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Making the Man in North American Drum Corps: Masculinities and Militaristic Music in Performance

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

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Dr. Xóchitl Chávez, Chairperson

As a North American musical subculture steeped in militaristic and masculinist aesthetics, the drum and bugle corps scene continuously grapples with the politics of gender in performance. Recent debates within the community over the transformation of historically "all-male" ensembles into gender-inclusive groups show that masculinity remains a hotly contested topic, with stakeholders questioning whether gender-restrictive membership practices have a place in the contemporary scene. My thesis explores this shifting discursive field by investigating how masculinity is constructed by professional arrangers, producers, and choreographers (a.k.a. "designers"), and how participants—especially queer participants—in this North American music tradition navigate these masculine ideals on and off the field of competition. Based on ethnographic research and interviews conducted between 2015 and 2017 as a member of The Cavaliers Drum & Bugle Corps, I argue that queer men in this "all-male" ensemble use and transform corps-specific ritual traditions to reorient themselves within physical, social, and sonic space. I begin by historically situating the development of hegemonic masculinity in North

American drum corps, then assess The Cavaliers' 2017 competitive program *Men Are From Mars* to highlight how professional show designers produce masculinity in drum corps performance. Combined with ethnographic insights, this analysis reveals how designers perpetuate the scene's hegemonic and militaristic masculine aesthetics, even as they promote drum corps as a space where participants can explore a range of masculine expressions. I then move to examine how queer men in The Cavaliers participate in ritual traditions of initiation, singing, and drag performance to reimagine the types of racialized and gendered practices they might embody during a season of drum corps. Drawing upon frameworks from queer scholars of color, I suggest that performers use these ephemeral off-field traditions to articulate queer subjectivities that exceed those that they convey in competition. In doing so, they demonstrate the ongoing construction and contestation of masculine aesthetics that undergird competitive marching music in North America.

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Introduction

August 8, 2016

I'm seated in a coach bus as it hurdles through the star-speckled night of rural Indiana. Listening attentively as RuPaul's "Category Is…" reverberates throughout the vehicle, I'm drawn to the cacophony of cheers, purrs, and sing-alongs emanating from the fifty members of The Cavaliers Drum & Bugle Corps seated behind me. I take stock of who they are: a group of queer white, Black, Latinx, and Asian American men ranging in age from 16 to 22, moving and shaking to the song's incessant house beat. A dozen or so of them are dressed in drag and applying last-second makeup flourishes. I am not one of these queens—in fact, I didn't even know about drag queen culture until I joined the corps—but I am here to support my partner Jae (they/them), who is tonight's MC. This is their third year in the corps and their first hosting this member-run drag competition, "Drag Queen International" (DQI), which is a pun on the Drum Corps International (DCI) circuit that we participate in. Jae is sitting in their front-row seat wearing a cropped silver-white wig, accented by deep blue eye makeup and turquoise lipstick. They wear a skimpy black dress with rhinestone false nails that refract the light of the reading lamps. *She* is now Ariana Del Harmonix, who instructs everyone to remove their backpacks and personal belongings from the aisle. The lights dim down and the bus fades to silence.

***

The politics of masculinity in the North American drum corps scene have never been more contested than in the contemporary moment. With the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) extending membership to transgender members in 2017, the single-sex status of two US-American "all-male" drum corps—The Madison Scouts from Madison, WI, and The Cavaliers from Rosemont, IL—came under renewed scrutiny from within the broader musical subculture.[1] Within a year, both corps amended their membership guidelines to reflect the BSA's new stance, eliminating the need for legal documentation of one's sex in order to participate. In 2019, the Scouts officially ended their male-only membership policy altogether, opening the corps to youth of all gender identities after 80 years of gender exclusivity. The effects of these rapid transformations reverberated throughout the drum corps community, as former and current performers debated the

[1] As ethnomusicologist Jamil Jorge (2022) argues, the North American drum and bugle corps scene constitutes a youth subculture, as it is a transient space that provides opportunities for youth to negotiate sociopolitical change.

politics of gender exclusivity within the performance tradition. Whereas more traditionalist factions saw the move as a reactionary appeal to political correctness and identity politics, social justice advocates in the space asserted that the new membership policy could serve as a corrective to years of explicit exclusion and gender discrimination. In the midst of these debates, The Cavaliers' Board of Directors, led by corps alumni such as president Chris Hartowicz and executive director Chris Lugo, retained the organization's "all-male" membership policy, sparking further discussion on the appropriateness of all-male social spaces in a musical activity that ostensibly promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion (Drum Corps International 2021).

Absent from many of these debates around corps membership policies, however, were sustained discussions on the role that performance itself plays creating, maintaining, or challenging the very boundaries of what it means to "be a man" in drum corps. It is against this political backdrop, therefore, that critical questions emerge: What is the relationship between musical practice, embodiment, and masculinity in the North American drum and bugle corps scene? How do men, particularly queer men, explore their own sense of masculine subjectivity in this space? And how much agency do these performers have in this pursuit? Starting from the premise that homosocial groups of men might inculcate members into productive forms of masculinity (Harris and Harper 2014) while resisting the reproduction of hegemonic forms of masculinity (Yeung, Stombler, and Wharton 2006), this thesis explores how all-male drum corps ensembles foster spaces for queer masculine belonging and subject formation. It draws upon participant observation and ethnographic interviews I conducted between 2015 and 2017 as one of

154 members in The Cavaliers, with a particular emphasis on the more than forty gay, bisexual, or queer-identifying participants that comprise the corps' LGBTQIA+ membership (herein, "queer members" or "queer Cavaliers"). I propose that these queer members—roughly half of whom identify as white, a quarter as Asian or Asian American, an eighth as Black, and an eighth as Latinx—negotiate their sense of masculine identity through performances in both "on-field" competitive programs and intimate "off-field" settings. Analyzing across these varying registers and discursive fields of masculine performativity, I thus show how queer Cavaliers reorient their bodies (Ahmed 2006) within gendered spaces during the DCI Summer Tour.

I outline this argument in two broad sections. First, I explore how the North American competitive drum corps scene continues to reinforce militaristic, hegemonic masculinities[2] through characteristic cultural and musical traditions. Combining historical and ethnographic observations with performance analysis of The Cavaliers' 2017 production *Men Are From Mars*, I contend that auteur arrangers, producers, and choreographers (a.k.a. "designers" or "show designers") help reproduce the scene's militaristic[3] (and historically white) masculinity by disciplining performers' embodied musical production. In the second part, I show how members of The Cavaliers situate

[2] Coined by sociologist R.W. Connell (1995; 1987), "hegemonic masculinity" describes how socially situated configurations of masculine identity, image, and performance become dominant through the subordination of other gendered expressions. Importantly, such hierarchies of gendered ideals within a given sociocultural formation emerge from "a pattern of hegemony, not a pattern of simple domination based on force" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 846). Thus, although scholars (e.g., Demetriou 2001) have since critiqued Connell for her assertion that hegemonic masculinities always secure patriarchal power of men over women, the framework still productively theorizes how power and difference help produce and maintain masculine hierarchies by delegitimizing and policing alternative forms of gender expression.
[3] Crucially, militaristic masculinities are not a monolith and are not necessarily hegemonic. As David H. J. Morgan (1994) asserts, "the military cannot be seen straightforwardly as a site for the construction of a single embodied masculinity" (174). Nevertheless, the heavy value placed on militaristic conformity within the drum corps scene suggests as distinctly hegemonic gender normativity.

queer masculinities within this performance tradition by offering multiple queer readings of ritualized "off-field" performances. Thinking alongside queer scholars and scholars of color, this section explores how such acts provide opportunities for queer use (Ahmed 2019) of voices and bodies to articulate alternative masculinities that exceed the gendered constraints of competitive performances. Using ephemerally collected ethnographic observations—what dance scholar Kareem Khubchandani (2018) terms "cruising the ephemeral archives"—I specifically narrate how queer Cavaliers participate in the corps' initiation process, sing the corps' song "Over the Rainbow," and partake in Drag Queen International competition in order to reorient their bodies with(in) physical, social, and sonic space. It is this fleetingly ritualized restructuring of space that ultimately allows members to imagine otherwise what masculinities they might articulate, as they find meaning and belonging in collectively refiguring the scene's hegemonic masculinity towards their own queer subjectivities.

My own position in this research has been one of power-full, relational intimacies which guide how I frame the insights of queer collaborators. As such, this project takes seriously Nicol Hammond's suggestion that "doing ethnographic fieldwork is like having sex" (2020, 54), insomuch as it hinges on close, intimate partnerships forged in the production of scholarship. As an enculturated drum corps participant, I often had access to private conversations and intimate social happenings which were not available to the broader public and therefore were not documented in video or audio. Rather than view this as an impediment to my ethnographic observations, I understand these trusting relationalities as a vital component of the research, as I could encourage candid responses

and critiques of drum corps sociocultural dynamics due to my insider status. Moreover, I foreground my collaborator's subjectivities as a critical intervention against previous scholarship on the drum and bugle corps scene (Cole 2011; Odello 2016; 2020), which has outlined the construction of "community" in this space at the expense of individual perspectives. By bringing performers' understandings of their own performance into dialogue with designer and audience perspectives, I join a growing cohort of drum corps scholars (Jorge 2022; Wells 2022) working to uncover performer subjectivities in the analysis of drum corps competition. It is through this practitioner-centered approach that I seek to explore not just the performance of masculinity in this musical subculture, but the real effects that such acts have on the men who embody such diverse ranges of masculinity as a part of their everyday lives.

Designing Masculinity in Drum Corps

June 1, 2017

I'm sitting on the rubberized track of Olivet Nazarene University's Ward Field in Bourbonnais, Illinois. The corps just completed two grueling four-hour blocks of rehearsal and trekked the quarter-of-a-mile walk from the dormitories to the stadium for full ensemble rehearsal. We are arranged in an amoebic blob as longtime drum corps performer, instructor, and judge Mike McIntosh takes some time to speak with us. A sturdy man in his late-40s with permanently styled brown hair, wearing shorts and a tank top, he always commands attention through a cool, hip gravitas. His role is to arrange the electronic samples in our show, write the battery percussion book, and to unite the music selections with the show theme into a cohesive whole. He connects his phone to the mixer board that runs the sound for our front ensemble. The connecting sound rings through our array of 6 speaker pods as he turns to us and begins to explain our competitive program.

"So how do we layer this show? How do we layer *Men Are From Mars*? Well, we started to really look at ourselves as men, and we…you…it's like, ok…We. Are. Terrible. Communicators. We're the worst…we like to show off; we think our timing is fantastic, when maybe it's not; we think we're something that we're not. All of these things, all of these vulnerabilities, are things that we capitalize on, because there's something incredibly sexy about being vulnerable…Women want to be heard; men want to be appreciated."

Most of the 150 or so guys around me nod in agreement with his statements. Jae leans over to me. Their remark is straightforward: "Me, basically."

Pausing for a moment, I'm not sure which parts of the statement they identify with. Perhaps that's the point.

***

Each year, thousands of performers join a DCI corps for a three-month season of rehearsals and competitive performances across North America. After successfully completing a multi-stage audition process, more than 150 accepted performers in each corps perfect an eleven-minute themed competitive program throughout the entire summer. These participants live together and travel on charter buses, sleeping on gym floors at schools near competition sites and eating meals from corps-run food trucks. Corps typically consist of three sections: *brass*, which contains marching trumpets, mellophones, baritones, and contrabass bugles; *percussion*, which includes both marching battery percussion (snare, tenor, and bass drums) as well as grounded keyboard instruments and electronic synthesizers; and the *color guard*, whose members use flags, rifles, and sabers to visually accentuate the music.

Within these ensembles, uniformity is desired in performance and expected in participant's daily lives. The production of a consistently flawless performance through uniformity is a key cultural value that drum corps members and staff embed into day-to-day activities: corps members will often set up water jugs so that they all face the same direction or wear identical clothing to demarcate their membership in a particular section. Such a desire for sameness reflects what dance scholar José Reynoso terms "homotopia." In his work on the development of ballet in Twentieth-Century Mexico, Reynoso argues that "values and interests" enacted on-stage are also "normalized off the stage in the

world at large," such that dance performance "[constructs] a 'reality' presented as the 'natural' state of affairs" (2012, 4). Reading through Foucault's notion of the heterotopia, Reynoso argues that this relationship between on and off-stage performance promotes:

> a site in which the utopic impulse would not be for diversity but for sameness, a social space where the preservation of the status quo through reproducing sociopolitical, economic, and cultural values among similars would constitute the ideal world.
>
> (Reynoso 2014, 86)

For drum corps ensembles, the desire for homotopic uniformity is firmly rooted in forms of hegemonic masculinity that gained social currency and cultural prominence in the 1920s. Following the boom of local drum corps in the nationalistic aftermath of World War I, local Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion organizations began to codify competitive rulesets to facilitate consistent scoring from competition to competition. Such standardization led to the proliferation of restrictive adjudication guidelines based on Euro-American images of militaristic masculinity. The "inspection line" consolidated these aesthetic values into a series of performances that carried competitive consequences: before every show, judges from the veterans' organizations subjected performers to a military-style uniform inspection, deducting points for every unpolished buckle, untied shoelace, or stray hair not cut or tied to an appropriate length underneath the corps' headgear (Atkinson and Close 2003). Thus, performers were required by corps leadership and fellow participants to conform their uniformed bodies to an immaculate and stoic hegemonic masculinity to secure the highest score possible.

While these formalized practices fell out of favor in the 1970s as corps began to focus less on military bearing and more on artistry (Vickers 2002), the unmarked hegemonic masculinity embodied in the inspection line continues to shape a wide range

of visual and musical aesthetics. In many corps, members still conduct informal inspection lines and will not allow members to perform unless their uniforms and hair align with the corps' dress codes. This means that women and nonbinary participants are often told to style their hair into a tight bun and to walk in an upright, stoic fashion in public for the sake of visual uniformity. In field shows, performers are expected to execute their show with militaristic precision, such that their bodies move together in space uniformly. Such a militaristic standard parallels what Foucault calls the "art of distributions" ([1975] 1979, 141–47), wherein bodies are rendered obedient through their enclosure, partitioning, operationalization, and ordering in space. Furthermore, male "screamers"—brass soloists playing in the upper tessitura of their instrument—are highly valued by instructors, designers, and audience members for their ability to play in an aggressive style. Meanwhile, men in color guards are often stereotyped as effeminate and gay because their ballet-centric choreographies are often seen as "soft" and "sensitive."

As an all-male ensemble with historical ties to the BSA, The Cavaliers maintain a masculine brand image that is both unique to the ensemble and connected to these broader histories of gender performance. Founded as Boy Scout Troop #111 Drum & Bugle Corps by Scoutmaster Don Warren in 1947, the Chicago-based corps broke away from BSA in 1950 and became a competitive ensemble after gaining veterans post sponsorship from Chicago's Kosciuszko American Legion Post #712 (Foutz 2009). Since 1957, the corps has accumulated 20 national drum corps championships along with over 25 state championship titles. Fans within the scene often attribute this sustained competitive success to the corps' "masculine" image, which encompasses characteristics

ranging from cool sophistication and a clean-shaven, "All-American" boyish appearance to physical and precise performances of uniformity that have earned the corps the moniker "The Green Machine." Masculinity in The Cavaliers' is therefore not just a product of the scene's hegemonic norms, but derives from an ensemble-specific configuration of gender ideals.

The primary shapers of The Cavaliers' masculine image are the corps' professional arrangers, producers, and choreographers, known collectively as "designers." These instructors often work within specialized roles: *caption heads* for brass, percussion, and color guard focus on educational staff management and member pedagogy; *arrangers* for the brass, battery, front ensemble, and electronics collaboratively construct the show's musical arrangements and choreographies; and a team of visual *choreographers* and *drill designers* determines the staging, costuming, and color palettes for each competitive program. At the head of the design team is the *program coordinator* and/or *artistic director*, who oversees the entire production. For 2016 and 2017, The Cavaliers fielded the following design team:

Program Coordinator: David McGrath
Artistic Director: Daniel Wiles
Drill Designer: Richard Hinshaw
Visual Designer and Choreographer: Tommy Allen
Brass Arranger: Michael Martin
Battery Arranger: Michael McIntosh
Front Ensemble Arranger: Alan Miller
Color Guard Designer and Choreographer: Blake Dutton
Color Guard Caption Head: Travis Speice
Percussion Caption Head: Joe Hobbs
Visual Caption Head: Michael Tarr

Each designer sported decades of experience as a performer, instructor, and designer by the time they joined The Cavaliers, with Wiles, Allen, Miller, Hobbs, and Tarr each

working for the corps after performing as a member. Except for Allen (gay and Black-identifying), Dutton (gay-identifying), and Speice (gay-identifying), the entire design team consisted of white, middle-class heterosexual men with careers in music or dance education. These designers were responsible for constructing the entire competitive program, including musical selections, staging, costuming, and hairstyles. The design team thus held the status of auteurs whose artistic vision was brought to life by the performers' sonic and embodied labors.

Designing Masculinity in Men Are From Mars

The politics of masculinity became a significant point of tension during the 2017 competitive season, a year when the design team explicitly leaned into the corps' masculine identity with the program *Men Are From Mars.* Drawing the title from John Gray's popular relationship self-help book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (1992), members of The Cavaliers' design team promised audiences a multifaceted exploration of masculine identities. Yet, much like Gray's monograph (Murdoch 2001), the show relied on reductive gendered stereotypes. The official show explanation—written by McIntosh and Wiles—reflects the limited scope of this exploration:

> Don't worry: The Cavaliers aren't really suggesting that men are Martians (although the use of Steve Vai's "Little Green Men" does toy with that implication). The real theme of this program is the innate martial nature of men—their need to dominate, achieve, and conquer, which drives them to band together in tribes and secure power over territory and other people. As human society has evolved, men have struggled to shed such tendencies. The cerebral battles with the instinctual, and the warrior of Mars grapples to be what he is not. *Men Are From Mars* is a multifaceted audio and visual representation of that struggle, tracking how far man's ego will take him and questioning whether it will ultimately destroy him. An eclectic assortment of music, from Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" and Holst's "Mars" to Laurie Anderson's "O Superman" and Frank Sinatra's "My Way," provides a variety of perspectives on the subject.
> (Drum Corps International 2017)

As this blurb suggests, repertoire selections played a key role in the construction of the show's discourses on masculinity. Moving from the idealized *Übermensch* suggested by Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (unmentioned in the blurb) and Copland's "Fanfare" to the more experimental realms of Anderson's "O Superman" and Vai's "Little Green Men," musical reference material reflected a nominal problematization of masculinities by moving from heroic imaginaries into increasingly experimental realms. The inclusion of "Mars" throughout the show was also quite intentional: beyond indexing the "martial nature of men," the movement remains popular among Cavaliers and drum corps fans who associate it with the corps' 1985 and 1995 *Planets*-inspired competitive programs.

Music arrangers in The Cavaliers' design team acknowledged this tension between reductive gender stereotyping and the putatively broad representation of masculine identities within the competitive program. For Michael Martin—a longtime member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra—the narrative trajectory moved from exploring "man" as an abstract concept to the everyday realities of being masculine:

> It really was a show about trying to explore the caricatures of masculinity, and then also societal needs of masculinity, [or] at least the perception of those. So we kind of follow the evolution of "man," and we kind of play on that a little bit: we start as "man" and grow into "men." And it goes from this slightly androgynous "No, we're talking about hu-Man-kind" and then "No, no now. We're talking about men."
>
> (Interview with author, March 3, 2022)

Other staff members acknowledged their personal role in reinforcing hegemonic masculinity, but still highlighted their efforts to allow members room to express a wide range of masculinities in on-field performances. Color guard caption head Travis Speice—a sociologist whose research notably addresses the construction of masculinities

in white-collar professional settings (Casanova, Wetzel, and Speice 2016; Speice 2019)—was quick to argue that visual performers in the color guard were granted the agency to explore gendered subjectivities in *Men Are From Mars*, despite the design team's efforts to shape performed masculinities*:*

> I do feel that when we talk about characterization for the show, we try to maintain—I don't know—I guess maintain a particular image that the designers of the show might want. This year [2017] in particular, I think that we get to play around with what that identity is a bit more, and I think that the color guard in particular will play a critical role in kind of how we characterize masculinity, what we think of being masculine, if that's even important. And I think that we certainly have made a caricature of masculinity and have certainly poked fun at this idea that men are masculine or should be or apparently are or are not. And I think that the color guard plays an important role in kind of poking fun at that, because historically, you know, color guards are—men in color guards are stereotyped as being particularly gay, so in some people's minds, gayness gets confounded with femininity, which is a whole other topic I suppose. But, um, I think that for us, walking that line between flamboyancy and this kind of tough guy image, I think that we can do both and show that all of gender is kind of performance and, you know, performance-based. And so, guys that are acting super masculine are acting just as hard as someone maybe acting more femininely.
>
> (Interview with author, June 7, 2017)

Speice's comments reflect a common rhetoric among the design team: while they understood *Men Are From Mars* as an expansive critique of traditionally hegemonic masculinities, they nevertheless maintained their position as actors with control over the masculinities performed by corps members.

Despite the design team's inclusive rhetoric, members were limited in their agency to perform masculinities outside of a hegemonic mold within *Men Are From Mars.* Members of color were particularly affected by the design team's grooming policy, a staple of The Cavaliers' "All-American," "boy-next-door" look. Since the 1980s, corps directors, instructors, and members have required that every member cut their hair to no more than an inch on the top and half an inch on the sides, with short sideburns. No parts or slick backs are allowed, though members are encouraged to style their hair on top

using standard hair gels and setting spray (see Figure 1). If a member doesn't conform to this standard, or if they are not clean shaven, other members or corps staff may deny them from participating in the competitive show. Because such grooming standards are rooted in white, middle-class sensibilities (Barber 2016), friction developed between corps instructors and Black members throughout the 2016 and 2017 seasons. While a compromise that allowed Black members to grow out their hair slightly longer was reached, multiple Black performers later confided with me that they were still dissatisfied with the compromise because they felt their concerns were not fully appreciated by the corps' design team.

Figure 1. Promotional banner for The Cavaliers 2017 production *Men Are From Mars*. Note that each member is clean shaven with a "Cavalier" haircut. Photo courtesy of The Cavaliers Arts, Performance & Education, Inc., used with permission.

Queer members also experienced restrictions to their gender expression and were often asked to modulate their speech, habits, and physical appearance to align with corps expectations. Jae, a queer-identifying and non-binary color guard member from rural South Carolina, was told during their first season to change out of a tank-top and into a

tee shirt by a corps administrator, since the garment was considered too effeminate. The next year, an anonymous non-binary and queer-identifying member departed from the organization because they felt that corps designers restricted their ability to articulate their queerness through piercings, makeup, and other bodily modifications. While the organization loosened these restrictions across 2016 and 2017, I still witnessed queer and non-binary members express frustration with the fact that they were told by instructional staff to act "more manly"—that is, uniformly aggressive and stoic—for their competitive performances. As a friend of these performers who presents masculinely, I was saddened that the corps' efforts to expand the acceptable tolerances for embodied masculinity had still left out some of my peers. Thus, while the design team discursively positioned *Men Are From Mars* as a nuanced exploration of masculinity, the corps' day-to-day operations reflected the harsh homogenizing realities of performing masculinity in The Cavaliers.

Assessing Masculinity in Men Are From Mars

A close examination of musical and visual elements in *Men Are From Mars* gives further evidence to how designers' aesthetic decisions constrained participants to a limited range of gender performances. The opening movement ("The Dawn of Man") begins with an undulating, prerecorded soundscape accompanied by the low rumble of two rolled concert bass drums. Horn line and color guard members emerge out from under a series of ten covered GeoDome props (see Figure 2), as if breaking free of a primordial egg. The horn and percussion members are dressed in uniformly black costuming while the color guard sports earthy, form-fitting unitards with drawn-in

musculature (see Figure 1). An electronic guitar sample sounds an ascending perfect fifth from Eb to Bb, and a voice stutters in quasi-Biblical fashion: “In the beginning, there was…man.” Trumpets and mellophones echo with the ascending fifths of “*Einleitung, oder Sonnenaufgang*” from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, along with Copland’s famous “Fanfare” melody. The Strauss quotes evoke the iconic opening scene of Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which Michel Chion describes as a masculine “exaltation of life” and “joy of destruction” (2001, 91–92). These references encourage the audience to interpret the scene as a Genesis story of masculinity, and the juxtaposition of Copland’s “Fanfare” with the uniform black costuming further implies that the performers share a common masculinity. This positions masculinity as innate and biologically essential, a move that “relies on the rhetorical collapse of ‘man’ meaning male with ‘man’ meaning humankind as a species” according to drum corps scholar Erin Maher (2018).

Figure 2. Cavaliers members hide inside the “GeoDome” stage props at a competition in Louisiana. Photo courtesy of The Cavaliers Arts, Performance, and Entertainment Inc., used with permission.

The second movement ("Diatribez") deploys a variety of musical and choreographic techniques to construct a tribal, martial masculinity. Musically, the movement is an arrangement of John Mackey's "Hubris" from *Wine Dark Sea* and begins with three large drums playing in unison, spread seventy yards across the field (see Figure 3). These "Roman war drums" herald an aggressive and tribalistic masculinity as members jump, claw, and battle each other. Throughout, the iconic 5/4 rhythmic ostinato of Gustav Holst's "Mars" reinforces this aggressive and martial masculinity (see Examples 1 and 2). More than a repeated rhythmic motive, the "Mars rhythm" suggests "[a]ggression and tenacity" (Greene 1995, 42) which is reinforced with guttural vocal samples at the end of the movement.

Figure 3. Staging for The Cavaliers' 2017 production *Men Are From Mars*. Note the "beacon props" with "Roman war drums" spaced across the field. Photo courtesy of The Cavaliers Arts, Performance & Education, Inc., used with permission.

In contrast to the tense aggression of "Diatribez," the third movement ("Superman") begins with a more subdued sonic texture. A single sampled ostinato bass voice incessantly states the word "Men" before a sample of "O Superman" by Laurie Anderson enters the electronic soundscape. The "Men" ostinato is now understood as a reference to the "Ah" that characterizes Anderson's iconic song, and a flugelhorn briefly quotes the G-D-Db motif of "Mars" while concert snare drum and timpani echo the "Mars rhythm." These samples, if only momentarily, signal an ambiguously gendered masculinity, as the sounds of Anderson's vocoder (and images of her androgyny) are juxtaposed against the remnants of the previous movement's aggression as sounded by "Mars."

Example 1: "Diatribez," mm. 52-7, snare feature "Mars rhythm." All music examples provided by Michael Martin and used with permission.

Example 2. "Diatribez," mm. 65-9, "Mars rhythm" conclusion of multi-tenor *soli* feature with bass drums.

Compared to the first half of the program, the show's fourth movement ("LGM") visibly and audibly paints a more complex picture of masculinity that surpasses rank tribalism. On its surface, "LGM" parodies masculine stereotypes by highlighting the pitfalls of unchecked bravado. Based on Vai's "Little Green Men," the movement commences with a voice informing the audience: "And then, man spoke." Immediately,

two tubas perform a duet played through an effect pedal with screeches and flourishes in the upper *tessitura*. The resulting sound is akin to an electric guitar, and the disjuncture between the stately sample and the ensuing sonic chaos implies McIntosh's thesis that men are terrible communicators. The trumpets enter with a rhythmically augmented quotation of the *Zarathustra* fifths played in 17/8 (5+5+7) time (see Example 3) while a Steve Irwin-esque voice encourages the audience to "watch man in his element." Here, additive meter gives evidence to an unstable (de)construction of masculinity, as a piece that was once firmly rooted in evenly spaced temporal pulses (and, therefore, marching steps) now requires members to step in uneven pulse groupings in order to stay together.

Example 3. The trumpet ascending *Zarathustra* 5ths in "LGM," mm. 13-9. Staves are for Trumpet 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

Midway through the movement, after the Irwin sound-alike exclaims how men "are the ultimate communicators," a series of vocal samples exclaim "Dude," "Buddy," "Hey bro," "Brotein shake," and "Brochacho." Dancing along to the thumping bass backbeat provided by the synthesizer and the battery percussion, members yell "Buddy" and "Hey" in reply as they shuffle and sway. These exaggerated movements and facial expressions verge on the carnivalesque (Bakhtin [1965] 1984), as for a mere thirty seconds,

performers suspend their disciplined bodily articulations and invert the scene's normative masculinist aesthetics.

Even in this tongue-in-cheek examination of masculinity—nicknamed "Dude, Buddy, Bro" by the corps members—performers were constrained to embodiments of masculinity that were deemed acceptable by corps designers. Originally the brainchild of McIntosh, "Dude, Buddy, Bro" became one of the most revised portions of the show throughout the season, with members learning multiple versions of the sequence while the design team tweaked and tailored its message. In earlier drafts, guard members were allowed to explore dance moves which invited queer readings of their corporeality, drawing attention to their hip gyrations, leg kicks, and hand gestures. Elements of queer Black and Latinx social dances, such as voguing death drops or HBCU marching band inspired J-setting, were notably prominent in these early stages. Such choreographies were important to queer members' sense of identity because, in the words of dance scholar Thomas F. DeFrantz, they activated "*queer potentiality* as an achievement of virtuosity, resistance and social flexibility," allowing them to "engage, briefly, in non-normative stances and non-normative physical presentation" (2016, 73; emphasis in original). In our casual early-season conversations, many of the guard members felt liberated from strict militaristic forms of comportment for that portion of the program, as they could embody historically significant and racially coded forms of queer masculinity.

But as the season continued, members of the design team deemed these choreographies excessive in light of the corps' need to maintain a "professional" public image. Accordingly, they scrapped these choreographies and instead asked members to

mock hypermasculine "jock culture" by engaging in excessive flexing, dabbing, and posing. In the final version of "Dude, Buddy, Bro," the only holdover from these queerly coded performances was a single extended "Hey" shouted by color guard members, who were instructed to do so in a way that mimicked a stereotypically "gay" vocal fry. Rather than constructing a space for "queer community-formation…made possible by phonic excess" (Dublon 2014), this single extensity instead revealed the residue of alternative masculine subjectivities that were rendered unacceptable by Cavaliers show designers. Thus, the creation of an ostensibly open space for members to explore different forms of masculinity actually reinforced hegemonic control over gender performance.

The final movements of the show depart from the comedic critique of "LGM" and veer into an exploration of masculine interiority and individualism. "The Isolation of Man" highlights the consequences of unchecked masculine bravado. Combining Max Richter's "On the Nature of Daylight" and Jóhann Jóhannsson's "The Sun's Gone Dim and The Sky's Turned Black," the medley represents men's struggles to process emotional isolation (Michael McIntosh, interview with author, April 12, 2022). This theme is expressed musically during a prominent baritone *soli* which is juxtaposed against soft yet dissonant interjections from the trumpets. This turn to sensitive interiority is fleeting, for after the horns swell to the movement's climactic resolution in Db major, color guard members grab rifles and run toward the center of the field, yelling. Singing Jóhannsson's titular lyrics, a voice sample signals a return to aggressive masculine performativity which characterizes the closing movement ("The Destruction of Man").

For this sixth and final movement, the corps juxtaposes a fragmented, remixed sample of Frank Sinatra's "My Way" over an arrangement of Holst's "Mars" transposed to A minor. The concurrence of disjunct signifiers of masculinity—the suave, bootstraps individualism performed by Sinatra (McNally 2008; Nanes 1997) with the warlike aggression of "Mars"—undergirds McIntosh and Wiles' thesis that masculine individualism leads to destruction. A *tutti* quotation of the "Mars" rhythm from the horns and percussion affirms the corps' return to martial caricatures of masculinity, and in the final minute of the program, the visual and sonic markers of the tribalism of "Diatribez" return in full force with war drums, yelling, and choreographies that simulate physical combat. A sampled male voice sings the song's final stanza ("For what is man? / What has he got? / If not himself, / Then he has naught. / To say the things / He truly feels, / And not the words / Of one who kneels. / The record shows / I took the blows, / And did it / My way"). The show ends with color guard members tossing rifles off the center stage as the horn line and battery percussion rush to the front of the field.

Crucially, "The Destruction of Man" garnered reactions from performers and audiences that diverged from the designers' intended message on masculinity. For the design team, this conclusion firmly critiqued hypermasculinity: to them, overt aggression and tribalism were not desirable characteristics, but rather expressions of "how far man's ego will take him" towards destruction. This critique, however, was not present in the rhetoric of members in the corps. Hunter Dorman, a white twenty-year-old tuba performer from Texas, felt that the movement served more as a meta commentary on the Cavaliers' masculine image than a critique of hegemonic masculinity. By performing

"My Way," he argues, members could take pride in "the Cavalier way of doing things." When pressed to be more specific about what he meant, he chuckled and replied "On or off the field, we make it look like our jobs are easy" (interview with author, July 5, 2017). His comments not only parallel attitudes held by the vast majority of members in the ensemble, but also reflect how unmarked hegemonic masculinity—packaged here as effortless physicality—informed performer interpretations of "The Destruction of Man." Meanwhile, audience members tended to view the conclusion as a reinstatement of hegemonic values. As Maher argued in her analysis of the show, the juxtaposition of "My Way" and "Mars" "emphasize[d] the idea of an essential, natural masculinity" by suggesting that such bravado "encapsulates what it means to be a man" (2018). For her and other audience members, "The Destruction of Man" thus served not as critique or meta commentary, but as a genuine valuation of hypermasculinity that played into the corps' all-male membership and masculine public image.

Thus, for all of its ostensible nuance and multilayered engagement with masculinities, *Men Are From Mars* effectively perpetuated underlying hegemonic formations of masculinity in the US-American drum corps community. While the program allowed some flexibility for gender play and inversion, its musical and visual construction ultimately constrained performers to a limited set of potential masculine embodiments, alienating audiences with its seeming reinforcement of essentializing gender discourses in the process.

Ritualizing Masculinities, Queering Performance

> *June 2017*
>
> I'm sitting in a dark, candle-lit room on a farm in the heartland of central Illinois. Around me sit the soon-to-be members of The Cavaliers, who have been led here by the veterans as part of the corps' initiation ceremony. Only members are here; the staff has the night off. For the last two weeks, I and the rest of the "old guys" have worked with this class of "new guys" to teach them what it means to be a Cavalier through a variety of group building exercises. Now, they are ready to officially become Cavaliers by receiving their coveted "white gear," a small plastic cog that represents their official acceptance into the fold. As I smell the hay bales stacked outside the shed, I remember the damp cool of night one year ago when I too received my white gear.
>
> The strains of "My Way" begin to spill out of a boombox placed in the corner of the room. We blow out the candles. I am now paying it forward.[4]

***

Drum corps ensembles are musical communities whose rituals provide their members with a sense of meaning and belonging. As ethnomusicologist and former drum corps performer Jonathan Ritter (2001) has argued, the typical drum corps season parallels Richard Schechner's (1985) seven-phase ritual sequence of training, workshops, rehearsal, warm-ups, performance, cool down, and aftermath. After members are selected for the ensemble through an audition, they *train* and *attend workshop auditions* with other prospective corps members. Come May, they "move-in" with the corps, at which point they participate in "a daily cycle" of *rehearsal, warm-up, performance, and cool down*. While routinized rehearsals instill hegemonic masculinities in some regards by disciplining bodies into reproducing a highly executed program, they also allow members to experience a sense of ritual *communitas*—the intense feelings of "an essential and generic human bond" (Turner [1969] 1991, 97)—predicated on the liminal experience of separation from their families and their typical day-to-day existence. The sheer amount of

[4] As an initiated Cavalier, I intentionally omit some details out of respect to my collaborators and The Cavaliers organization.

time spent together, combined with a heavy load of physical labor and social interaction, makes these ritual processes effective at forging affective ties among performers.

What interests me here are not the times when ritual serves the end of producing a better drum corps show, but rather when ritual creates “a ‘moment in and out of time,’ and in and out of secular social structure” (Turner [1969] 1991, 96). For it is in these moments, I propose, that corps like The Cavaliers temporarily break away from hegemonic (and historically white) forms of militaristic masculinity to explore other gendered expressions. In the following section, I examine how the corps’ long-standing “off-field” traditions—initiation ceremonies, corps songs, and member-run drag performances—have been transformed in ways that allow queer Cavaliers to articulate different ways of being men. While these performances are often fleeting—members must continue to perfect their show, after all—they provide liminal moments of respite, “times out of time” where members can feel like their gender is not inscribed by anyone other than themselves.

Initiation Rituals

Dating back to the 1950s, The Cavaliers’ initiation process is one of the corps’ oldest ritual traditions and is the primary means by which veteran corps members teach corps history, instill accepting attitudes towards alternative masculinities, and promote camaraderie to corps neophytes. While the timeline and content of each initiation varies from year to year, the complete ritual sequence—often referred to as “the process” by the members—typically takes place throughout pre-tour and culminates in a final ceremony

before the start of the competitive season. Until 2018, any second-year member or "rook-out" (i.e., a first-year member in their final year of membership eligibility) could voluntarily participate. Before the season begins, all eligible members convene for a formalized orientation session where senior members explain the process and set expectations for member conduct and safety. It is here that queer- or gay-identifying veteran members typically share their initiation experiences and explain how the process made them feel accepted in the group. Prospective initiates are then given informational materials on corps history and are encouraged to begin meeting all their fellow classmates, or "brothers," to learn about their aspirations and personal beliefs. Neophytes are then tasked with a few writing assignments that ask them to reflect on why they came to The Cavaliers, why they wish to be initiated, and what being a "Cavalier" means to them. Once the corps "moves in" together, initiates participate in nightly ritual events facilitated by veteran members. These group activities often encourage neophytes who identify with minoritized communities or marginalized sexualities to speak frankly and honestly about their experiences with discrimination, in the hopes that their testimonies might encourage empathy and understanding among their classmates.

By giving individuals space to voice their experiences, initiated Cavaliers reaffirm that there is no one "man" that makes "a Cavalier." Thus, rather than reproduce hegemonic masculinity (see Gutierrez 2019), The Cavaliers' initiation process incorporates new members into a culture of care by teaching them how to value a range of masculine identities. Such "inclusive masculinity," Eric Anderson (2008) argues, often centers around core tenants, such as the social valuation of gay and queer men, advocacy

for women's political issues, and engagement with forms of difference to cultivate dialogue and emotional intimacy. The Cavaliers' initiation process forwards a similarly inclusive, utopian vision of masculinity through carefully crafted interpersonal engagement. While not all queer—or for that matter, racially minoritized—members may feel comfortable sharing their feelings, queer-identifying members are generally willing to have serious conversations about their own sense of gender identity. During a group activity in my own initiation process in 2016, Thomas[5] —a gay member of the color guard—spoke about his struggles with anxiety and depression after his parents rejected him. Growing up as a petite and wiry blonde kid from a major Midwest metropole, he experienced bullying at school for wearing clothing deemed overly effeminate by his peers. As he shared these stories, I looked around the dormitory room at the five of us neophytes sitting together. In that moment, it was clear that the "old guys" put us together intentionally because we hailed from vastly different backgrounds: in the room were no less than one member from the color guard, front ensemble, battery, tuba, and mellophone sections, each from a different state and each of a different ethnic/racial identity (white, Asian American, Black, Latino, and mixed-race). The veteran members, therefore, used initiations to place Thomas and other queer members in positions where they could safely offer testimony and initiate dialogue across a diverse cross-section of fellow initiates.

The initiation ceremony itself provides neophytes an additional opportunity to affirm their newly formed attitudes towards masculinity. Only when the "old guys"

[5] "Thomas" is a pseudonym used to protect the collaborator.

determine that the initiate class has cultivated a sufficient culture of listening, empathy, and unity are the initiates deemed ready to become Cavaliers. Veteran leaders block out a full-day of pre-season rehearsal to accommodate the entire ceremony, which can take upwards of five hours to complete. Importantly, this ceremony relies on liminality—the state of being "betwixt and between" (Turner [1969] 1991, 95) social identities—to reaffirm the social values taught during the entire process. Held at a discreet location away from the football fields where the corps rehearses, veteran members add to the feeling of in-betweenness by placing symbolically significant decorations throughout the ceremonial site and marking it off with an abundance of candlelight. The final stages of the ceremony urge participants to acknowledge and work through personal differences to forge bonds based in common "brotherhood." Veterans will ask neophytes to reflect on what it means to "be a Cavalier" through a series of interviews and group dialogues, asking how they can apply their newfound empathy to their everyday lives once the season is over. Initiates also spend time in isolation to reflect on what it means to be a brother for other members of their class, and to consider—via a series of written prompts—how they can care for men who do not fit their personal definitions of masculinity.

Once the initiates have sufficiently affirmed their understanding of the corps' core values, they embark through a series of decades-old traditions that culminate in receiving their white gears and learning the secret meaning of the corps' battle cry, SPLOOIE. This completes their enculturation process into becoming Cavaliers, a transformation that is affirmed when veteran and newly initiated members join together and sing the

ensemble's signature tune, "Over the Rainbow." It is to this song I now pivot, as it opens potentially queer musical space for the performance of alternative masculinities.

Singing "Over the Rainbow"

In The Cavaliers, "Over the Rainbow" is a profoundly sentimental song steeped in the corps' sense of identity and tradition. First added to the corps' show repertoire in 1951 (Foutz 2009, 32), the song became a staple of Cavalier shows for the next twenty years, often serving as the "closer" or final movement to the annual competitive program. Outside competition, the tune became a favorite among the members, who drafted multiple vocal and horn arrangements throughout the 1960s and 70s that were soon incorporated into the corps' show-day rituals. Thus, by the 1980s, members sang "Rainbow" before entering the field and played the horn arrangement as an "encore" piece after the judged competition concluded. These traditions continue into the present.

While I have never heard members or alumni explicitly connect "Rainbow" to Judy Garland's popularity amongst US-American gay men, the song boasts a sustained history of queer interpretation. As film scholar Richard Dyer articulates, Garland's tumultuous life after leaving Meto-Goldwyn-Mayer caused a split which "made possible a reading of [her] as having a special relationship to suffering, ordinariness, normality…that structures much of the gay reading" (Dyer 2004, 138) of her voice and image. Accordingly, her blossoming appeal among gay US-American men in the 1950s resulted from her "star image with strong elements of difference within ordinariness, androgyny and camp, and a way of interpreting homosexual identity that is widely available in society in both dominant and subcultural discourses" (ibid., 191). That

Garland's most iconic song depicted aspirational hopes for a better life "over the rainbow" prompted gay men to map her "difference within ordinariness," along with their aspirational hopes for gay liberation, onto her iconic signature tune (Frisch 2017, 85–87).

Over the Rainbow

Somewhere, over the rainbow,
Way up high,
There's a land that I've heard of
Once in a lullaby.

Somewhere, over the rainbow,
Skies are blue.
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true.

Someday, I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far behind me.

Where trouble melts like lemon drops,
Away above the chimney tops,
That's where you'll find me.

Somewhere, over the rainbow,
Bluebirds fly.
Birds fly, over the rainbow,
Why, then, oh why, can't I?

If pretty little bluebirds fly
Beyond the rainbow.
Why, oh why, can't I?

Example 4. Lyrics to "Over the Rainbow" (1939) as written by E. Y. "Yip" Harburg.

Given the song's overt evocation of the rainbow and its enduring associations with Judy Garland, an increasing number of openly queer Cavaliers interpret the song as an affirmation of their non-normative identities. What links this song to queer sentiment in The Cavaliers is audible within the corps' current vocal rendition, which allows members to selectively disrupt a normative, straight-forward performance in four ways: a) constant movement between sentimental song and quick chant, b) abrupt pauses, c) the use of multiple melodic possibilities, and d) intentionally produced "participatory discrepancies" (Keil 1987). These characteristics are evident within the first two lines of "Rainbow" (see Example 5). Members start by singing the characteristic octave jump of "Somewhere…" before briskly chanting "overtherainBOW" such that the last syllable is accented. This section is often chanted in the contour of the original melody (notated in

the example), although the singer might shape the contour differently at their own discretion. Following a pause, singers bring back the original stately melody for the lyrics "Way up." They then have two *divisi* options for the word "high," one that soars above the vocal texture (scale degrees 1-2-3-2) and one that descends (1-7-6-5).

Example 5. Transcription of the first two lines from The Cavaliers' current version of "Rainbow." Crossed noteheads indicate chanted lyrics with implied melodic shape, which performers may or may not adhere to.
(Key: a = movement between sentimental song and chant, b = abrupt pauses, c = multiple melodic possibilities, d = intentional participatory discrepancies)

This pattern of abrupt pauses, chants, and singing is repeated in the following lines (There's a…landthatIheardOF!...Once in a lullaby"). Leading up to the bridge, singers also chant "dreamsthatyou daretodreamreallydocometrue" to "kick-in" the following up-tempo stanza. The arrangement then quickly accelerates as members speed through "wheretroublemeltslikelemondrops, awayabovethechimneytops, that'swhereyou'll findme," joining back together only at "somewhereovertherainBOW!" The final stanza is markedly sentimental, with members often singing the final "can't I" in the upper regions of their vocal range.

This version of "Rainbow" allows members to productively queer drum corps musical practices by granting them musical space to individually tailor their performance along an indeterminate path. Arguably the most liberating parts of the performance are the chant sections, where participatory discrepancies are encouraged. If, as Charles Keil asserted, "[m]usic, to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be 'out of time' and 'out of tune'" (1987, 275), then it is precisely at these moments that Cavaliers members enact a "socially valuable" sonic politics of inclusion. This is because members disrupt what could otherwise be a homogenizing, close-harmony vocal arrangement by manipulating their individual voices across an uneven temporal terrain. Rather than subjecting their singing to the hegemonic desire for uniformity, stoic seriousness, and precise execution, members can shift between overtly sentimental and distinctly tongue-in-cheek registers of vocality, modulating their sonic production to convey grave solemnity or comedic gibberish. The abrupt pauses function to mold these individual expressions into a socially cohesive whole, as singers must always be aware of when those around them are about to stop and start at a different clip by using visible and audible cues. The *divisi* sections, in turn, allow members to choose their own performance paths and to experiment with the upper and lower registers of their vocal range: some members might shoot for the high (and implied feminine) notes in an emotional outburst; others might stick to the "masculine" bass and baritone registers.

What is powerful about "Rainbow," therefore, is that it opens musical space for performers to tailor their individual sonic and embodied affects within an overarching ritual context. This power is due, in part, to the fact that there is no one prescribed way of

singing the song, but rather a range of possibilities that one can choose from to personalize their performance. My personal experiences with "Rainbow" are marked, as a result, by the overwhelming feeling that indeterminate performance possibilities can offer. At times, I will completely miss the high *divisi* notes on the word "high" because I began singing the descending line before deciding to switch at the last second. During the accelerating passage "Where troubles melt like lemon drops," it becomes hard for me and other members to keep up with those who have clear diction, causing us to slur our words together to stay with each other. As a result, these songs frequently risk falling apart, with different members finishing at slightly different times at each of the chanted sections. And yet, the performances remain cohesive enough for their lyrical content to be understood by passersby. Within this ritual time and space, members thus open musical space to articulate uniquely masculine identities that are nevertheless part of a cohesive community. In doing so, they tailor a decades-old ritual practice to facilitate the diverse performance of vocalic and embodied masculinities, sparking feelings of anti-structural *communitas* in the process. Out of many masculinities, a cohesive yet anti-hierarchical "all-male" whole emerges through song.

Drag Queen International

The Cavaliers' most legibly queer tradition is the annual member-run drag competition, Drag Queen International (DQI). While the origins of DQI are unknown, queer Cavaliers have run the competition since at least the early 2010s. During these performances, each participant completes a three to five-minute lip sync to a song played

over the loudspeakers, wearing a DIY drag costume assembled from used clothes and wigs purchased during the season. The show always takes place on the guard bus during the last overnight trip of the season and is adjudicated by senior members of the ensemble. The fact that it always takes place on the bus is significant, as the bus is physically transient and socially queer. Beyond the fact that many queer members ride the guard bus, the very act of traveling between two locations renders the bus a fleeting, temporary zone that is at once situated within and beyond a stable notion of locality. Compared to the standardized performance space of the football field, the bus is a liminal social space that fosters ritualized bonding (Ramsey [2013] 2016) and provides an arena for body-space relationships that exceed the scene's discipline. Members heighten these feelings of in-betweenness by affixing streamers and LED lights to the roof of the bus to create a festive nightclub atmosphere.

Notably, queer members of color played a significant role in DQI 2016, the competition introduced in the opening ethnographic sketch. Of the 14 performances that evening, five were by Black members of the color guard, and over half were by members who identified with a racially minoritized group. Black artists took prominence in members' song selections: Arthur—a Black veteran leader who grew up in Texas and experienced discrimination growing up based on both his sexuality and race—synced to Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda," whose hypersexualized lyrics in the context of a drag queen show were interpreted by the bus members as expressions of queer male desire. Meanwhile, Kory—a tall and lanky Black man wearing virtually nothing but a bedsheet and some makeup—performed alongside Jennifer Hudson's version of "And I'm Telling

You I'm Not Going" from Bill Condon's film *Dreamgirls*.[6] Even in performances by white participants, Black artists remained prominent. As I discuss in further detail below, performances by white-identifying members such as Jae often drew from musicians of color such as Beyoncé Knowles or Ballroom Beatz visionary DJ Vjuan Allure.

As an annually recurring ritual, DQI enables participants to reorient their bodies in relation to physical and social space so that they can explore alternative ways of being men in the drum corps world. According to Sara Ahmed, such reorientation with(in) space is one of the fundamental processes that undergirds queer politics, as moments of bodily *dis*orientation "often…'point' toward becoming orientated" (2006, 159). "The point," she suggests, is to explore "what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do – whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope" (ibid., 158). The ambivalent political potential of reorientation is a possibility made evident in DQI lip sync performances where members enact a "queer use" of their bodies by eschewing militaristic precision. For Ahmed, queer use not only conceptualizes how "things can be used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended" (2019, 199), but also how sociocultural scripts might be rebuffed through "improper" use of the body: "Sometimes to survive a restriction," she states, "we refuse an instruction" (ibid., 201).

This refusal of the daily instructions placed upon performers bodies is apparent during the DQI opening procession, wherein the MC performs an exhibition lip sync. For

[6] "Arthur" and "Kory" are pseudonyms used to protect the collaborators.

DQI 2016, Jae/Ariana del Harmonix (see Figure 4) performed a lip sync of the song "Category Is…," a collaboration between famed drag queen RuPaul and DJ Vjuan Allure. Popularized on VH1's *RuPaul's Drag Race* and released on the 2016 album *Butch Queen,* the song evokes the queer space of the runway, where *Drag Race* competitors are perform overt femininities to reflect the social construction of masculinity (Edgar 2011).

Figure 4. Jae, a.k.a. Ariana Del Harmonix, 2019. Photo courtesy of Jae Adams and used with permission.

Between constant calls to "Bring it to the runway," RuPaul offers in the song a catalogue of possible gendered performances that the imagined contestants might embody. These range from the relatively broad and typical within drag culture ("Femme Queen Realness") to the campy, comical, and absurd (e.g., "Bear Claw Realness," "She's Looking Fish Tonight"). The repeated question "What category are we on right now?" further suggests that audience members might witness any number of gendered

performances in the upcoming acts. During this catchy and driving lip-sync, Ariana was everywhere in the bus aisle "runway." At various points, she stood up and strutted towards the back of the bus, shaking her hips sultrily. As she passed each row of audience members, they turned on their reading lamps to create an ephemeral runway of light along the narrow walkway. Returning to the front of the bus, she gazed longingly into the distance, as if to beckon the audience to express their queer desires in that very moment.

The ability to articulate alternatively gendered and racialized subjectivities is made further apparent through the physicality of DQI performances. In another exemplary lip sync, Sonny—a white rookie color guard member from Louisiana—wore a nappy blond wig and a tan one-piece dress. Sashaying to the front of the bus, Ariana announced Sonny as queen Gloria Hole. Gloria began her lip sync by gliding down the aisle, stopping every so many rows to lean in towards the seated audience members. Immediately after the applause died down from the captivated audience, a sparse, reverb-heavy piano riff spilled out of the speakers, accompanied by a woman's breathy voice. This was Beyoncé Knowles's cover of "Crazy in Love," produced for the 2015 BDSM fantasy film *Fifty Shades of Grey*. As the music swelled to its apotheosis and Beyoncé's breathy "Uh-Oh"s were accentuated by a penetrating half-time drum track, Gloria kicked her right leg high into the air and landed her body on the lap of another color guard member. Reaching above her head, she tore down some of the streamers and LEDs that had been affixed to the ceiling just hours before. In the mess sweating bodies, squealing laughter, and driving music, the bus erupted in applause. Sonny's rousing conclusion reflects how Cavalier queens use improvised choreography to participate in corporeal

drag. As performance studies scholar Naomi Bragin articulates, “corporeal drag” is a “process of queer play in which performers try on and refashion movement as sensory-kinesthetic material for experiencing and presenting the body anew” (2014, 62). Importantly, corporeal drag is vital to the aesthetics of underground queer of color dance practices, as they “disorien[t] white-hetero-patriarchal notions of power and racialized sexuality” (ibid., 63). In DQI, corporeal drag not only allows members—regardless of racial identity—to pay homage to queer Black artists and aesthetics, but to also place their bodies in direct, queer contact with other members. Such close contact evokes Jack Halberstam’s (2011) notion of the “queer art of failure,” because what members value in DQI is not masculinist forms of militaristic precision and prowess, but performances of “failed” masculinity through drag.

These performances thus illuminate how, for the few hours of DQI, performers queerly use their bodies beyond the restrictions placed on them by the hegemonic (and historically white) masculinity of drum and bugle corps aesthetic practice. Left to create their own choreography, choose their own music, and move their bodies according to alternatively gendered and racialized logics, participants express queer physical and social intimacies prohibited by corps show designers in on-field performances. Their bodies, in turn, became sites of transgressive movement that resist subsummation into the hegemony of drum corps masculinity. By valuing individual expression over conformity, and having a good time over precise execution, members make space to perform what they are not on the field, to envision otherwise their gendered subjectivities.

Conclusion: Last Men Standing

In 2017, The Madison Scouts edged into the twelfth and final slot of the DCI World Championship Finals with their show entitled *Last Man Standing*. In this dystopian production, tribes of men fight over scarce oxygen supplies to a soundtrack of music from *Mad Max* film series, Bela Bartok's *Miraculous Mandarin*, and Karel Husa's "Music for Prague 1968." Controversially, the corps departed from its classic green uniforms in exchange for a grimy outfit of earthen cloth ripped and dirty make-up. Though the Scouts used these musical and visual elements in an effort to explore "man's internal struggle" like The Cavaliers, Scouts executive director Chris Komnick suggested in an interview with DCI that their program would take a slightly different tone:

> "The show is complicated, there's a lot of difficulty in it," Komnick said. "It's all kind of represented on the field in a very 'Mad Max'-like aesthetic, so post-apocalyptic kind of world, the struggle there is lack of oxygen and the battle within the tribe to actually figure out who should lead the tribe."
>
> (Griffith 2017)

This emphasis on violence and aggression was not lost on Maher, who remarked after the season that "[i]n the absence of [*Mad Max:*] *Fury Road*'s productive critique of male violence, 'The Last Man Standing' offers only the bleak notion that men faced with threats to their survival with always turned to brutality" (2018). Noting the similarities between the rhetoric used by show designers for both The Scouts and The Cavaliers, she pondered the combined effect of these shows on gender non-conforming performers:

> Considering these two shows together, I can't help but wonder about the experiences of corps members whose gender identity or expression is in conflict with the essentialist visions of masculinity they took part in performing. The insistence that each show is "just entertainment," combined with the cultivation of a unified group identity within a corps, seems to leave little room for the acknowledgment that a show's message could be harmful or exclusionary to some participants.

Acknowledging that the ethnographic insights of this project are limited to only one of these two historically all-male organizations, I have still worked to address Maher's concern, to understand how members—especially queer-identifying men—negotiate their own sense of gender identity and masculinity in the face of drum corps' pervasive hegemonic and racialized values. With *Men Are From Mars*, show designers at The Cavaliers attempted to create a show that could act as a vehicle to explore an array of masculinities. But as close analysis and ethnographic observation show, members in The Cavaliers often found themselves constrained to a series of masculine performances that conflicted with their queer subjectivities. Rather than share in Maher's pessimistic outlook on the scene's gender politics, queer performers in The Cavaliers instead drew from the corps' vast and deep set of traditions to reorient themselves within social, musical, and physical space. Whether by their participation in the corps' decades-old initiation process, singing of the group's iconic theme song, or producing an ephemeral, one-night-only drag competition, queer Cavaliers rendered possible—if only temporarily—the very gender identities and expressions that seemed foreclosed to them in their on-field embodiments.

The phenomenon of the all-male drum corps is potentially reaching its end. As of the writing of this thesis, BSA continues to develop co-ed programming, even as it faces criticism for its treatment of trans and queer members once they reach middle school (Riley 2021). Within the North American drum and bugle corps scene, The Cavaliers are now the last competitive all-male ensemble after the Scouts' implemented their new membership model in 2020. As the "last men standing" in this musical subculture, The

Cavaliers now occupy a unique position. If, like the Scouts, they transition into a co-ed membership, they will have to address the many latent forms of hegemonic masculinity that pervade their musical practices. If (or when) that time comes, members of the corps will have a legacy of practices that they might use to transform their traditions towards an uncertain future. Until then, queer Cavaliers will use these rituals to reflect the ever changing, ever contested politics of masculinity in North American marching music.

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