

Tulane's Director of Bands talks producing, directing music for Olympic opening ceremonies

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Tulane Director of Bands Barry Spanier served as the venue band coordinator for the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles and as the artistic director of the Sydney Olympic band in 2000. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The only thing that may rival the inspiring athletes at the Olympics is the pageantry of the Olympic opening ceremony. What does it take to put on such a memorable spectacle that is broadcast live around the world? Tulane's own Director of Bands [Barry Spanier](#) is a veteran of opening ceremonies and shared the magic and ingenuity required to produce the historic event in a [recent episode of Tulane's On](#)

[Good Authority podcast.](#)

Spanier served as the venue band coordinator for the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles and as the artistic director of the Sydney Olympic band in 2000. The 2,000 members of the marching band in Sydney came from 23 different nations and took years of planning, show design, recruiting and practice. Designing and implementing all of the elements across multiple continents was a unique set of logistical challenges.

Spanier said of the process, “You have such a long lead up time. And yet, the resource of time is absolutely limited. Everything—not just the band component, but every component of the opening ceremonies—the budget, supplies, facilities, all these things are limited. So, as you get closer and closer, you have less flexibility.”

Spanier explained that beyond the time it takes, there are always unexpected surprises to overcome as well.

In Sydney, the field was a thick carpet stretched over the field with a dot every four meters to create a grid for performers throughout the show to hit their marks. When they moved the carpet from the practice facility to the stadium, it had to be restitched and restretched over the new field. During the move, the grid didn’t come back together straight. Spanier and his staff improvised, “We found some white paint and they were serving fried chicken for lunch. So, we got chicken legs, and we dipped them in the paint and we just went and painted new dots on the field.”

For Tokyo, Spanier says, there have certainly been unexpected challenges but he’s curious to see how they approach the opening ceremonies given the limitations. Spanier noted, “Ultimately it’s about that physical competition and reaching beyond what you’ve done before. I trust that that is still going to be the primary element.”

To hear the full discussion, listen below.



Barry Spanier served as the artistic director of the Sydney Olympic band in 2000. The 2,000 members of the marching band in Sydney came from 23 different nations and took years of planning, show design, recruiting and practice. (Photo provided by Barry Spanier)