



"The President's Own" United States Marine Band, posing on the South Portico of the White House, ranks as the oldest continuously active musical organization in the United States. It was established in 1798 and performs at the White House more than 300 times annually. (Unless otherwise stated, photos courtesy of "The President's Own" United States Marine Band.)

# 'The President's Own' Marine Band Includes a Phi Kappa Phi Member

By Saxophonist and Master Sergeant Audrey Cupples



Audrey Cupples poses in her Marine Band uniform.

**W**hen I graduated from the celebrated Eastman School of Music in 1986, I considered myself an artist with aspirations of making classical saxophone a respected and sought-after platform for musical expression.

I never would have imagined joining the Marine Corps, but 21 years ago I did just that and became the first and only female saxophonist in "The President's Own" United States Marine Band.

I auditioned on my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday and was a little hesitant to accept the job since I would have to enlist for four years. I worried that the military and I might not mix.

The first rehearsal put my mind at ease. The other musicians were artists and professionals and I felt right at home. I knew this was the perfect place for a career, one that would give me a chance to express my musicality and serve my country.

In more than two decades with the Marine Band, I've played for six inaugurations (every one since George H. W. Bush), hundreds of White House functions, hundreds of concerts, and countless funerals, dedications and other historic events. Here are some of my most memorable musical and patriotic experiences with the Marine Band.

## One singular sensation

My first big White House event was the taping of *In Performance at the White House* (which began in 1978 with a recital by pianist Vladimir Horowitz) in August 1988 for the Public Broadcasting Service.

We were conducted by Marvin Hamlisch and backed performances by alumni from the original cast of the hit Broadway musical *A Chorus Line*, which earned Hamlisch (along with lyricist Edward Kleban) a Tony Award for best score. We also supported entertainer Shirley Jones and comedian/singer Stubby Kaye, among others. The show was recorded in front of the White House with an audience that included President Ronald Reagan and first lady Nancy Reagan.

It was surreal performing outside with the bright lights, glitter and celebrities. I remember getting a photo of the occasion from the White House and being thrilled.

President Reagan was charismatic yet down-to-earth. He always thanked what he called "his" band for performing at events he attended.

He would invite the band to eat at the end of White House events. We were encouraged to partake, and we did!

## Standing ovations from comrades

In February 1990 the band traveled to Russia and made history as the first U.S. military band to tour the former Soviet Union. I had a little trepidation about going to a Communist country while the Cold War was still being fought, but apprehensions melted away once we met the warm-hearted people.

Soviet military bands greeted us in each city, performing their national anthem and ours, and women dressed in traditional garb offered us bread with salt, a Soviet ritual of welcome. I got tears in my eyes every time. I was so proud to represent my country!

Every stage hung an American and Russian flag. We had a difficult time communicating verbally, but, as musicians, we could sit down with our instruments and perform together.

In Moscow, we were told that performing Tchaikovsky's booming "1812 Overture" with its anthem "God Save the Tsar!" was frowned upon (since Tsarist rule was long over) and new endings to that piece were passed out. That made me appreciate how free we really are in the United States.

Audiences always gave us standing ovations and threw red carnations (the symbolic flower of Communism) on the stage. The applause was so different than what we were used to. Russian audiences would start clapping at different speeds, then gradually all clap in rhythm together. That was the signal they wanted us to play encores.

At one hall, audience members came onstage and gave us presents. One person fought his way to the center of the band and gave me a beautiful glass vase. I still treasure it.



**President Bill Clinton** (right) mingled with U.S. Marine Band members and their guests including **Cupples** and her aunt, **Renee Dolan**, at the White House during the band's 200th birthday party in July 1998. (Photo courtesy of Audrey Cupples.)

### All sorts of presents

President Bill Clinton threw the band a 200<sup>th</sup> birthday party at the White House in July 1998. We were allowed to bring guests for the ceremony and picnic. I was excited about showing my family — my dad, stepmother, Aunt Renee, Uncle Joe and Grandma and Grandpa Cupples — around my workplace for the first time, go on a tour of the White House and take pictures.

There was plenty of food and we all ate at picnic tables set up in the South Lawn. How many times had I played music for White House guests while they ate at these very tables?

I got a chance to speak with President Clinton about saxophones, an instrument he plays as an amateur. He asked me which brands I thought were best and told me which manufacturers sent him instruments.

We had a concert the next night at the Kennedy Center and the Clintons were there. As a special treat for President Clinton in a program that included some Aaron Copland and George Gershwin, among others, composer W. Francis McBeth conducted one of his own pieces, "When Honor Whispers and Shouts." In 1962, McBeth conducted the Arkansas All-State Band. One member of the tenor saxophone section was the future president. McBeth stayed at the White House that night.

President Clinton was so excited

about the concert that he woke McBeth up early the next morning to talk about it, McBeth said.

### Conducting a notable farewell

President George W. Bush thought it would be fun to conduct the Marine Band for his last White House Correspondents' Association Dinner (on April 26, 2008). He wanted to keep this a secret from the press and had the band come over one afternoon for a rehearsal in the East Room.



**John Philip Sousa**

He practiced conducting us to "Stars and Stripes Forever" by John Philip Sousa, the march king and our band's 17<sup>th</sup> director (who served 1880-92). I couldn't help smiling because

President Bush was having so much fun. He used facial expressions and hand cues to show if he wanted us to play loud or soft and when an important musical flourish was meant to come in.

After the rehearsal, he asked one of his White House photographers to take a photo of all of us with him and to make sure we each got a copy.

### President No. 44 and counting

Barack Obama's inauguration on Jan. 20, 2009, was one of the biggest events I've ever been part of — a reported 1.5 million people were there. Sitting at the Capitol underneath the swearing-in area, I looked out over the crowd and as far as I could see there were people.

I realized that I had one of the best seats in the house and that many people would love to trade places with me. It's humbling to be a part of an event that huge.

While marching in the 2009 inaugural parade past the president and other dignitaries, we wanted to look and play perfectly, especially since we are "The President's Own." ■

## Facts About the Marine Band

### Background:

The Marine Band was **established** by an Act of Congress signed by (the second) President John Adams on **July 11, 1798**, making it the oldest continuously active professional musical organization in the United States.

Third president **Thomas Jefferson**, an amateur violinist, was the first president to invite the Marine Band to play at a presidential inauguration (his first on March 4, 1801). He's **credited with giving the band the title "The President's Own."** The band has played at every presidential inaugural since: 53 and counting.

"The President's Own" is the only organization whose primary mission is to **provide music for the president of the United States** and the commandant of the Marine Corps.

Marine Band personnel are **enlisted**, initially for a **four-year term**, in the United States Marine Corps as staff sergeants

Musicians **audition** for openings. Musicians do not go to boot camp; instead, they train for six weeks, under the command of the assistant drum major, learning military customs and courtesies, ceremonial drill, uniform regulations and other military subjects. "The President's Own" has no secondary tactical or combat mission.

The Marine Band, Marine Chamber Orchestra, and Marine Chamber Ensembles **perform more than 800 commitments per year**, more than 300 of those at the Executive Mansion.

### Milestones:

The Marine Band made its **White House debut** on New Year's Day **1801**.

The Marine Band has participated in many historic events including **accompanying President Abraham Lincoln to Gettysburg** in 1863 when he gave his historic eulogy to Americans who lost their lives in that Civil War battle.

Renowned American conductor and composer **John Philip Sousa led the Marine Band from 1880 to '92**, taking the baton at age 25. During his tenure as the 17<sup>th</sup> director, he established the band as a world-class performing ensemble and established the Marine Band's National Concert Tour.

On Nov. 25, 1963, the Marine Band led the **funeral** procession of **President John F. Kennedy** (No. 35), at the request of his widow, Jacqueline.

On July 4, 1986, the Marine Band performed in New York City for the **rededication of the Statue of Liberty**, re-creating the band's performance under John Philip Sousa for the original dedication ceremonies 100 years earlier.

(Source: "The President's Own" Web site at <http://www.marineband.usmc.mil/>)



For more anecdotes, photos, history and trivia, go online to: <http://www.PhiKappaPhi.org/Web/Publications/Forum/summer09/presidentsownband>

To learn more about and listen to "The President's Own," go online to <http://www.marineband.usmc.mil/>

**Saxophonist and Master Sergeant Audrey Cupples** (University of Maryland) joined "The President's Own" United States Marine Band in May 1988. She earned a bachelor's degree in music from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., in 1986 and both a master's degree in music in 2000 and a doctor of musical arts degree in 2008 from the University of Maryland at College Park. Prior to joining "The President's Own," she performed as lead saxophonist on Wynton Marsalis' 1987 *Carnaval* album. As part of "The President's Own," she has been featured as a soloist on a number of performances, including Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Fantasia*, and in 2000 represented the band at the International Saxophone Symposium as a soloist and a member of the Interservice Saxophone Octet, premiering her arrangement of Felix Mendelssohn's "String Octet in E-flat, Op. 20." Her husband is Gunnery Sergeant Steve Longoria, principal saxophonist in "The President's Own," and they have a son Jacob. Email her at [goldie3@crosslink.net](mailto:goldie3@crosslink.net).