New marching band director sets to inspire passion, drive

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The University of Louisiana at Lafayette has its new associate director of bands in music. Jason Missal, Ph.D., who is replacing former marching band director Eric Melley, Ph.D., will lead the Pride of Acadiana Marching Band, conduct the Symphonic Winds and teach courses in music education. Melley served as marching band director from 2013 until 2017.

Before accepting his current job, Missal served as associate director of bands at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas, where he led the Big Purple Marching Band, conducted the concert band, supervised student teachers and taught music education courses as well as applied horn, according to UL Lafayette’s website.

Missal, who has been in Lafayette since August, credits the people for being so welcoming to him, and joked how good the food has been.

A Stillwater, Oklahoma, native, Missal earned his doctorate of musical arts in conducting from The University of Texas at Austin, his master's of music in conducting from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and a bachelor's of music in instrumental music education from Oklahoma State University. He said he hopes to grow the marching band in not only quality of play, but in quantity of players.

“I hope to grow the marching band,” Missal said. “I’d love to see the marching band top 300 members.”

Missal said he also hopes to add enthusiastic members to his corps.

“I’d like to have the group be really excited and really feel like a family and have a lot of enthusiasm,” he said.

The son of Oklahoma State University’s current director of bands and a fourth-grade teacher, Missal credits his family for his love for music.

“I grew up in a musical household,” Missal said. “My dad was a band director, so he was a strong influence on me early on.”

Missal started off with classical music at first, but as he got older, he said he branched out to pop music.

Missal listed groups such as Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin and artists like Stevie Wonder and Charles Mingus as his pop and rock influences. He said his role models in the conducting world as well as conductors Carlos Kleiber, an Austrian conductor most famous for his tenure at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the New York Metropolitan Opera, and Leonard Bernstein, whose work is perhaps most recognizable in “West Side Story,” as contributors to his musical career.

Maggie Missal, Missal’s wife, who also teaches at UL Lafayette, plays the clarinet and gives lessons around the city. Missal said he hopes his son, Paul, who he said is very much interested in music, is happy with music like his Mom and Dad.

“I don’t want to necessarily steer him to music as a career because it’s not the easiest career path,” Missal joked. “But as
long as he enjoys music, that’s the most important thing.”

He said he hopes to bring something new and some variety to the Pride of Acadiana marching band.

“We’re going to try to involve the crowd more in terms of the selection of some of the music we do that we play in stands,” he said.

Missal said the bands will look to incorporate more R&B and rap music to their performances.

Dominique Lousteau, a junior mathematics major who plays for Missal’s marching band, said she can already see a difference in the way he conducts.

“He does things differently, and I find that rather refreshing,” Lousteau said.

Lousteau said Missal’s drills, or marching formation and movements, are more technical, a change she believes will benefit musicians old and new.

Missal’s new approach to UL Lafayette’s band is structured to leave burgeoning musicians, as well as program leadership throughout the years, with the same passion for music as when they first arrived.

“If I succeeded as a teacher in no other way, then I want people to still love music,” he said.

As women’s rights movements spread throughout the country, we can’t help but address the situations happening right in our backyard. This abuse of power enacted by the men of this school board not only hurt the teachers, but also the students. These greedy men thrive at the expense of the children they are hired to educate. If women didn’t continuously voice their opinions and stand up for what they believe in, what would ever change? Time is up.