

## UVa pep band plays on 5 years after ouster

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Members of the University of Virginia Pep Band leave McIntire Amphitheater after a concert, marking the fifth anniversary of the band's ouster from UVa varsity sports events, was stopped short because of noise concerns.

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Brian McNeill

University of Virginia student Kevin Binswanger dropped his trumpet and picked up the microphone.

"You sir, in the front. Have you accepted Jefferson into your heart?" he preached. "You cannot be saved by blind obedience to authority; this leads you to the fiery pits of hell!"

"Only by embracing the word of Jefferson and by practicing student self-governance and rebellion can you find salvation in the world to come," he continued. "Accept Jefferson into your heart and you will be saved from eternal torment in the fires of hell!"

Binswanger then picked up his trumpet and joined his fellow members of the University of Virginia Pep Band in a rousing rendition of "Hot Hot Hot."

The pep band — a ragtag club of irreverent musicians in orange and blue vests jam-packed with buttons — held a concert at the McIntire Amphitheater on Thursday afternoon to mark the fifth anniversary of its ouster from UVa athletics events.

From 1969 to 2002, the pep band attended UVa's football games and other events, performing zany shows during halftime and leading the crowd in sing-a-longs.

The university's often tumultuous relationship with the pep band came to a halt, however, in the aftermath of the band's halftime performance at the 2002 Continental Tire Bowl, in which UVa faced off against West Virginia University. In the pep band's halftime skit, band members essentially mocked West Virginians as barefoot, overall-wearing, square-dancing nincompoops. WVU fans complained. West Virginia's governor complained. And, perhaps most significantly, some UVa donors and alumni complained.

UVa benefactor Carl W. Smith and his wife gave the university \$23.5 million to establish an arts center and a more traditional marching band. The new marching band replaced the pep band, which found itself shut out from all of UVa's varsity sports events.

"You can strike a blow to the people in the band, but you cannot kill an idea," Binswanger proclaimed Thursday. "Days later, the Virginia Pep Band rose from the dead. The University of Virginia Pep Band died so that you may live."

The band then played a funeral march of "Auld Lang Syne," which sounded like a depressing version of UVa's "Good Old Song."

"We haven't disappeared," said Xander Houck, the pep band's leader who plays mellophone and trumpet. "We have a strong and proud history. And we have a hopeful future. We're not going away anytime soon."

On Thursday, the pep band consisted of 16 musicians. At its height, the pep band boasted a membership of more than 100.

These days, the pep band plays at community events around Charlottesville and at UVa. On Saturday, it will perform at the Dogwood Festival. Last weekend, it played at a half-marathon in the city.

The band also plays at club sports, most notably at rugby matches and hockey games. At this year's hockey game against Liberty University, UVa's pep band mocked the other team so much that when Liberty took the lead, its fans yelled at the pep band, "What now, band nerds?"

Last year, the pep band performed at the 80th birthday party for Mitchell Van Yahres, Charlottesville's beloved former state delegate. Van Yahres, an honorary member of the band, died in February.

If the pep band had its druthers, UVa would allow it to once again play at official sporting events such as lacrosse, soccer and basketball.

"We're a student-run band," Houck said. "We just want to play."

It seems unlikely that UVa will permit that to occur, though a UVa official did not return a call for comment. On the fifth anniversary of the band's boot from the university, a UVa official stopped by the pep band's performance Thursday and told the band to stop playing and leave.

"You can't be playing instruments and using amplifiers," said the UVa official, who declined to identify himself. "It's too loud. Sorry, but you're interfering with the academic mission of the university."

The pep band was disappointed yet again.

"It's kind of ironic," said David Leon, one of the pep band's snare drum players. "We were once again shut down by the man. It's a tragic comedy."

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