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WKU Big Red Band prepares to march on London

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WKU senior music education major Emily Boyle posed with her “ceremonial” medal for her role in the 2025 London New Years Day Parade on Monday.

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Western Kentucky University's Big Red Band gathered Monday for what they thought was a group photo with President Timothy Caboni.

Instead, they got a trip to London.

The band was invited to participate in the 2024-25 London's New Year's Day Parade & Festival.



Bob Bone, LNYDP co-founder, traveled to WKU to surprise the crowd during their rehearsal.

“We are here today because your reputation goes before you,” Bone said.

“You are known by me and others in my organization as being one of the finest marching bands of this part of the United States of America.”

Students will march in the parade Jan. 1 and visit museums, historic sites and places of architectural and artistic interest during their week-long United Kingdom excursion.

Gary Schallert, director of bands, said the parade will be an exciting start to the band’s 100th anniversary year in 2025.

The parade, compared by some to the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, sees more than 8,000 performers from across the world and a street audience of around 500,000.

It will be streamed globally, including in the U.S. on the USA on the PBS Network.

The next 15 months will see a slew of fundraising events to raise money for student expenses.

Matthew McCurry, director of athletic bands and associate director of bands, said the event will take the Big Red Band to a “whole new level.”

“We have worked really hard to put the Big Red Marching Band in the spotlight on a national stage and have our students be recognized for the fantastic work that they do,” McCurry said.

This won't be the first time Schallert and McCurry participated in the parade.

Schallert performed at the inaugural LNYDP in 1987 with the New Mexico State University Marching Band. McCurry took the Carter High School Marching Band to the celebration in 2010.

Bone said they've been lucky to avoid rain for most years of the event, in part because "whenever you bring your umbrella, it never rains."

To continue the trend, Bone presented a "ceremonial umbrella" to WKU music education senior and drum major Emily Boyle.

Her duty is to carry it wherever she goes until the day of the event.

If she forgets it, the rain is on her, he joked.

Boyle said the news was "crazy" and the students were completely in the dark until the announcement. She added she's taking the umbrella job very seriously.

"I'm so excited to tell my parents," Boyle said. "I've never been out of the country and I've never flown on a plane either. It's the Midwesterner in me."

She said the band travels all across the country, just recently returning from Ohio State, but they've never gone as far as this. The chance to travel provides experiences

beyond words, she said.

“It’s like a big family bonding moment,” she said. “You just get to be around a lot of excitement, a lot of positivity, and I think going to London is really just going to be so crazy.”

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