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Ian Black oral history interview by Deborah Anderson Silvers, November 2, 2007

Ian Black drum major. (Interviewee)

Deborah Anderson Silvers (Interviewer)

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Deborah Anderson Silvers: This is Deborah Anderson Silvers. It is Friday, November 2, and we are in the fourth floor of the library. I am here with Ian Black. He is one of the current drum majors for the University of South Florida's Herd of Thunder Marching Band. And we are going to be conducting an interview today. Ian, is this okay—this is your name?

Ian Black: Absolutely.

DS: Okay. Let's see if we can clip this on.

IB: Without getting feedback.

DS: Without getting feedback. There we go. And it's still moving, so we're good. Okay, let's start. You are one of three drum majors for the band.

IB: Yes.

DS: Tell me about your background. When did you begin in band, and when did you begin to be interested in being a drum major?

IB: I began in band in sixth grade, middle school, playing clarinet. And at the time, I didn't really know what a marching band was at all. So I kept studying music. My father

went to Oberlin [College] briefly, so he had an interest in music, and my mother's father was in the New York Philharmonic—no, mother, sorry, on cello. So the musical background was there. I continued in high school and didn't do marching band my first year, but then after seeing the marching band—and all of my friends in band were also in marching band—figured it would probably be a good idea to join.

DS: Have you always played the clarinet?

IB: Yes, so ten years now, maybe.

DS: Wow!

IB: And still going.

DS: Awesome, that's great. So when you came to USF, did you know you were going to be in the marching band?

IB: Oh, yeah.

DS: Were you a drum major in high school?

IB: Yes.

DS: Okay, and so this was a goal from the beginning?

IB: Yeah.

DS: Now, in the Herd of Thunder, do they have any requirements that say you have to be a band member?

IB: Yes. To be drum major?

DS: Mm-hm.

IB: To audition, you have to have been in the band for at least a year. Then from there, there's a conducting audition where they evaluate you based on a prepared piece, then you conduct the *Star Spangled Banner* with a live group, which is always absolutely terrible. And then finally a rather grueling interview process which, especially for returning drum majors, is not really that fun.

DS: I bet not. So who is the interview with? Is it current drum majors?

IB: Well, not current drum majors, with maybe ex-drum majors. The director of H.O.T. Band, which is Dr. Michael Robinson. At the time that I first did it there was the now assistant director of bands, John Schnettler. Mary Dooley.¹ Shawn Harlan. There were lots of people who were involved in the band, on staff, who each had their own view of—maybe bias, I don't know—of who should be drum major. Supposedly the thing that we always hear is they always know who's going to be drum major before the auditions even start.

DS: But they want to make you sweat?

IB: Oh, yeah, and they do!

DS: Oh, yeah, chill-bumps. So tell me about when you first came to USF, your first day of band practice.

IB: The first day of band camp ever here at USF, I showed up with my clarinet and everything. Actually my parents—like a lot of people, their parents help them move. My parents just said, “Bye,” ’cause I lived in Pinellas County, so really it's not that far away. And so I set up in my dorm and all that, and then band camp was the day after that. So I went and filled out the form and was greeted by all these people. “Hey, welcome to band! How ya doing?” really overly excited to see you, and it was interesting to me. Everybody started making friends. I only had one other person from my school—in the band from my high school—so I had to branch out and meet people. But immediately I felt like it was going to be a good choice, just because there were so many people and it's a different environment, ’cause it's college as opposed to high school or anything else like that. So I was pretty excited, just not only to be away from home, but to be away from home making music and being in a band that was really loud. That was exciting.

¹ Mary Dooley was also interviewed for the USF History Oral History Project. The DOI for her interview is U30-00007.

DS: Having all these friends, new friends, that did music. Was it scary at all?

IB: I didn't think so.

DS: Was it organized, or was it mass confusion the first day?

IB: It was pretty organized, and after being a drum major now—this is my second year—I've realized that there is a lot of organization that goes in it. I took part in all that, the behind the scenes work that gets it so that when a freshman walks in, they're not scrambling everywhere and not knowing what to do. There's always a friendly face guiding them. Something happy is going on that keeps them smiling and wanting to do band.

DS: That's cool. Speaking of high school, do they recruit in high school?

IB: Yes. Oh, yeah!

DS: That's a big part of your—

IB: We go to competitions and blow people's faces off. And that really gets the kids—that got me. They had Festival of Winds here, which takes in students—musical students from high schools all over the state, brings them here. They do wind ensemble, concert band, stuff for a few days. They get to see a lot of the ensembles that we offer here at USF. But the big draw for a lot of these kids is the marching band.

DS: Of course.

IB: So we—they get to sit in the stadium, or actually when we had the Special Events Center; in there it echoed, and that was amazing. But they know it's coming, and they hear the drum tap and they go nuts. And then we come out and play really loud, and from there, they're sold.

DS: Oh, yeah. So is it cool having been on both sides; you heard it in high school?

IB: And now, seeing—well, being a part of it, it's interesting, because I guess at the time I thought, "Wow! They must practice so much and do so many drill things, and I don't even know." And now when I got to college it was like, "Wow, okay, never mind." It's time consuming but it's a lot different than high school. It's really not—I don't want to say glamorous, but it's probably the best word I can think of at the moment. It's not as glamorous. That's actually a terrible word for it. It's more entertainment-oriented, as opposed to trying to perfect a show over the course of a semester. It's, "Here, we're going to do three shows, hope you enjoy all of them." Laying it out for you.

DS: (laughs) That's cool, though. So the end result is amazing when you see it. So, when you've been getting yourself prepared for both drum major and to play—you don't get to play, do you?

IB: No, not anymore. I initially did clarinet my freshman year and knew I was going to go for drum major, so I just left that in the dust. But no more playing. I mean, I'm still in ensembles and all that stuff, but not in marching band.

DS: Right, right. You get your clarinet playing in other ways.

IB: Yes.

DS: Can't do without that. Tell me about your first performance.

IB: As a—?

DS: As a drum major.

IB: Oh, as a drum major?

DS: Were you nervous?

IB: Oh, yeah! Because the way it works is that we do three shows, and each drum major gets a different show that they are center for, which center—you have to know the show inside and out as far as drill moves [and] music is concerned. Know what the drums are doing and where they're going to be, because you have to watch them constantly. And it's a lot of pressure, and especially—I was a sophomore, and usually people become drum

majors when they're juniors and seniors, so a sophomore who is in the third rotation or the third show.

So I'd seen the past two drum majors do it, and they'd set a pretty good standard. And then the new guy comes up, and to help it out, it wasn't actually a show that many people enjoyed, but that's another story. So I was really nervous. And during practices we'd practiced with tempos on, so that everybody hears it including the drum line; the drum line really drives it, and the center drum major has to watch the center snare's feet or else sound waves and science things that—I'm a music major, I don't really care about that (DS laughs)—and the band falls apart.

So we practice with the metronome on and then we take it off. And then it's up to the center drum major entirely to figure out tempos and get everything going, but there is a sound delay and that really—unless you're up there, you don't know what it's like. Being in the audience you might not notice it that much 'cause you're listening to the band, you're watching, but being that conduit between band organization to audience enjoyment is a rough, rough position to be in. Yes, I was very nervous, and there were many tempo changes, did not help at all. Really, really could have done without all that.

DS: So when you're the center, and the other two—what are the other ones—what are they doing?

IB: They look and they mirror whatever the center drum major does. So during our practice, if the center drum major messes up, as far as we were supposed to only go twenty counts and the center drum major went twenty-two, we all better go twenty-two counts or else we look bad. We all have to look bad together, it's not good to look bad as an individual. Really, it's not good to look bad at all.

DS: But if you're all together, maybe nobody—they'll think you meant to do it that way.

IB: Yeah, exactly. And we have to—when the metronome's on, we can usually get away with not watching the center drum major if you're on the side. But once the metronome's off, you have to see where their hands are falling and mirror that, because then there's phasing across the field and that's bad. But also, from more of a leadership standpoint, we all try to work together. The center drum major has to drive rehearsal, has to get things going. And that's arguable, because each of us have our own different leadership style, I suppose. And when one person's up there, it's completely different than when another person's up there and when another person's up there. But on the sides, I guess, it's more relaxed. But it's still—you have to be really focused, you have to know what you're doing, and you have to be ready to step in, take charge, and let yourself be accountable

for everything.

DS: So what do you do when something goes all to pot?

IB: Try not to look sheepish, I think, is what I—the avenue I take. (DS laughs)
Recognizing the mistake is the biggest point, so that you don't ever make it again. We went to FAU [Florida Atlantic University] just a few weeks ago, and I was center drum major for that. Made the mistake when we went out to lunch before the game.

We caravanned up there in buses, and we stopped off at some mall and went to the Cheesecake Factory and I ordered a barbecue pulled pork sandwich. Those things are gigantic! I'm not trying to plug the Cheesecake Factory or anything. But by the time we got to the game, I was so uncomfortably stuffed that I couldn't focus on anything. So in the stands, the assistant director—John Schnettler right now—calls out the stands tunes and taps the foot. We're standing and he's kind of sitting on the podium, and we're looking at the band ready to go, make sure we have their attention, and he taps your foot when to go. But he called out the tune and I was trying to think of the tempo, but I was so distracted by pork—that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it—

DS: Sounds good to me.

IB: —that I just had the complete wrong tempo. So it was supposed to be (sings the correct tempo), and it came off as (sings the tempo he used)—two, and as I'm counting it off I realize on the third beat, “Oh, my God, what am I doing?” But I had to keep going anyway. And everyone, as soon as we're done playing, looks at you and you're in the spotlight. And not only that, not only is the band looking, but all the fans in the stadium that know all of our stands tunes because they're—you know, if USF were a religion they would be devout Bulls. But they're all doing the slow turn of the head over to us. I'm just, “Oh, why did I do that? Why did I do that?”

But that's the kind of, I guess, responsibilities, and then what—when I made that mistake, I made light of it or try to, and so do the other drum majors. If we make mistakes it's always, “Oh, I'm going to make the same mistake again! Just kidding, ha ha ha! No, I'm not really going to.” But it is tough to have responsibility in that manner sometimes. But it's also an enjoyable challenge, I guess.

DS: The three of you work together very well?

IB: Yeah, I really think so. One of the other drum majors, Melissa (inaudible), she has been drum major now this is her third year. So, she and I are drum major together before this year. And then there's this new drum major, Crystal (inaudible), and she's doing a great job. So, we all know how we work by now, and we know how to deal with each other. If anything gets tense, which it never does—it has once or twice, but we work together very well.

We all have our strengths and weaknesses, as far as Melody's better—she has the respect of being in the band for four years. She knows how everything is run. I don't want to say band mom, 'cause that would be Mary Dooley. But everyone sees her and knows that she's the authority. I have the benefit, hopefully, of being known as a nice guy and not yelling at practice and just wanting to get things done. And Crystal tries a lot to get everyone motivated, because that's what we should be doing as drum majors, be more motivational and inspirational as far—in my opinion, more so than task master “We're going to have to do this or I'm going to yell at you” type thing.

DS: Like, before the beginning of band season, how long does it take the three of you to get your act together, you know, as far as beginning the practices and everything? How is it divided up? Like, are some of you in charge of certain sectionals? I know you have section leaders.

IB: Yeah, we have section leaders who take sectionals. However, we did initially this year go over to sectionals that pertained to whatever instrument we played, which were flute, clarinet, and euphonium, trombone, low brass. But then we have staff and we have section leaders. They just took care of it. So, we focused more on preparing the score, making sure we know where all the cut-offs are, what cues are we going to do, what's the drum line doing at this point?

DS: You always have to watch the drum line. (laughs)

IB: Yeah, but a lot of times we goof off. But I didn't say that into the microphone.

DS: No, you didn't.

IB: Yeah. I guess that we just know how to do it because we've seen other people do it before us, and also having done it for a year. Crystal picked up on it quick. There are certain responsibilities that we have to take care of. But it's not so much drum major intensive, I think, for the band. The drum major is not above the members of the band—only height-wise, which for once is awesome because I'm short. (DS laughs) But we just

have different responsibilities than the other band members. They have to play, we have to conduct. So, I try to approach it from that point of view, that we're not, you know, trying to get things to run in this way or take over, take control of it. We're just doing our job.

DS: How's it feel to be on the podium?

IB: Amazing, for lack of the ability to use an expletive.

DS: (laughs) I can imagine.

IB: It's so intensely loud, especially when they're warming up and you can just feel the sound waves pushing your cheeks back and it's (makes noise) going crazy. But the unfortunate part about that, 'cause I get carried away very easily with that. I love the sound of the band. It really just drives me when I'm at rehearsal, hearing them play. But I get really carried away, and I like to dance on the podium. And that's—I've been reprimanded for that, to only have fun from the waist up and also to stay focused on the drum line, 'cause I just like to listen to the music.

DS: The drum line again.

IB: I like to listen to the music and get down, which I think I'm the only drum major who expresses that desire. But whatever the case may be, it's really exciting to be up on the podium. Being out in the audience is probably still really good. But right there, you know, like I said, being the conduit between band and audience. It's so intense and it's exciting. But you have to stay focused and stay calm. But you can't. It's two opposites meeting, and it's ridiculous.

DS: Awesome experience.

IB: It really is.

DS: Tell me about when you are not on the field, when you are in the section in the stadium. Is there a set order for the way that you play, or the songs?

IB: It's based on timing. And we have downs cheers, so those are played whenever the

certain down is. We will, like I said—'cause we have that—the director has the headset on with the guys up in the box, who are, in our experience, often highly disorganized. So, what we hear, or what the director hears, is, “Okay, band, go, you have ten seconds.” And so we have a list that says this song lasts for this long. Can we pull it off? So, there’s the center drum major being yelled at and being told to go. The other two drum majors have to get everybody up, ready to play, and have to know what song we’re doing. The center drum major not only has to get everybody ready to play, but know what tempo it is and then just start it almost immediately as the director says “Go!” Then once you play, then football for a while, and it goes back to band.

We do have some—I don’t know, I guess you’d call it traditions—in the stands. Fourth quarter, for the past—I think it’s been three years, or maybe it’s two years—we’ve been playing the theme from *Superman*; that’s the “Fanfare” from *Superman*, right before fourth quarter. And that usually gets the crowd pumped up, 'cause they see the drum major. Our signal for it is we stick our hands out in the air like we’re Superman. And some people in the crowd have caught on to it, and it catches on.

DS: I’ll watch for it tomorrow.

IB: Oh, yeah. Do it. And the clarinets and the flutes stick their hands up in the air. That’s a tradition that we do. We have that in the stands. We also, at the end of the game, play the fight song, the “Alma Mater.” And then we have a song called “The Mission,” which is actually an oboe solo that was taken from a movie called *The Mission* and somehow worked into being something that we play at the end of each game. And some people like this thing that we do in the stands; other people couldn’t care less. But it’s something we do, nevertheless. But there’s no real set way. It’s just whatever works out when it works out.

DS: Okay. Do you often get people yelling from the student section, “Play number nine!”

IB: Sometimes some of the H.O.T. Band alumni, or some of the students in the other musical fraternities, will come, and they’ve been in the band before, probably, or know people who’ve been in the band—or just know the band so well that it’s like the back of their hand to them. So, they come up and they try to heckle us and say, “Hey, you should play this, you should play this!”

There’s a certain gentleman that started coming to the games last year, or maybe he’s been to the games, but there’s a song we play called “Apache.” And he loves that song, and sits conveniently right across from the band in the student section, and can yell loud enough so that we can hear him, “Play ‘Apache’! Play ‘Apache’!” So, we don’t ever

really—we're not going to play "Apache" because he does it, but whenever we play it, he gets all excited. And some of the people—you know, there's songs that students maybe don't know they want to hear, but they want to hear them when we play it. They go nuts for it.

We get yelled at—or not yelled at. People yell to us often to play—what is it? I wish I could think of what it is. Well, besides "Apache," "Shout It Out," which is another—kind of a rap song I guess, and everybody goes crazy for that stuff, especially the high school kids, which they've heard the band play it. We were at a competition recently, and the center drum major at the time forgot what we were supposed to play next. And so people in the stands just started shouting out options for what to play, and that was one of them. But then eventually the director of the band said "Play—play this, Melody," and so she did.

DS: The one I've heard yelling for is "Soldier Boy." (laughs)

IB: Oh, we don't—that's three notes, and I don't think we need to play three notes, like that. I'd rather just have the band dance to it, although we already tried to dance to it. It's more of a very poor attempt at dancing, and I don't think we should do it. I enjoy doing it.

DS: It'll be something else next year.

IB: Yes, exactly. It changes every year.

DS: It will. It will. Is there any traditional song that you play after, say, a touchdown or—

IB: Fight song.

DS: Uh-huh.

IB: "March Victorious" for a field goal. That kind of stuff. Nothing really special about that.

DS: No.

IB: I mean, it's special that we're winning, especially now recently it's been great, but—

DS: Yes, now that we actually have occasion to.

IB: Yeah! Oh, and I think it takes on more—like now that we're doing so—our football is doing so successful, that when we play the fight song it starts engraining, if you will, that pride in their organization. So they hopefully become less fair-weather fans and more devoted to your alma mater type thing. And hearing your fight song played should be a big part of that, in my opinion, but that's from a music guy. And I think the next step would be learning the words, 'cause a lot of times they just—it's on the screen, "USF Bulls" (hums song) and they don't know what's going on.

DS: Until it goes S-o-u-t-h.

IB: And even then they rush, and it's absolutely terrible. It's supposed to be in time, "S-o-u-t-h F-l-o-r-i-d-a," but we hear, "S-o-u-t-h F-l-o-r-i-d-a. South Florida! South Florida! Go Bulls!" (DS laughs)

So, I'm just glad that the team is doing better so that the band gets more recognition, the fight song takes on more meaning, and that we can start building these traditions that—people actually know our fight song now. Schools like Auburn, when we went there, we did not realize how steeped in tradition the school was. They take football and their band seriously, seriously. I've never seen anything like that. I'm not that big into football, honestly, not that big into college football. But going to Auburn and seeing the craziness that it gets to blew me away, and it blew a lot of people away, actually. You know, wow. Our fans, the only thing they've got going for them is they come drunk to the games, whereas these people are there because they are supporting their programs, supporting the Bulls, and they have pride in their organization. That was an eye-opener for us.

DS: And they all wear ties to the game.

IB: Oh, that was really neat. I think that's a great tradition. Everybody should do that. Everybody should do that.

DS: We'll all wear ties to the game, and dresses.

IB: We'll look sharp. We'll look dapper. It'll be a nice experience. I don't know, the drunk fans—maybe that's—I don't know, not the place to talk about it.

DS: It works. It's part of it.

IB: In the band, seeing the way other fans of other schools appreciate their band and are all about it, and then have our fans who really sometimes couldn't care less. And that's unfortunate, 'cause we really work our butts off to please them. We design our shows, thinking about, what would a college group want to hear? We're going to do some band stuff, some traditional like Latin show thing. But what would college kids want to hear? What would they enjoy? And we work so that they can have a fun time at the game, and associate all these sounds and these songs, and have excitement with the football. It goes hand in hand with building a better program. But sometimes they could care less, and that's unfortunate.

DS: Do you think it has something to do with the fact that our football program is so young, and the band program is so young?

IB: That, and for a while we weren't winning. We weren't—

DS: To put it mildly.

IB: Yeah, we weren't in the top twenty-five. We're in the top ten, top three. And now we've got this whole following and people are making weird t-shirts with Jim Leavitt's hair. And it's great.

DS: I have the—

IB: I saw that. I looked down and saw the U right there, that's very nice. But hopefully—it shouldn't be that people's support for a team or the band organization is dependent on the success of the team. It should be "Go Bulls" no matter what. But, that's the way it is. Hopefully, it will—just time will go by and tradition will set in and people will see the band and songs will become permanent. They'll recognize it. A lot of times our stands book changes. Over the course of the past three years there have been songs that have been cycled out of it. And even though we've been told, "Oh, you'll come back twenty years from now and they'll still be playing this song," and then next year the song is out of the book. But there's some songs that stay, which is really nice.

DS: Like that Spanish sounding one.

IB: Oh, “The Bull,” that—

DS: Yes, “The Bull.”

IB: That’s the equivalent of the Gator, or the Seminoles’ (hums the FSU “War Chant”) thing, which I love that. I love conducting it, just because I imagine it’s like Chinese water torture for the opposing team, just hearing it (hums “The Bull”) over and over again. And whenever it comes fourth quarter, our director just says into the loudspeakers that we have over the band, “All right, you know we’re playing any time—any time there’s a break in the game, that’s what we’re playing.” And everybody at first gets pumped up about it, and then, “Oh, my gosh, my face is going to fall off playing this.”

DS: (laughs) But it’s cool.

IB: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

DS: It’s cool. And to watch the rest of the stadium doing their—it’s the equivalent of other people’s thunder sticks.

IB: Thunder sticks, and the Gator chomp, and the Nole chop, anything.

DS: Yeah, it’s cool. Speaking of traditions, does the band itself, inside the band—tell me about their traditions.

IB: Oh, yeah, I was hoping you’d get to this. There are really small things that no one on the outside really knows about; it’s more for the enjoyment of the members in the band. As far as—starting back at band camp, the first day the leadership—it’s usually the exec board greets everybody, and most of the time the exec board’s involved in one of the three musical organizations or fraternities here on campus, which is Phi Mu Alpha, which I’m a member of, Sigma Alpha Iota, and Kappa Kappa Psi. So, we’re wearing our jerseys, supporting that. For a lot of the freshmen coming in, it’s their first time. That’s a real college experience for them. Besides being on a college campus, they’re seeing, “Oh, my gosh, fraternities, Greek letters. What’s all that about?”

Then, after registration, then they have a meeting where the leadership performs for them and shows that hey, we play, too, and gets everybody pumped up. Then later that night, there's a section dinner that each section leader has to take their section leader out to dinner—the section leader has to take their section out to dinner. Not buying it, but going out to where everybody—I went to Applebee's with the clarinet section my first year. That's where I met a lot of my friends that I still—even though they're not in the band now, I talk to them all the time, they're really close. And so, a lot of really neat things happen within that, as far as bonds forming and friendships and other traditions being started.

During band camp we have spirit days, which I'm sure bands everywhere do—dress up funny, which—it's funny to note that the tubas, always—tubas and color guard really always have to go completely all out, to the point of being ridiculous with what they're doing, or else they're just not doing their job right. The tubas—I forget what day it was, but I think it was a dress up—your section decides what you're going to dress up as, and you come in and you better all be wearing the same thing. They did, “We're going to switch genders.” So, all the guys are coming in in skirts and little tube tops, and the girls are coming in with baggy shorts and baseball caps tilted to the side and baggy shirts. But then the guys coming in in thongs and banana hammocks—

DS: Oh, my.

IB: Yeah, but that's the tuba section. I guess that's maybe a tradition, if you want to call it that. The tuba section has to be ridiculous at all times. What else is there? At the end of band camp we do a talent show. Drum majors judge that, and we just arbitrarily assign points. But it's usually whichever presentation we like the best. Everyone loves the talent show. That's a big deal for us during band camp. If you're not practicing for your talent show thing, then you shouldn't be in the band.

DS: Tell me about your favorite number in the talent show.

IB: This year, the top—we awarded first place to the tubas for their very odd skit of someone having a drug-induced hallucination about tuba players doing ballet with their cases, which the gigantic tuba cases on wheels, and there's twenty-one of them. And they actually worked out a ballet routine. It wasn't—I wouldn't call it ballet; it was more a dance routine that was mimicking ballet. But it was absolutely hilarious, from our point of view. Other people argued with us, but it was really funny.

The drum line, normally for the past few years there's been a guy in the band named

Leon, who has perfect pitch and can play piano really well. So, he would play rap songs on the piano. And even though they have five notes in them, they'd play it and it's recognizable and the drum line sings it. But since he's gone, they had to think of something else to do. And so, they talked about what it is to be a first-time member in the drum line, what it's like. So they did imitations of all the staff members. And they got a standing—I don't want to say ovation, but they were recognized for their outstanding portrayal of Dr. Robinson by Dr. Robinson, which was very hilarious. They also imitated their drum instructor, Rich Riano: by doing that, they had the drum instructor come up to the freshmen in the group, curse them out, and then he detonated a water balloon in his pants, so that no one could see it. And so you'd just see his pants turn completely white—not white, his pants turned wet. Sorry. And you get the picture with that.

DS: I get the picture.

IB: That was really—and so they really strive to go all out, and just be crazy and have fun, because that gets everybody pumped to take on a season. You've made these friends, you've had these experiences, and now we got to work hard. So, at least we had our fun—we're still having fun—but it gets that out of the way.

Other traditions: during practice I'm trying to start this one that the drum majors take off their shoes on the podium. I don't know why that works, or why that's even—it's starting to get off the ground. So far I have to remind the other two to do it, but I am religious about it. I always take them off. Before games, the sections get together. They tune, and then they kind of—to pump each other up, they each have a little chant. Maybe it might not be a chant. Some sections might not do it. I know the clarinets do it, because I started their chant, thank you. They say “Get some.”

DS: Okay.

IB: Well, we don't need to go into that. The tubas have a really long chant; like I said, they have to be—they have to go all out for everything. It takes ten minutes for them to finish. Then we have a chord progression that we play called “The Rival,” which is our invitation to blow the same way—I'm apparently hungry. Stomach's growling. That gets everyone pumped up. Everyone loves hearing “Rival” because it's our chance to play as loud as we can. And the drum majors, we act as if—if you've seen the movie *The Matrix*, where he bends back and it's slow motion, we do that every time they drop another chord. We act like we're getting blown back, and we move in slow motion the whole time. And then after that, we do a road concert. That's, I guess, a tradition. We play our show for the people who are outside the stadium.

DS: Yeah!

IB: And then, on the way back from—actually, while we’re marching to the road concert and away from the road concert, the mellophones have this dance that they do where they—it’s a whole bunch of hand movements, and then put the mellophone between their legs and pretend like they’re riding the bull. They’re spanking the air behind them. Drum majors do this thing, we shake our fists. It’s a fun thing to do. And we’ve—like you said, we’ve done that because we saw other drum majors before us do that. We play “The Krypton” fourth quarter, that’s a tradition. And then, after the game, we play the “Alma Mater,” fight song, “The Mission,” and then whatever else people want to hear, if they want to hear it. Those are just some of things that I can think of off the top of my head when I was making little notes about it.

DS: Oh, that’s cool.

IB: So, there’s a lot—I bet there’s a lot of smaller things that maybe our individual sections might—I guess it’s not tradition if it changes every year. But it’s something meaningful at the time for them, that gets them appreciating what they do in the marching band.

DS: I think that’s cool. Tell me about going to bowl games.

IB: What about it?

DS: Well, good experience, bad experience?

IB: Great experience. Except the first bowl game we went to. We stayed till New Year’s. The option was to go into the city of Charlotte—I think that’s where it was, the Meineke Car Care Bowl.

DS: It was. I was there.

IB: Okay. Go to the city of Charlotte, and have a New Year in Charlotte. Except, we’re all under twenty-one, so there’s nothing to do, nothing to do at all. But being out and about, going shopping during the day, playing at a little pep rally, that’s kind of fun. Just being on a trip and hanging out with your friends during Christmas break is a fun experience. Some people like to be with their family. But it’s a couple of days out of the year.

DS: You can do both.

IB: Yeah. You've got time. Usually everyone really gets pumped about it, really enjoys it. Once we know we're going to a bowl game, we'll vote on what show of this year that we've done to take. So, hopefully this year they'll choose the Queen show, 'cause that was my show. The past two years that we've done it, it's voted on, usually through email, and then it's decided and then we rehearse that. Maybe alumni might be able to come back and participate, which is really fun. You get to see a lot of the older guys.

DS: I know they did that at the Meineke.

IB: Yeah. And they did—I think they did that for the last game. I don't remember. I, at the time, was just stressed out. "We're at a bowl game! Have to be on top of our game. If we weren't on TV before—it's not like we weren't on TV before, but now we're on TV again and I've got to be on top of my game!" And the drum majors rotate for that. We normally—whoever's center drum major has their show that's being premiered, or just played that day, is center drum major in the stands, on the road concert, for everything else. But at the bowl game we switched off drum majors, who got to be drum major.

DS: Oh, that's cool.

IB: Yeah. So, I mean, that's just a small little thing about the bowl game. But a lot of people really like that—there's actually been tailgating where people show up before the buses arrive, well before the buses arrive; I'm talking about 2:00 in the morning out in the parking lot. Not gonna—I'll just say that it's a fun experience for everyone who attends, and reaffirms that, well, I'm glad we're in band. Not because the things we do outside of band; for some people, that's what it's about. We're getting together, we're getting pumped for this. Let's have a great time on this bowl game trip. And so, the past two times that we've done, it's really—we've been really charged, really excited. And it starts well before then. But you know, the day of, people are already awake, ready to go. On the bus, people don't sleep—it's going and talking, and it's going crazy. We get to the hotel, everyone's going crazy. Next day, everyone's—it doesn't stop.

DS: Wow!

IB: Until the bus ride home when everyone falls asleep.

DS: Makes sense.

IB: Yeah.

DS: So, how many away games do you get to go to? And is there a formula for how—

IB: Whatever we have the budget for, I think is what it is. Mary Dooley could probably expand on that more. What's closest, what we have the budget for. I know a lot of it might be out of our hands, because Athletics might take care of that, the funding. I know they tried to get the band to be sent to Rutgers, since it's only New Jersey, which I think is still very far away. But we weren't able to do that, obviously, so, we had a small little pep group in the Sun Dome at the watch party. Away games, there aren't many teams in our conference that are close by.

DS: I've noticed. Very few bring bands.

IB: So, UCF [University of Central Florida] we'll do. FAU we did. FIU [Florida International University], well, in my years here we haven't done that. We went to Miami when we played [University of] Miami. It was really great that we got to go to Auburn. That was absolutely fantastic. Hopefully, we'll be able to continue now that, now that the Bulls are more successful, get more funding. Well, we can hope.

DS: Right. Well, let me ask, is there such a thing as a band alumni association?

IB: I don't know if there's an alumni association. I know that there are—just recently the assistant director started an alumni group. Well, there's a listserv that the director keeps of all the emails of people who used to be in it, phone numbers, so that way if there is ever an event that alumni could be involved in, they're notified about it so that they can make the arrangements. And Dr. Robinson's usually pretty good about getting it out there, so that they know that they have this opportunity to take it up. And a lot of them do. I know some people who knew they weren't going to be in the band last year, supposedly right after they got back from the bowl game went home to their computer and typed a letter to Dr. Robinson saying, "Put me on the first—I'm first on the list for being an alumni call-back to be in the band."

DS: So, is there that kind of atmosphere, like a mentorship?

IB: Sometimes. I think as far as guiding the younger members into the traditions of the Herd of Thunder, this is what we like to do. There is, but I guess that's—it can only be as successful as the people who are going to be hopefully carrying on these traditions. Successful, rather. If they want to carry on, great. Yeah, fantastic. But if they don't, that's unfortunate. And there's some people who are just in band 'cause they get money, they want to play, whatever, their friend's doing it. But they might not necessarily care that when you walk by this tree, you do this. I don't know if that's a tradition. Hopefully the—I know that a lot of the vets have tried to inspire the rookies to get into it, and to really get into the band and get into USF Bulls football, to keep traditions alive, 'cause it's a part of history that you don't want to let go of it. That's why we're talking about it now. So, it's up to them.

DS: Well, and you guys are making the history right now.

IB: Yeah. We're told that every practice. "You're the first—this is the first band to go to this many away games, they're this many miles away." We're making history, we get it. But it's nice to know that the history is going to be carried on, which, again, is why we're here.

DS: Yes, it is. Let's see. Tell me, is there anything I've forgotten, as we wrap things up? Is there anything you think needs to be included that isn't?

IB: I don't know. I think that the best way to find out about the band, to really get to the heart of things, is not only interviewing people. I think listening to the sound of the band every year, 'cause it changes by instrumentation, and it gives you a little clue as to, you know, maybe who is in it. 'Cause sometimes you hear recordings, you go, "I know it's that person," and then, the memories come back about this person. You could just talk about them and how they affected the band, and all that kind of stuff. You talk about, "Oh, that's the year so-and-so was in the band."

It's really people-driven, too, being in the band. A lot of it has to do with who was in it at the time, what changes did they make, how people say, "Oh, man, you weren't here when so-and-so was in the band, and man, that year was the best because this happened and this happened and this happened." "Well, no, I like this year." "'Cause he is—she was here, and he was there, and they did this, and that was really—that was the best part for me".

So, I don't know if a lot of it can be really captured in this small little segment. Hopefully, I don't think we've left a lot out. But things change every year, but there's a lot of stuff that stays the same, and it's nice to have that tradition there. Hopefully, you

can include some clips of music and other things that we've played.

DS: Absolutely.

IB: If it weren't against some kind of rule, I'd try to provide you with clips of what we sounded like at band camp versus what we sound like now. Because—I mean, it was the first day of rehearsal, but oh, man, it was terrible. It was pretty bad, but everybody knew that, and we've come a long way. And that's something else that, for my perspectives, are worth chronicling, because the music is a big part of it. I like being up on the podium being blown away by the sound.

DS: You know, whether it's blown away by covering your head, or blown away by, "Wow, it's great!"

IB: Yeah, yeah. Usually it's that. It's a really intense emotional experience.

DS: Oh, that's great. That's great to hear. Well, thank you so much for the interview.

IB: Oh, well, thank you.

DS: Again, this is Deborah Anderson Silvers interviewing Ian Black, the drum major for the Herd of Thunder Marching Band at the University of South Florida, on November 2, 2007. Closing off, I hope.

End of interview