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LAPD Band

by Michael Ellington

The story is different for every Band member. I asked Danielle Acuña to tell me about her first encounter with a flute. At age 5, she announced to her parents that she wanted to play the instrument. They doubted she even knew what a flute was. Little Danielle wasn't deterred. She grew up going to Trojan football games and watching her uncle, who was 11 years older, play in the USC Marching Band. She wanted to be part of that group making music out there on the field. When her elementary school started a band, she joined at age 10 and started learning to play flute.

Born the eldest of three girls in "Horsetown USA" (Norco, Calif.), her family was somewhat musical. Her father appreciated music but never played an instrument. Her mother didn't play, but some of her siblings did. Danielle's Uncle Donald plays piano, her Aunt Diane plays the accordion, and her Uncle Armand plays trombone and leads a big band. Her godmother, Diana, plays piano and sings.

A slight detour in junior high school ended up broadening her musical capabilities. The band director recruited her to learn to play alto saxophone. She found the fingerings fairly similar, so the transition wasn't difficult. "It was a pretty big deal because jazz band was mostly eighth graders, and I was recruited as a seventh grader," Danielle said. "I felt pretty good about my skills as a musician."

High school brought new challenges and more opportunities. Danielle performed with the marching band, the jazz band and the concert band. In her junior and senior years, she was the drum major. That position included conducting the band's field show. She made lifelong friends during those times, and they've stuck together ever since.

Following in her uncle's footsteps, she went to the University of Southern California. She joined the Trojan Marching Band during her freshman year and played with them all through her undergrad years. "Being in the Trojan Marching Band was one of the most challenging and rewarding things I've



Danielle played in the USC Trojan Marching Band as an undergrad.

ever done," she said. Danielle learned valuable music skills and life lessons during her time with the band. Chief among them was an approach to figuring it out—deciding what was going to work in the larger scheme of things and getting busy doing just that. That approach has made all the difference for her as a musician and as an educator. While with the "TMB," she's marched in the esteemed Tournament of Roses Parade four times and performed on "Dancing with the Stars" and in a number of high-profile concerts.

In musician terms, her day job has lasted quite a long time. She's a high school English teacher, working mainly with 10th graders and English learners for a number of years.

She enjoys playing music because of the way it makes her feel. "Music makes me feel connected—to other people, to myself, to the universe," she said. "Music is one of the few things that requires me to be fully present." She has no particular legendary flautist as an inspiration.

In the language of the country where she spent a semester studying: "Den ypirxe poté kápoios pou íthela na eínaí ópos." From the Greek: "There was never anyone I wanted to be like." Danielle Acuña is her own person, and the Band is happy to have her among the woodwinds.

For more information about the Band, see our website at www.lasown.com and contact Jim Starr, executive director, at sngcop@aol.com. For greatly appreciated donations, please go to www.lapolicefoundation.org, and in the "comments" box, put "For the Band." ♦



Danielle Acuña

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