

Trojans band delights at Disney World

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DOWNERS GROVE – Long hours of preparation paid off for the Downers Grove North High School Marching Band, when the young musicians were greeted with enthusiastic cheers as they performed Nov. 24 and 25 at Walt Disney World in Florida.

Disney chose the Trojan Marching Band for the prime spot during one of the busiest times of the year – closing out the evening parade on the day after Thanksgiving.

“You’re like, oh my gosh! There’s so many people; you don’t even know who they are,” marching band drum major Maria D’Ambrose said.

Because the popular Main Street Electrical Parade stopped running at the Magic Kingdom this fall, two school marching bands – one from Indiana and the local players from Downers Grove – were the only entertainment in the parade preceding the nightly fireworks show. Thousands lined the route that meandered past the sparkling holiday lights of the castle.

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"It's where dreams come true ... and then the fact that we got to bring our music into it as well just made the experience once in a lifetime," said Audrey McDaniel, marching band board president and mellophone player.

Neither nerves nor excitement distracted the band members from giving a rousing rendition of Andy Grammer's "Good To Be Alive (Hallelujah)," an apropos choice for dozens of teens from Downers Grove who enjoyed four days of fun and friendship in sunny Florida.

"I knew our students would rise to the challenge," Downers Grove North Marching Band Director Bill Miller said about the group's two performances Nov. 24 and 25.

The band spent 24 hours on a coach bus before a four-hour rehearsal Nov. 23 and a 5 a.m. call time Thanksgiving morning. Despite the tired looks, the teens displayed the maturity of professionals while warming up, running through the program several times and suiting up.

"During the rehearsal I was kind of sluggish, but during the performance I was a lot better. It was really hot, but it was nice to see all these people there and to know that they really wanted to hear the music and see us perform," McDaniel said.



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The Downers Grove North High School Marching Band performs Nov. 25 at Disney World's Magic Kingdom.

A few minor mishaps – like a broken instrument and a missing uniform piece – didn't slow down the preparation for the Thanksgiving Parade of Bands, a very different venue from a Trojan football game.

"That's one of the things that I really like about doing performances like this: It takes them out of their comfort

zone. They have to problem-solve. They have to work together," Miller said.

By the time the Trojans marched through Epcot's World Showcase with three other high school bands to the stage at Fountain Plaza to join the Boston Brass Quintet, multiple cameras were capturing the spectacle for a live broadcast on BandDirector.com.

"It didn't feel real. It was weird to see all the cameras going around," D'Ambrose said.

The band dazzled the morning crowd with Star Wars, Disney and patriotic medleys.

"They sounded great and they looked great, too – marching in perfect formation and performing the color guard routines without a hitch. As I watched them parade past Cinderella's castle, I actually had goose bumps!" Downers Grove North Principal Janice Schwarze said in a blog post to parents. "I also wanted you to know how impressed I was of the band's behavior."

Miller said a band trip is about more than just hitting the right notes.

"Our students really take pride in doing the right thing and conducting themselves the right way and being respectful and polite to others," Miller said.

Hearing feedback like that is music to parents' ears, especially those who worried about children who were missing out on family holiday celebrations to be part of the school's renowned music program.

"We're really passionate about music. It's our favorite part of the day, and we also have amazing directors: Mr. [Brayer] Teague and Mr. Miller," said McDaniel, who called Miller "an incredible instructor. He really works with us and makes us know that when you walk into the fine arts hallway, there's someone there that cares about you."