplishment came after the Mavericks earned first-division ratings in UIL marching and sight-reading contests.

"It was my first year as head director, and that was really exciting," shares Kyle Coleman, who oversees the Maverick band. "We also had two students earn outstanding ratings in the individual all-state auditions, which puts them in the top 1% of all high school musicians in Texas." Coleman's pride in his band is typical of all the band directors in Katy ISD, and the accomplishments of Morton Ranch mirror those of other schools, as well. Superior ratings in marching contests and sweepstakes awards are common.

Musical Motivation

Creating outstanding music programs for competitions provides lead-ins for concert programs and community-based activities throughout the year. Holiday programs have become fan favorites, and spring concerts bring with them an array of varied music far different than the marching pieces. Spring also means trips for the bands, and they can be the highlights of the school year. These trips spotlight the level of excellence Katy marching bands have come to be known for. Recently, with the world as their stage, the JET and Spartan bands teamed up to perform in the Sugar Bowl pregame and halftime shows in New Orleans. Pairing up for this endeavor strengthened the bond between their two band programs and showed the world what Katy is made of.

Disney World and Disney Land are also sought-after destinations and provide recording studios for high school bands. Students can work with a professional to record music to accompany a movie, getting a better idea of what it means to work as a professional musician. The Seven Lakes Spartan band will embark on the recording process this year, and Mayde Creek's marching band participated in it last year. Added to the unparalleled professional experience is the chance to parade through Disney's streets.

Connecting with the Community

Band members work to raise money for travel to contests and special programs around the country by hosting fundraisers like car washes, fireworks sales, and golf tournaments throughout the year. They work hard to make these events successful and learn the value of finding creative ways to fund their dreams.



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“At Katy High School, we, as a band take a great deal of pride in our community involvement. We are glad that we have the opportunity to support our school and community in a public way, while striving for success as a performing ensemble.”

- Andrew Lee, assistant director of bands at Katy High School

The Katy Tiger band expertly forms the state of Texas during a halftime show



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The JET band takes the field during halftime

Photo by Dale Morrison

Katy's band directors also believe music programs play an important role in teaching students to interact with and give back to the community. Every year, the marching bands at Taylor and Seven Lakes high schools parade through their neighborhoods to connect with the community and raise funds for music programs and events. For a donation, families can ask the band to stop and play a song on their lawn. Band members get a kick out of seeing the little kids run out to the curb and wave to them. Last year, the Spartan band dedicated time to creating care packages for the troops overseas. That's community interaction of the highest order.

A Family Feel

A strong sense of family exists between band members, serving as one of the biggest factors in helping them do their very best and overcoming any adversities that come their way. Melissa LeRoy, a drum major at Seven Lakes High School, speaks of a particularly difficult situation her group faced in 2009 when Matthew Schmitt, one of their members, was killed in an auto accident. It was a crushing blow to the whole school, but particularly for the band. "Everyone came together and became even closer," LeRoy shares. "It was very uplifting."

All of the band directors have expressed similar goals of guiding their students toward being responsible leaders and capable citizens in the context of their music programs. Seven Lakes' band director Damon Archer has succinctly set those goals into what he calls the major pillars of being a Spartan.

The first pillar of unity reminds students they are stronger as a group than as an individual. The second pillar of training shares that through discipline and methodical practice students can develop their natural ability. Focus, the third pillar, refers to the ability to center one's mind on the task at hand and bring it to completion. The next time you watch your favorite high school band marching during halftime at a football game, remember the dedication and perseverance of these young Katy musicians. KM

NOREEN STAVINOHA lives in Katy with her husband and miniature schnauzer and loves to tell the stories of interesting people.