MEDUSA'S REVENGE

A history 'zine from the Queer Big Apple Corps

Marita Begley,
passing the baton!!



ISSUE NO.03

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ON THE COVER

“Marita Begley, QBAC Marching Band Artistic Director, 22 Years”

Acrylic on canvas, 14” h x 11” w,

By Gwyneth Leech (Fliccolo),
June 2026



THE BAND IN 1983





ART BY ALICE GAIL BIER

MARITA'S FINAL STEP OFF

Welcome to the third edition of Medusa's Revenge, the 'zine documenting and celebrating the history of the Queer Big Apple Corps. And in this issue, we're featuring what is certainly a historic moment: the end of Marita Begley's run as marching director! What you'll find in the following pages are messages and pieces of art from just a small sampling of people whose lives Marita has forever touched.

Marita, I still remember the first time I met you, at my first symphonic band rehearsal. Everyone kept mentioning someone I thought was named "Maria" or "Merida" or something. People spoke about you with such respect and reverence, and I can clearly remember thinking *I gotta meet this person!* Within two minutes of meeting you, experiencing your warmth and enthusiasm, I understood why. After almost five years knowing you, I'm the one speaking about you with reverence! Thanks for being a mentor and a friend.

To everyone reading this tribute, thank you for being a part of Marita's past, present, and future. Thanks to everyone who contributed, with a special thanks to Joe Avena for sharing many of these great old photos!

With love,

Nora Neus Gaillard and your whole band family



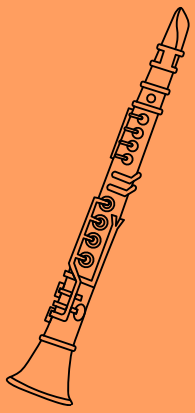
THE CLARINETS, 1984

THIS AND OTHER PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF JOE AVENA



MARITA AND MARSHA STONE





PORTRAIT BY
MERCEDES LI



2004



BAND BANQUET
IN 2003

MARITA IN 1987





JACQUI DURING EARLY BAND DAYS, SECOND FROM LEFT, BOTTOM ROW

JACQUI AQUILINO-JIRAK

The first time I met Marita Begley was when she sat next to me at her 1st rehearsal of LGBAC back in 1982. The excitement and joy she exhibited was palpable. I knew then that she was someone special. We were a struggling group back then in need of young enthusiastic musicians. Marita fell in love with the band that night in Roberta Rayburn's loft on Howard Street. She's been an enthusiastic contributor to our little band ever since.

Marita gave her big heart, her passion, her blood, sweat, and tears to QBAC freely for decades to help create the biggest most famous QUEER marching band in the world. Thank you my friend. There are no words to express my pride at being a part of your phenomenal journey.

In the words of Marsie Silvestro, *Bless you my sister, bless you on your way. You have roads to roam before you're home and many to speak your name.*

With Love, Jacqui



THE BICENTENNIAL PARADE FOR GEORGE WASHINGTON'S INAUGURATION; APRIL 30, 1989

A LETTER TO

DUANE ALLEN

Dear Duane –

WOW, a lot has happened since you left! And guess what? Most of it happened because Marita made it happen. Yep – just like you, she set her sights on making a big and bold band, and she did it! I mean, sure, I helped a little and so did some other folks, but really, it was her. Are you surprised? No… me neither! We're SO BIG now, Duane, and SHE DID THAT!

She actually stopped coming to band for a little while after you left. We were all so sad, but then I guess she missed the band, the music, and all of us, so she came back. And wow, she came back with a vengeance! She wore a pin of yours at every parade so you could see what your band was doing! Then she lost it at a parade. Did you know that? Was that you that made it rain on us the day she lost it? No… you wouldn't do that!

And then… guess what again… she became the marching artistic director! I'm not kidding! Yes, I know she was the director briefly with Sam Gindin. That was the year we wore those silly Hawaiian shirts! You were NOT impressed! We called you – the whole band called – from a pay phone on Central Park West before we stepped off to tell you how much we missed you, and you said "Happy Pride!" and then you told us to get real uniforms! We laughed and cried all at once. Anyway, not long after she came back, the director job opened up and she said "what the heck" and put her hat in the ring. And here we are, 23 years later, throwing her a party because she's stepping down to play – get this – the trombone! Can you believe it?

Well, that's about it for now, except to say that at just about every parade over the last 30 years, at some point she and I look at each other and say, "Duane would have loved this," or "I felt Duane when we heard the roar of the crowd in the Village – he would be so proud of us!" and we'd smile and cry. But I know you're as proud of this band and Marita as I am, right? I mean, how could you not be? She even named the best award after you – The Duane Allen Heart of the Corps Award! I can see you rolling your eyes and grinning that sheepish grin under that beautiful bushy mustache, but loving every bit of it, just like we love you.

Until we are all together again,

Love,
Leslie Regina



MARITA AND SAM GINDIN DRUM MAJORING TOGETHER



NANCY (3RD) AND MARITA (4TH) AT PROVIDENCE 2026

NANCY CORPORON

I have been recognized and honored many times over as the co-founder of the band, something for which I'm deeply grateful. In turn, I recognize that many, many people over the years have helped the band grow into the renowned performing group it is today. Of those, Marita Begley stands out as a transformational leader. Her contributions ranged from musical leadership to logistics for a 200-piece marching unit and beyond, developing a deep level of trust and commitment from band members. But for me, it is Marita's intangible qualities that have elevated the band from a group of people who march together, to a family that cares about each other as we march.

I remember, during the COVID times, how Marita kept reaching out to us—sometimes with funny videos (shout out to Ana, Lindsay and Leslie!), sometimes with reflections about how hard it was for our band family to be apart for so long. Marita created a sense of belonging, even when we couldn't be together.

One of my favorite things is reading Marita's accounts of the various events and experiences of the band. Many times I felt as if I'd actually been there due to the vividness of her recollections and the emotional power of her words. Her ability to bring so many together for the common cause of music as a way to communicate to the world who we are and, yes, even what we aspire to be, is uncanny.

Whether Marita motivated huge groups of performers to give the best of themselves, or comforted individuals, many voicing their belief that it was the band family that pulled them through tough times, she was the one who connected us all to each other.

As we witness Marita's transition from marching director to whatever position she might hold going forward (rumors abound about the trombone section…), let us pause to feel our gratitude for Marita and all her talents. Thank you, Marita!

---Nancy Corporon, Co-Founder, The Queer Big Apple Corps



THE BAND IN 2002





MARITA AND ANA AT THE BAND'S 30TH ANIVERSARY, 2009

ANA DEL CAMPO

For Marita, marching band is more than an activity—it is a way of life. She was born not only to live it, but to make others want to be part of it.

When it comes to band, Marita will put 1000% of her effort into making it happen—no matter how far she has to go, how early or late it is, or how hard, complicated, or convoluted the task may be.

To prepare for the listening sessions, Marita has spent thousands of hours listening to hundreds of song submissions. Right after New Year's, she hosted up to 40 people at her home to listen to the top choices.

Then she would hum the music to Leslie on the phone, working out the cuts and how it would sound best. She would hum the cuts to Rusty. Rinse and repeat, until each song sounded just right. Then she would run all over the city, picking up music packets so everyone had them in time to play.

The music needed movement, too. Choreography teams were recruited, and routines took shape at Foley Square, Seravalli Park, the 14th street pier, and Leslie and Lindsay's back yard.

When I first joined the band, Marita would convince anyone with a big car to haul our fewer than 50 overlays to performances. The rest of us fitted drums, tubas, and other items into our cars—and shuttled people to gigs, too. Some passengers may have been seen riding with a snare in their laps.

That same willingness to help continues: Marita will pick up band members, drive them to gigs, and take them back home.

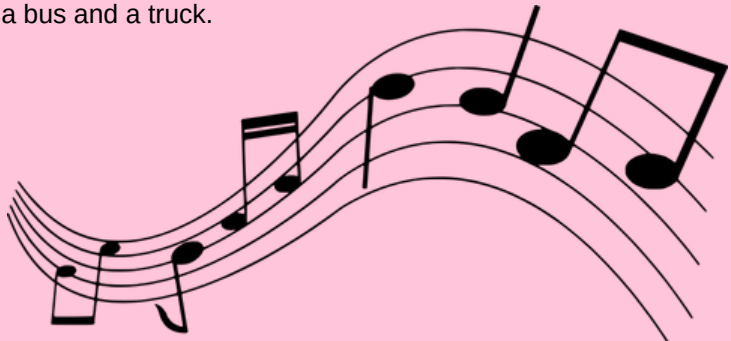
Behind the performances were countless hours of board meetings, program services work, and committees galore.

Marita reached out to band members and wrote welcoming emails to new members, treating that welcome with the urgency of an emergency. That work continued on weekends and late into the night.

And how did we pay for all of this? Marita spent countless hours cultivating donors and finding paying gigs. She helped write grants and worked with organizations that would build the band's profile for the world to see. And the world saw us.

The fundraising efforts were titanic. There were Polar Bear Plunges with Michael Tolliver, auctions, raffles, and countless fundraising events. Even after marching in New York Pride, there was bartending at Dance at the Pier.

As time went by, her enthusiasm for building this band brought together a coalition of volunteers, donors, and fans willing to roll up their sleeves and help her build it. One day, we had a grant for a van to carry our uniforms and percussion—the luxury! Then came passenger vans to take people to gigs. Then a bus and a truck.



Leslie created the first program services committee to turn this growing machine into the well-oiled machine we all know now.

Little by little, joining and staying in the band became seamless for everyone. A uniform committee was created to make us all look sharp and neat: here are your pants, your shoes, your hat, your overlay.



And it was more than looking sharp or getting to a gig. You could see lives changing for the better as people joined. The band grew not only in size, but in joy.

Now we can see what all that care has built—and I'd say the result is spectacular.



Marita wanted everyone in the band to feel welcomed, loved, included and fulfilled. That one obsession fueled her actions, every step of the way.

That is the way of life Marita gave this band: making sure everyone belongs. She gave her big heart to everyone in the band.

And because of that, I fell in love with her and married her. Of course, she asked me to do so in front of 500 people.







LINDSAY, ANA, MARITA, AND LESLIE IN A PANDEMIC-ERA VIDEO, 2020

LINDSAY BECKER

The first time I met Marita - and I mean REALLY met Marita, in that way that new marching band members meet Marita - was at the end of a Symphonic Band rehearsal in 2008. I had joined the band two years prior as a 2nd clarinetist, at the urging of my roommate Andrew Berman ("You should pick up your clarinet again. They don't audition!"). We had just wrapped a rehearsal at City Center, and I was waiting for him to put the percussion away. I was also fighting a wicked cold (not sure why I was at rehearsal with a cold, but so be it), sitting right outside the door to the rehearsal room, and ready to get home and into some comfy jammies. This is how Marita found me.

"Oh, you're Andrew's roommate, right?" Easy question. Yes.
"Have you ever thought about being in marching band?" I had not.
"Well, we could REALLY use someone on auxiliary percussion." I had no idea what that was. I nodded anyway.
"I mean, we REALLY need someone." She had spotted a weakness and was going in for the kill. I was fading. Nodded again.
"You should come to rehearsal this Thursday. It'll be fun! So happy to have you on board! See you Thursday!"



And this is how I was conscripted into marching band, playing an array of instruments I had never played before. And god, did I LOVE it. Thank you, Marita, for being the singular thread that led me to marching band, to percussion, to the percussion captain :), and to some of the best times/friends/memories of my entire life. Innumerable stories. I owe you everything and then some. See you at the next Michigan Rummy game.



MARITA AND ERIC AT REHEARSAL IN 2003

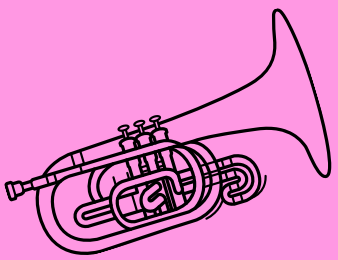
ERIC ROUDA

June 1990
Pride day Boston, MA

My brand new boyfriend (still the boyfriend 36 years later), came with me to Boston. We show up at band call. I see Marita and walk over to where she was standing and here is the conversation:

ME:
Ron meet Marita. Marita meet Ron.

MARITA:
Hi Ron. Hold this!





KIMBERLY ENGEL

Marita- congratulations on an incredible tenure as QBAC's AD. What an honor it has been to have been a part of it even for only a chapter of your run. With you, I was lucky enough to see the band build relationships with Edie Windsor after the band charmed her at the 2016 Dyke March, march with hundreds of thousands of protesters at the 2017 first ever Women's March in NYC (*an experience I'll never forget), lead the 2018 DC Pride March, perform "Don't Stop Me Now" on 5th Avenue during the Stonewall 50th Anniversary/QBAC's 40th anniversary, put together 2 historic performances in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day in Parade in 2020 & 2022, and so much more.

Some notable other things that might be overlooked for me include how you led us in times of sorrow, playing for mourners at the Pulse Nightclub vigil in the West Village, and even after the news of Edie's passing outside Stonewall. Our presence at those vigils were so meaningful and it is to your credit that we could always find a way to pull together a band on short notice to do them.

You've led us to these feats because of your enduring belief in this band that it could always be as great as it is today. Thank you for taking us to the highest of mountaintops. And thank you for taking a shot the younger me who joined all those years ago to lead the trumpet section- I'll always be grateful to your for it.



MARITA LEADS A SECTIONAL IN 2004



DRUM MAJORS, 2026

JULIAN LANDER

I met Marita in 1987 when we had a rehearsal of the Boston (Freedom Trail Band), DC (DC's Different Drummers) and New York (LGBAC) bands in New York in preparation for a concert and marching performance at the 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. The performances were as the massed band of what was then the Lesbian and Bands of America, now the Pride Bands Alliance.

I kept in touch with Marita through LGBA, and I moved to New York when I retired in 2019 in order to play with the (then) LGBAC, now QBAC marching band because I knew how good it was.

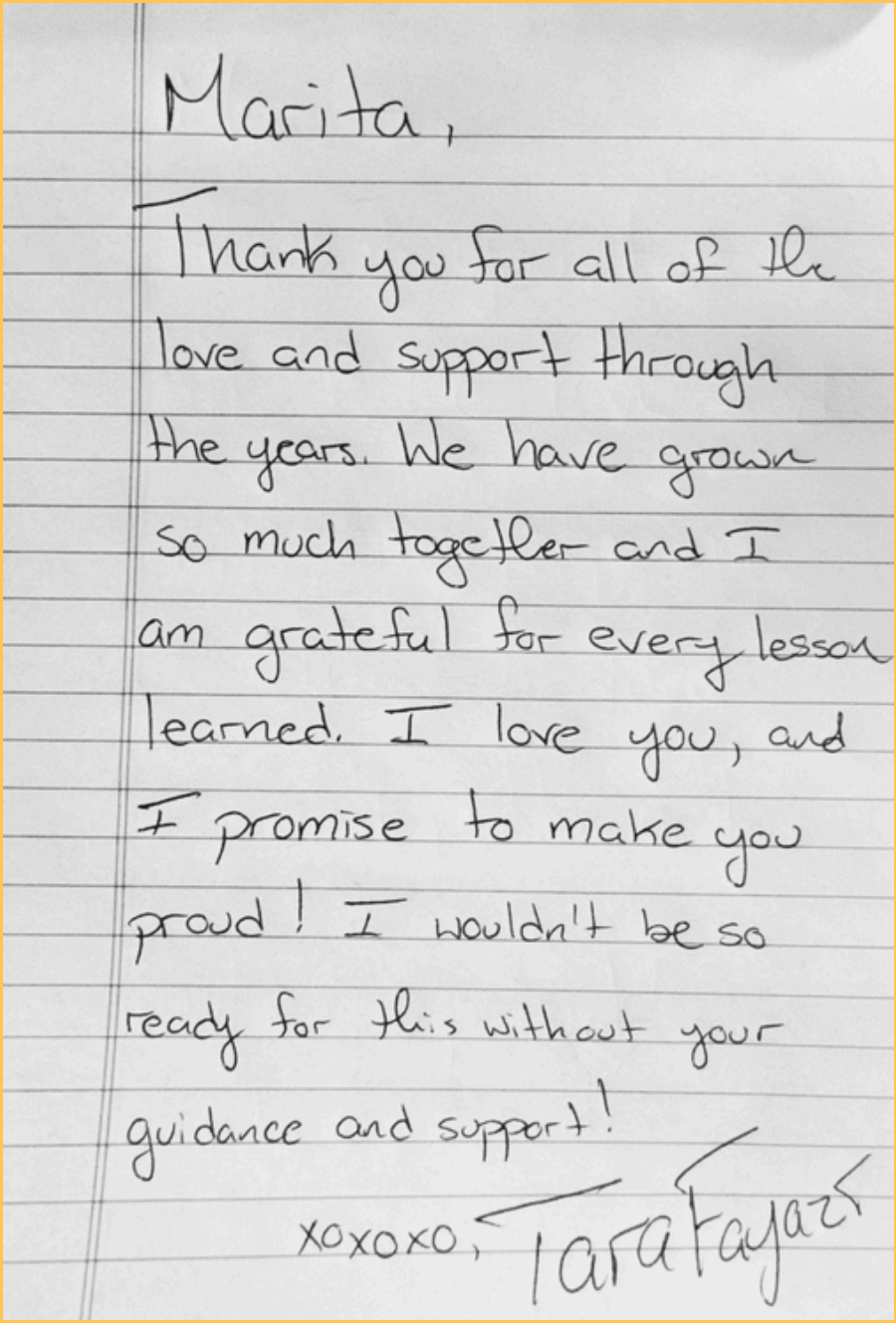


DANA, IAN, AND MARITA

DANA S

Marita made Ian and I feel welcome in the band from the moment we joined three years ago. More than that, she took us under her wing, showed us the lay of the land, and encouraged our attendance to all things QBAC.
We adore her!!!❤️

TARA FAYAZI



Marita,

Thank you for all of the love and support through the years. We have grown so much together and I am grateful for every lesson learned. I love you, and I promise to make you proud! I wouldn't be so ready for this without your guidance and support!

xoxoxo, Tara Fayazi

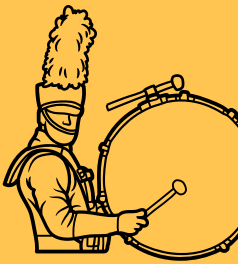


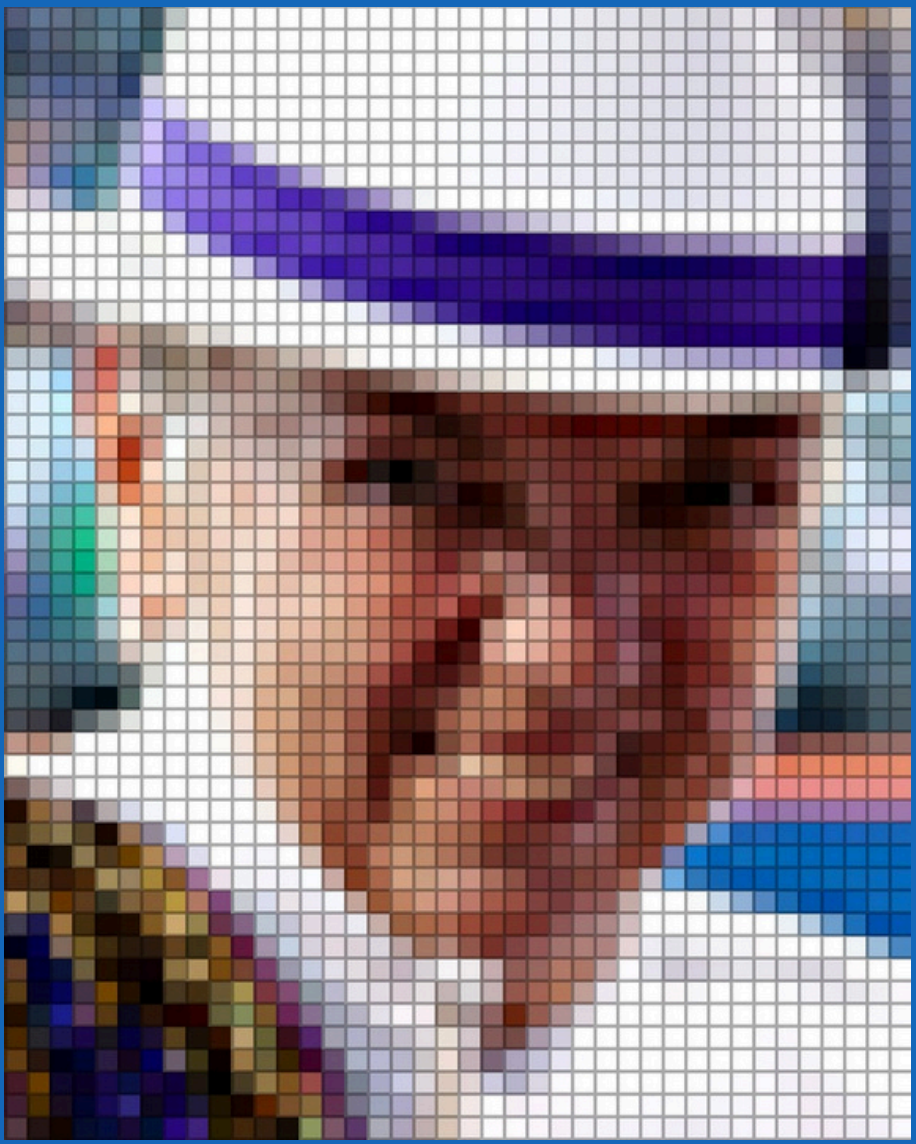
“PASSING OF THE BATON” CEREMONY, OCTOBER 2026











ART BY STEVE MCLURE

VAN MORROW AND BRUCE SHENTON

The Schlepp Sisters have unending love, admiration, and thanks for what Marita has added to our lives. She will always be the fly in our ice cube.



JUNE 4, 2023

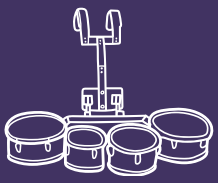
MEL TORTORELLA

I joined the marching band in 2021, after lockdown was lifted. I promised myself after being holed up in a tiny studio that I would pursue hobbies and community. The first memory I have of Marita is greeting me by name. How did she know me? We'd never met before. I was just another flute player in a now giant band with a fliccolo section larger than most flute ensembles. I learned later that she insisted on memorizing everyone's name -- a holdover from an earlier era where the band was smaller, perhaps. But indicative of Marita's leadership style nonetheless. Now even as the band inches toward 200 musicians, she still finds time to personally wish everyone a happy pride before each gig. She makes sure everyone feels welcome. And she learns everyone's name.



LESLIE AND MARITA, 2009

LESLIE BECKER



It was 3:00 AM on Thanksgiving morning and Marita and I went looking for an open bar to use the bathroom. It was the only time that day we were able to grab a few minutes alone to talk about what we were about to do together. We'd both done a lot with this band in what at the time was my almost 35 years with the BAC, and this parade was always the one thing that we kept reaching for, the one parade that all of marching band-dom wants to do. For so many years we showed up and played, constantly striving to be better, to be a band worthy of the special parades. And for many of those years we were...not all that good. At times we were actually pretty dreadfully bad, and certainly not worthy of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade! But we showed up and acted like we were the best band ever. We didn't care that we were not very good - it was what we loved doing, and plus we needed to always show up for LGBTQ awareness (especially when the LGBTQ community had not yet gained the kind of acceptance we now have – and have to fight to keep - and so we took our jobs as activists through music very seriously). Every Thanksgiving we'd watch the Macy's parade and on New Year's Day we'd watch the Rose parade and see those big, amazing bands with rows and rows of winds, a giant drumline and a guard that went on for days and we'd dream of that for the Big Apple Corps.

So, we scrimped and saved and nickel-and-dime fundraised, we played Christmas carols on the streets of the West Village while someone passed a hat, and when we got too cold to stay on the street corners we'd go into the bars and try our luck playing there. We were never sure if they gave us money because they enjoyed our marching band version of "Santa Baby," or if they just wanted us to get out so they could get back to the business of drinking and flirting. Either way, we made a bit of cash so on to the next bar we went, jingle bells and empty hat at the ready.

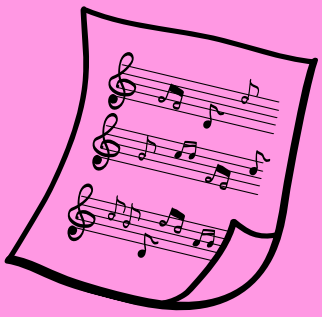
And little by little, year by year, we got bigger and better. We started charging for an appearance. We got real uniforms. We got drums! All the same kind and not just whatever was left in storage by some former member with no room in their studio apartment for this random snare. We got sousaphones. We OWNED them! Good ones! And mellophones! And, then one day I looked around and the 22-person band I joined in 1988 had become a band that was so good, so professional, so amazing that we were chosen to be in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

How did that happen? Because Marita made it happen. She willed it to happen. One song at a time. And on that Thanksgiving morning at 3:00 AM as we descended the stairs to use the bathroom in that open bar we found around the corner, something we had done together hundreds of times over the years, it felt like we were both 30 again and happy to be doing the thing we loved so very much with the band we loved even more. Taking this amazing ride with Marita has been so much fun, and I wouldn't change a single bit of it. I am excited for the band's next chapter with Tara at the helm, and at the same time I will miss the fun adventures I have had with Marita over the years. Except how she always banged on the door of any Port-a-San that I was using and screamed "ANYONE IN THERE? OPEN UP!" I won't miss that.



MARITA AT A CAR SHOW, 2003





MAGGIE SITES

Our Dearest Marita,

I could write at least 36.5 pages about how unbelievably incredible you are as a human being. Unfortunately, the Zine does have length constraints, so bear with me as I condense all things wonderful about you into a single page. You were one of the first friends I made when I joined QBAC. I was really shy and felt a bit out of place at first.

You immediately sensed that and came to me with some of the warmest, kindest, and most ridiculously hilarious energy I've ever experienced. I felt so much more comfortable after meeting you, and oh so at home with the band after that. It has been an absolute gift to watch you lead and love this band. This big, beautiful band is what it is today because of YOU. You have poured yourself and your fun and fuzzy soul into this group and its people, and we are all incredibly honored to have witnessed this. More than witness it though, we get to experience it. We all come to rehearsals, performances, zoom meetings and more, totally enveloped in this wonderful QVerse (QBAC Universe) you've nurtured and loved. So many of us throughout these dozens and dozens of years have had unforgettable life experiences - some life changing - because of this band...because of you.

I am doing something I never thought was possible - something I had always half fantasized about, accepting that it would never be my reality. That something is meshing my two passions - music and dance - into one. You came to me (out of nowhere, mind you, but that's very on brand for you, Marita) with an idea, and an offer. You said to me, "I want you to be our Marching Band Musicians Choreographer". I'm pretty sure I choked on my own spit when you said that. I couldn't believe it. I was shocked, nervous, and scared. You assured me though with your whole heart that you knew I could do it. Marita, you believed in me and saw my little dream hidden away in my mind, and you made it real. You gave me confidence, acceptance, and trust. You provided, and continue to provide, guidance, knowledge, and strength. You give your whole, entire self to not just me - but to every single person in this band. I am just one of hundreds of people that can proudly say, "Marita Begley changed my life".

We love you, Marita, so very much. You have helped foster and create one of the safest, most loving spaces I've ever known (and I think, like, to have ever existed??). For all of this, and so much more, I want to say - we ALL want to say - thank you. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Congratulations on an incredible and unforgettable career as our Marching Band Artistic Director.

We'll see you at rehearsal! (still - forever and always~)

ART BY MERCEDES LI





MICHAEL AND MARITA, 2004

MICHAEL TOLLIVER

Twenty-one years. That is how long Marita and I stood together as drum majors. It is almost impossible to capture what those 21 years have meant to me. There were countless memories, extraordinary highs, a few difficult moments, and experiences I never could have imagined when we first began. For most of my time with the band, Marita was always by my side—or perhaps I was by hers.

Trying to choose just one or two memories from the hundreds we created together is nearly impossible, but several immediately come to mind. I think about all the fundraising we did over the years—from raffles and pier dances to one unforgettable Polar Bear Plunge. Of course, simply running into freezing water would have been far too ordinary for Marita. Thanks to one of her famously “scathingly brilliant” ideas, we did it wearing coconut bras and grass skirts. That was Marita: creative, fearless, enthusiastic, and always able to make an ordinary event memorable. And then there were the performances—literally hundreds of them. Together, we had the privilege of participating in moments that were not only meaningful to us, but historic.



We marched in President Barack Obama's inauguration parade as part of the Lesbian and Gay Band Association, when an LGBTQ band participated in a presidential inaugural parade for the first time in history. We performed for the New Jersey Nets and later the New York Knicks. We marched joyously together when Marriage Equality became law, and we stood together in far more somber circumstances, performing at a vigil following the Pulse Nightclub shooting.

Then there was Macy's. Getting our band into the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade had been a personal goal of mine for years, and I had invested countless hours in the application process. When we finally received that invitation, marching that route together was incredibly special.



Yet, for all those major events and historic occasions, some of my happiest memories are much simpler. They are the moments when Marita and I were marching together at the front of the band, leading everyone behind us. On numerous occasions, she would look over at me and say, "I love you, and I love doing this with you." And I would say, "I love you too, and I love doing this with you too." And we did. We really did.

Through scorching heat and freezing temperatures, through spring, summer, fall, and winter, we stood together at the front of that band for 21 years. We rehearsed, performed, traveled, celebrated, struggled, laughed, raised money, made history, and watched something we loved grow into what it is today.

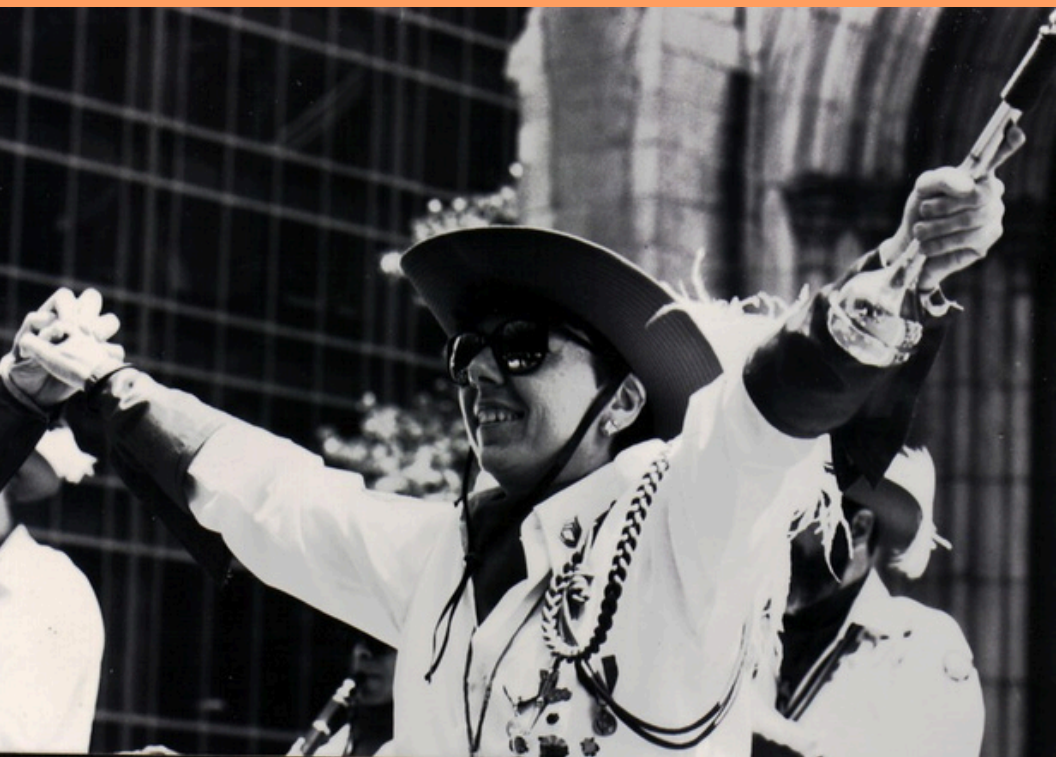
I am tremendously proud of everything Marita has accomplished and incredibly fortunate that, for so much of that journey, I had the privilege of standing beside her.

When I look back on those 21 years, what I remember most is not the number of performances, the parades, the milestones, or even the historic firsts.

I remember my friend standing beside me, looking over and saying, “I love you, and I love doing this with you.”

And I will always be grateful that we got to do it together.

1987



NICOLE GUTMAN

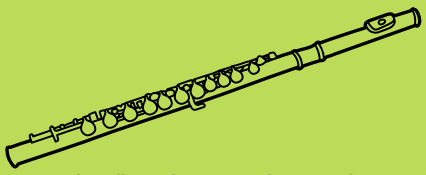


Our Marita is many things: inspired, enthusiastic, endlessly creative, and occasionally a walking reminder that chaos and leadership are not mutually exclusive.

Marita has never been short on inspiration, excitement, or the willingness to try something new. She has pushed us to dream bigger, embrace the unexpected, and remember that marching band should be about more than the music. It's about the joy, the adventure, the ridiculous moments, and the community we build along the way. And with Marita, there's pretty much always an adventure.

Behind all that wonderfully chaotic energy is someone who has given so much of herself to this band. Her passion, creativity, and commitment have helped shape not just what we do, but the experience of being part of something bigger than ourselves.

Marita, as you lay down your mace, I wish you a next chapter filled with inspiration, adventure, and plenty of opportunities to follow your scathingly brilliant ideas wherever they lead. Thank you for filling our lives with the sounds of love and joy, for the memories and laughter, and for those moments when we weren't entirely sure how it was all going to come together—but trusted that somehow, it would. You've made this band what it is, and I'm grateful to have been part of the ride.



KATERINA WATSON

The first time Marita made me feel like I belonged, I hadn't even met her.

I hadn't attended a rehearsal, marched a single step, or played a single note alongside the musicians who would eventually become such an important part of my life. In fact, my entire experience with the band at that point existed within the confines of an email exchange.
But there, at the bottom of Marita's very first email to me, were two little phrases that have stayed with me ever since:

"Welcome to the Big Apple Corps band family."
"Xoxo, Marita"

I remember being struck by the warmth of it. Not because the words themselves were particularly elaborate or profound, but because of how effortlessly they conveyed something that is often so difficult to manufacture: a genuine sense of belonging. Here was a woman who had never met me, who knew virtually nothing about me, and who was already treating me like I was part of something.



And the remarkable thing is that she meant it.

Because that's what Marita does. She makes people feel seen. She makes them feel known. She has this extraordinary ability to take a collection of individuals, each arriving with their own histories, insecurities, talents, and reasons for being there, and make them feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves. Not simply a band, but a community. A family.

It's difficult to articulate what 23 years of love, sacrifice, dedication, and seemingly boundless energy have meant to an organization like ours. We can point to the performances, the parades, the rehearsals, the countless hours of work that happen long after the instruments have been packed away. But none of those things, remarkable as they are, quite capture the essence of what Marita has given us.



Because her greatest contribution has never been just the music. It's been the people. It's been the feeling of walking into a room and knowing you have a place there. It's been the quiet assurance that you matter, that your presence is valued, that you belong.

I didn't know any of that when I opened her first email. I couldn't have known what those two little phrases would come to represent, or how profoundly they would reflect the spirit of the woman who wrote them.

And perhaps that's the most beautiful thing about her legacy. For 23 years, Marita hasn't simply been directing a band. She's been creating a place for people to belong.



Xoxo, Marita.

It was never just an email signature. It was a promise.



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