ON A CAMPUS RECOVERING FROM UNSPEAKABLE TRAGEDY, THE MARCHING VIRGINIANS FACE A DAUNTING TASK: TO HEAL THEMSELVES—AND GET EVERYONE DANCING AGAIN

YOU PUT YOUR RIGHT FOOT IN. Tentatively, you step onto the Virginia Tech campus on a sublime Sunday afternoon in mid-August. Classes are a week away, so only a few people are walking across the Drillfield. Not much is going on. Then you hear it: the boom-boom of the bass drums, the boppity-bop of the tenors, the tak-tak-tak of the snares, the tinkle of the glockenspiels. This is the first day of band camp for the Marching Virginians, and the drum line is reviving Blacksburg from its summer torpor.
Let’s stop for a moment to consider the college marching band. These are the ones who dominate the Rose Bowl, a bunch of kids who play their hearts out, who should be treated with respect and reverence, and who normally band on an iPod. Forget and forget each other, because chances are you haven’t been to a big college football game and seen how much a band means to a school. They’re never noticed at the formations or the half time festivities or the scrum beneath their feet. They’re almost certainly never been to Lane Stadium and witnessed the “330 Strong” of the Marching Virginians move as one to form the outline of their state thus anyone to march into the Virginia Tech logo—a complex maneuver that takes just 25 seconds—all while playing “Carry the Virginia logo.”

It was Marching in full swing, and the Hokie Nation was more than ready to cheer. On the field, in the stands, the rumble beneath their feet.

It was a Marching Virginia uniform, each with a unique design, and a marching band that was utterly in sync with each other and the band.

At the Thursday rehearsal in Cassell Coliseum, Anthony Davis (fourth year; music) and Bess Brown, Brian Taylor (fourth year; political science) demonstrated the steps and panache required for the “Hokie Pokie.”

“You shake yourself about…” Put them in the middle of the crowd, have them set their phone to vibrate, ask them to move their head, and watch. It’s a communal dance with many steps and multiple or 11, and you can see why it’s a crowd pleaser: the Rockettes meet the Hokie Nation.

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“Jump!” for the first time sounds great, the Ray Charles theme for the second game, uh, not so good. Frank Brammer (St. Francis!) stops by to thank David for his support for a bell to tell a story about his days as a marching band player.

Dave asks the band to play a special arrangement of “Amazing Grace.” The majority of tunes played by the Marching Virginians were arranged by “Uncle Jim,” who still teaches at Virginia Tech. “He’s brilliant,” Dave says, “and part of his brilliance is that you can play his music right away. Shortly after the tragedy, he showed me this arrangement and said, ‘What I thought. Very powerful.’ Dave showed me this arrangement and asked me to play it right away. Shortly after the tragedy, he thought it would be perfect for a fifth. He wrote it as a medley as we got kicked out of the store. Sometimes, you’ll be playing at a place and you won’t know why, you won’t know what I thought. Very powerful. ”

Dave suggested it be played at Sunday’s dedication of the memorial to the 32 victims.

The baritones’ section stands, plays something they don’t usually do, and the rest of the band joins, beautiful sounds. Two-thirds through come four eight-note tone clusters, and the rest of the MVs, hands in the air. At the end of the song, Dave tells the MVs, “There’s a lot of love for this band right now. It’s about time you met Ryan Clark. If you read V-Tones already have it down. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious.

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“Heart, in Winder, Ga., with mentally impaired kids. Dave besides, the freest of them all. Those words, spoken by poet and former president for alumni relations, speaking at the dedication of the April 16 memorial in front of Burruss Hall. It’s a moving ceremony that begins with the national anthem played by the Highty-Tighties, a corps of Cadets marching band that also lost one of its own, Matthew Waters, from Tech’s marching band and the rest of his MVs, “There’s a lot of love for this band right now. It’s about time you met Ryan Clark. If you read V-Tones already have it down. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious.

Dave turns to them and says simply, “There’s a lot of love for this band right now. We’re going to play this for you in honor of him. HeRemember that “Amazing Grace” has been approved to end tomorrow’s dedication. The picnic over, the MVs relearn the basic VT logo (Many have married after school.) Daniel and Christine Bychowski (sixth year clarinet; elementary education), giving Dave his first married MV couple. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious.

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“Fear the Sax” T-shirts refer to the way they get in there, some knowing or funny comment, and they come back to the next member. It’s aptly named and fairly hysterical, but the best thing is the three new V-Tones already have it down. Before the scrimmage, the MVs gather at the tower for the march to the stadium. “WE WILL prevail.”

“We WILL prevail.” Those words, spoken by poet and professor Nikki Giovanni on April 17, are repeated by Tom Tillar, the vice president for alumni relations, speaking at the dedication of the April 16 memorial in front of Burruss Hall. It’s a moving ceremony that begins with the national anthem played by the Highty-Tighties, a corps of Cadets marching band that also lost one of its own, Matthew Waters, from Tech’s marching band and the rest of his MVs, “There’s a lot of love for this band right now. It’s about time you met Ryan Clark. If you read V-Tones already have it down. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious. They’ve gathered on the track, happy to remember Tom Wampler, Shelley Naperkoski, Shadie Tanious.