

# HUZZAH!

## For the John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps

By Elizabeth Ford



**T**he John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps, led by Wendell Dobbs, is a new organization at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia; it is the only major collegiate fife and drum corps in the country. Supported by the John Deaver Drinko Academy and Judy Ketchum and Lena Shell, the corps was created to promote the mission of the Academy – to reinvigorate civic and political culture – and to reaffirm the bond between Marshall University and the era and spirit of Chief Justice John Marshall. The founders also wanted to foster local public interest in the Chief Justice.

The corps debuted in 2007 with an opening season that included a performance for the John Marshall Foundation in Richmond, Virginia to honor the Chief Justice's birthday at his home. Chief Justice Harry Carrico of the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and Marc Greenough, who often portrays John Marshall, greeted

the corps at the John Marshall Foundation. Later the corps played at the Shockoe Hill Cemetery to dedicate an historical marker near the site of the Marshall family graves.

The corps also performed a field exhibition show in the lobby of the Library of Virginia, followed by a program, "An Evening with John Marshall and Friends," conceived by Linda Dobbs. It featured Dobbs' voice students, who dressed in period clothing and performed parlor songs from the early 1800s accompanied by flute and piano as well as dance. A highlight was an excerpt from the musical, *Poor Soldier*, a favorite of George Washington.

The fife corps ended the program playing the "Star Spangled Banner" and "Hail Columbia," the tune most closely associated with the Federalist Party of Washington, Adams, and Marshall. The concert was repeated in Lexington, Virginia and Lewisburg, West Virginia to appreciative audiences.

The corps also participated in the Mountain State Forest Festival in Elkins, West Virginia, where members marched in a parade and opened the marching band competition that afternoon. For this performance, they integrated the cry "Huzzah," an English interjection expressing goodwill and approval, into the routine. Drum Major Robert Heath was inspired by John Marshall impersonator Mark Greenough and began to shout this to the corps while marching, eliciting Huzzahs from the corps and crowd.

### Costumes and Instruments

One of the goals of the John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps is to link the present with the past. Their green with white uniforms – white shirt, cravat, knee socks, knickers, vest, jacket, hair ribbon – are based on those from the Revolutionary War. Corps members with short hair wear wigs beneath a tricorne hat that comes with a green cock-





A performance in the West Virginia senate chambers, center.

Rehearsing on the Old Main lawn at John Marshall University, right and far left.



ade. The shoes are black band shoes with buckles, and the drum major wears a large bushbee helmet, sash, and drum sticks to signify his rank.

Painstakingly created by Magic Makers Costumes in Huntington, West Virginia, each uniform has 57 pewter buttons bearing the design of John Marshall's watch fob, created while he was in Paris during the XYZ affair.<sup>1</sup>

The fifers play McDonagh fifes that are similar in sound to a piccolo, with 10 holes along a conical bore. Rope tension drums are replicas of 18th-century field drum emblazoned with the same John Marshall watch fob signet.

### The Music

The tunes, arranged in two parts by Dobbs, are traditional fife tunes and

airs from the 18th and 19th centuries and include "Finnegan's Wake," "The Green Cockade," "Yankee Doodle," "The Downfall of Paris," and "The World Turned Upside Down," all performed from memory. It is likely that John Marshall would have been familiar with some of these tunes.

Like all historical instruments, fifes can be tricky to play, but the flutists have enjoyed the challenge. Senior music education major Callie Huff states, "With music, it is always fun to get to learn something new, especially a new instrument. With this, I was able to take a step back in time and bring a bit of history back to life. Not many people have this special opportunity."

*The corps on parade at the Marshall University vs. West Virginia University game last year.*



Photo by Rick Hays

<sup>1</sup>In 1797, President Adams labored to defuse growing tensions with France by sending two new diplomats, John Marshall and Elbridge Gerry, to join C.C. Pinckney in Paris. The French foreign minister, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, made the American mission wait for weeks and then deployed agents (designated X, Y, and Z by the Americans) to demand a \$250,000 bribe for himself and a \$12 million loan for France. Bribery was standard diplomatic fare at the time, but the amount was deemed exorbitant. (For more information [www.u-s-history.com/pages/h465.html](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h465.html))

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The John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps was inspired by the U.S. Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps in Washington, D.C., whose members include Marshall alumni flutists Lutricia Tampa Fields and Jennifer Razok Bailey. In August the corps received training from Susan Brockman who played in the Old Guard for many years and is now retired. Precision marching and silent commands are trademarks of the group.

The corps began practicing high mark-times, sharp turns, and clean angles in early summer, spending hours of practice to perfect each move. The drum major leads the group with an espontoon, a long spear that was the weapon of noncommissioned officers during the Revolution. While children are usually fascinated by the object, a drum major uses it during parade and field formations to send important signals to the corps.

All the fifers in the John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps are flutists with the exception of Rebecca Murphy, who is a bassist. Because of her strong background in marching band, she writes the corps' drill. All members are music majors or professors at Marshall University. Dobbs attributes the success of



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the group to the students' saying, "The students themselves are responsible for most of the success. Their devotion of creativity, time, effort, and professionalism makes this a quality group."

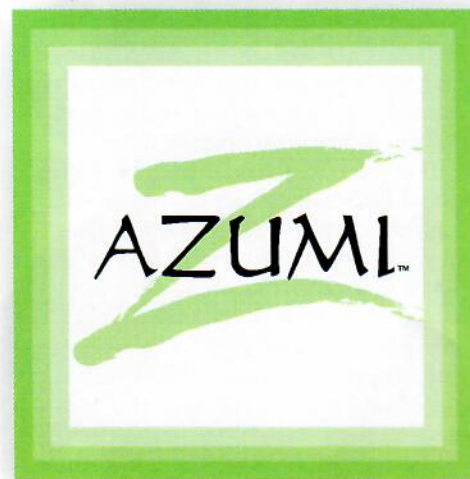
In the words of John Marshall, by way of Mark Greenough, "The John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps has 13 fifers representing the 13 original

states. The corps' two snares represent Liberty, while the bass drum, the corps' foundation, represents the Constitution." Drum Major Robert Heath adds, "The John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps is a way to instill national pride. The community enjoys seeing and hearing us, and we provide a link to our country's history."

The John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps ended its first season with a performance at the Drummer's Call in Colonial Williamsburg on May 17. This by-invitation-only event showcased fife and drum corps from around the United States and Canada. Future performances will be in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New England for musters, as well as local excursions in the West Virginia-Ohio-Kentucky area.

If you happen to see the corps perform, remember that "Huzzah" is just as good as applause. †

For further information contact Wendell Dobbs, professor of music at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. [dobbs@marshall.edu](mailto:dobbs@marshall.edu) or [www.marshall.edu/cofa/music](http://www.marshall.edu/cofa/music). You can also read more about the activities of the John Marshall Fife and Drum Corps at [www.marshall.edu/drinko](http://www.marshall.edu/drinko).



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