



photo maxwell stroud

The Band Plays On

BY TIM EVANS

If you've participated in or watched a Vermont Pride march in recent years, you've probably heard it – the sound of flutes and horns working together on such classic parade tunes as Sousa marches and "We Are Family." (Hey,

"It's very fun, lots of laughs and no pressure."

- Jill Malin

these *are* Pride parade tunes we're discussing.)

And if you've heard that, then you've heard the Green Mountain Freedom Band.

The group has been a part of every Pride Day march in Burlington since 1993, blending traditional marching band music with more contemporary sounds from its fun and rousing repertoire.

"We play a variety of types of music," says Peter Thomas, the band's founder. "We play traditional marches by Sousa, chorales by Bach, pop music like 'Love Shack' from the B-52s, patriotic tunes like 'This Land is Your Land' and rock tunes like Aretha Franklin's 'Think.'"

So who are these people with the diverse musical tastes?

The Burlington-based group currently consists of about 20 gay, lesbian, and bisexual musicians from an area that stretches from Montréal to Brandon, Highgate to St. Johnsbury.

They are affiliated with Lesbian and Gay Bands of America, an international organization that seeks to promote the lesbian and gay band movement in the U.S. and it was actually the existence of this organization that sparked the band's birth.

"The idea came from a(n) LGBA) pamphlet my sister Michelle picked up at San Francisco Pride in 1992," says Thomas. "I was really attracted to the idea of being a member of a LGB band. But the thought of trying to make rehearsals in NYC or Boston [the closest band locations at the time] on a regular basis did not seem possible.

"That's when I decided I would start one here in Vermont."

Thomas spread the word through a network of friends and placed an ad in *Out in the Mountains*. Interest in concert band music was apparently strong. "In time for Pride Day 1993," he remembers, "we had a band of 9 musicians." The program for that year's march was John Phillip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever."



Since then, the band has expanded its concert schedule beyond the annual Pride appearance. During December of 1998, the group played concerts at three different nursing homes in Burlington. Encouraged by the positive reception of these performances the group entered 1999 "with an ambitious plan to become more than just a Pride day band."

They certainly achieved that goal; in May, 1999, the band played its first spring concert under the direction of Yuji Nakayama, assistant conductor of the Lesbian and Gay Big Apple Corps Band of New York City. A few months later, they made the trip to Montréal to participate in that city's DiversCité Pride parade before an audience of more than 100,000.

Back at home, they've performed at a number of other community events, including the Rutland AIDS Walk, UVM's Coming Out Week speak-out, and at Mountain Pride Media's Green Mountain Tour event in McIndoe Falls –

and, of course, the Pride march in Burlington.

A love of music, getting together with other lesbian and gay people, and perhaps most of all, an opportunity to have some fun seems to be the common bond for members of the Freedom Band. Four-year veteran baritone horn player Jill Malin likes the relaxed, social atmosphere of rehearsals. "It's very fun, lots of laughs and no pressure."

Malin says that there's no pressure on less experienced players; no matter what level of expertise individual members have, there is always support from everyone involved. That camaraderie prevails at rehearsals and in performance as well.

The future of the Green Mountain Freedom Band looks exciting, and the year 2000 will certainly see it performing at a number of interesting venues. "Our plans include another Spring Concert," says Thomas, as well as "participation with other Lesbian and Gay Bands of America at the Millennium March on Washington in April,

and a combined marching band and concert band with the Boston Freedom Band in May at the Northampton, Mass. Pride."

At some point, the band would like to collaborate in concert with the Vocal Minority Gay Men's Chorus and perhaps reach a larger audience.

"We hope that by performing in a variety of different locations and events we will serve as a positive symbol of the lesbian and gay community in Vermont," says Thomas. ▼

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