

Bangalore (Ban-gé-lor): 1. a city in southern India, 2. a long torpedo with an explosive tip that, when pushed deep into an entrenchment, can blow a hole in it allowing entry (*really!*), 3. what an historian records of the early days of

KAPPA BANGA BANGA.

As with all origins, the beginnings of **Kappa Banga Banga**, the “percussion fraternity” of the Yale Precision Marching Band is shrouded in mists through which the historian must peer using whatever fragmentary evidence remains: an image here, a fragmentary document there, and the cultural similarities found in other institutions of the time. What follows is an attempt to peer through those mists with the help of a few supporting fragments of evidence, and the historian’s memory, which is, of course, extremely selective and subject to the truths contained in ‘Feinberg’s Theory’. Since there really were very few written records, it may help to set forth what is remembered in more ancient poetic form...

*Tell me, Old Blues who dwell off campus, and observe proper order
for each thing as it first came into being.
Death was first of all, and after him came Duffy
the broad-bearded, the firm seat of all
those who sat in and painted the seats of the Bowl,
and the wistful Marcil who knocked small pieces of wood
and Simon, the most eloquent of the ancient ones;
who guarded the river Scotch and subdued both mind
and sensible thought in the breasts of all who banged and blew.*

Though there is, as will be seen, a considerable fog surrounding the exact origins of KBB, historians will agree with the poet that its origins lie in the absence of many of these early “immortals” who departed in the summer of 1985 for lives elsewhere. The legends of the pants drop of 1983, the “Nuns for Elvis” and the “It’s Hallowe’en Part XIII, Charlie Brown” halftime shows became legends only in the fall of 1985, when the torch was passed to a younger generation, one which venerated the ‘traditions’ of the drumline perhaps a bit more than the actual leadership of the band (i.e., Duffy). Of these ‘traditions,’ the poet is once again enlightening...

*Death passed on the waltz-cadence, and Ashtar to do our bidding;
and these Kubik, Schlegel an Wilson mated with black Converse high-tops
and in turn, black “drumming gloves” and blue and white taped sticks.
Warren bore the three-toms, and Kubik played the go-go bells on snare,
and then with these he drank from the river Scotch, inducing others
to do so as well as a way to “feed the bear, pay the toll.”
With Berman we added new lines to songs of firemen and rangers,
and raunchy limericks that made the faint of heart blush.
All these we did on our own, while Simon,
and then Berman and Wynne, guarded the river Scotch.*

*These, the sousa-minded, were the last to join our line, lusty lads
with huge instruments made of brass on which one blew.*

As near as the documentary evidence from cadences and photographs suggest, the fall of 1985 and then into 1986 was spent in a kind of identity-limbo (there were, as yet, no identity politics at Yale, so this was only natural). New traditions like the Chuck Taylor high-tops were started under the section's leadership (Jeff Schlegel, Rusty Wilson, and Tim Kubik), and we tried with mixed success to introduce the berets that were then popular with drumlines in "fascist" bands like those of the Big Ten. Other traditions persisted with the help of the earlier generation who hung around for another year: one of the Brothers Grudberg (who carried a case of Budweiser in his bass drum for a "muffle"), and mighty "Warren, Bearer of Tri-Toms" (and the line's number one "Turkey Shooter"). Members of the drum line returned once more to script-writing meetings under the capable guidance of Pat Smith, and, when combined with "*the Glenfiddich*," and a "son-of-a-sailor's mouth" added not a few new raunchy limericks and songs to the bus-riding itinerary, and some devastatingly harsh cheers at hockey games. On the whole, however, the drum line was somewhat weak by comparison to the rest of the band, who were primarily both YPMB and Concert Band members, while many of us in the drum line (Rusty Wilson, the exceptional exception) just showed up for YPMB stuff. It was thus, that...

*Duffy then gave another cadence (1986-87 Series)
to match Death's influence and bind us
and to make us legit in the eyes of the stands.
We proved that we could, and gave insults as good
as we got, yet we remained the "boys who banged sticks on skins,"
and we desired the goddesses of the winds
to play with us. They would sing our songs, and sail with us
on the sea of Bud, whose Captain, Grud kept a case in his bass.
But then they would return to their place in the stands,
and we would drink from the go-gos alone, spending the night
with no bird in the hand, but two on a Busch.*

The drumline had dared to be different, and everyone could see that we were, especially Duffy, who had several good causes to drum some of us right out of the line (by his grace we were spared). It was the mid-80s, after all, and Yale was settling into a "Reaganaut" phase where the excesses of the 70s and early 80s were, well, frowned upon in about the same way that even threatening to 'drop trou' in the Bowl was frowned upon (a line we joyfully pushed with a "Simon says" pre-game that had everyone flinching). The greatest example of this new trend was the Band's expulsion from West Point without being allowed the chance to do its "Red Scare" halftime show. It was not that college antics were disappearing altogether, but that they were going underground a bit more. The drinking age had gone up to 21 in the fall of 1985, and as a result, fraternities received a fresh breath of life as the place where fun could be had behind closed doors, without having to put up with all the usual secrecy associated with "behind close doors" at other Yale societies. Going into the fall of 1986, the drumline had an identity again, bolstered

by the approval of the returning Mark Temares, who replaced Grud as a member of the Old Guard. Sometime in that fall, perhaps even – though as Reagan had said a lot that summer: “I don’t recall” – after returning from the Brown game, we gathered at Naples and, beating our blue-taped sticks on the tables while playing games with many from the winds section of the band, declared KBB to exist, and promptly carved the initials into one of the walls of the backroom. A few of us started wearing the letters on the sleeves of our uniforms, but it wasn’t an official thing, yet. Again, as we were all adherents to Feinberg’s Theory of the Survival of the Fittest Brain Cell, the details must remain shrouded in the mythic language of the poet:

*We were the percussion section, haughty in our might,
Boll, Kubik, London, Warren, Wilson, and Temares of the old spirit,
and we gave Whalen and Matthiessen the clashing cymbals,
and the goddesses of the winds came to play among us.
We splashed in the river of Scotch and spent our nights
gaily upon the Sea of Bud that then flowed ‘round Naples.
In all respects, we felt like those who came before us,
but we had three letters on our sleeves;
our name was **Kappa Banga Banga** because of these three
Greek letters that blazoned our blazers,
And partying, a potent wit, and percussive skill were among our deeds
(as was postering Harvard Yard, and putting a Bulldog mask
on John Harvard’s statue in the fall of 1987.)*

The rest, as they say, was history. In the fall of 1987, Rusty and I held the first official “KBB Auditions” for new members of the drumline, and we welcomed them with the official initiation rights of the go-go bells and a night on the Sea of Bud at Naples. Everyone in the line stitched the KBB letters on their sleeves, although I spent that fall up in the “box” as the voice of the band. I still managed to bang a few drums in the stands during the games, and all in the line paid the toll, as necessary. We knew we had become an institution when, at the Game (the **COLD** Game of ’87), some of the younger members of KBB spray-painted a banner with our letters on it, and flew it from one wall of the Bowl. Yale lost that year in a last minute fumble, and we’d never have been able to play “Bright College Years” if Roger Wynne had not been the keeper of the River of Scotch, the only thing that could keep valves from freezing. Funny how longstanding jokes, sometimes turn into reality...