

Bagpipers, herald trumpets and jazz celebrate grads

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The 2016 Unified Commencement Ceremony takes place Saturday, May 14, in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

At the Tulane Unified Commencement Ceremony on Saturday (May 14), there's no question that the 2,000-plus graduates are the stars of the show. Helping to elevate that graduation experience, however, is a group of New Orleans musicians whose performances enchant the grads and their 15,000 or so friends and family members who will be in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome seats.

[Tulane Commencement](#) features traditional jazz music from the Original Liberty Jazz Band, led by renowned clarinetist (and Tulane alumnus) Dr. Michael White, herald trumpet fanfares, and the distinctive sights and sounds of bagpipes and drums.

"I think anytime you can bring that sense of community to rituals like this it really makes it special," says Annie Cohen, former cellist with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, whose ties to the musician community brought her into the commencement planning process years ago.

This version of Tulane commencement originated in 1999, when the university reinstated the idea of an all-school ceremony after a 30-year hiatus and added Crescent City elements.

At this year's ceremony, performing the herald trumpet fanfares will be the [Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra's](#) principal trumpet player, Vance Woolf, and fellow LPO member Stephen Orejudos.

When the platform party is ready to enter the floor of the Superdome — including President Mike Fitts, keynote speaker [Hoda Kotb](#) of NBC News, deans and members of the Board of Tulane — the group will be led by [Kilts of Many Colors Pipes & Drums](#) at the direction of pipe major Steven Brownlee.

At that point in the ceremony, the graduating students and faculty members are all in their chairs. “When the bagpipers start up, it makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up,” Cohen said. “It’s such an evocative sound, it just sets off the platform party in a way that catches everyone’s attention and makes the whole room fall silent. And that’s saying something in the Superdome.”

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