

## YourAirForce

# Musicians go on with their shows

Despite band's imminent demise, airmen focus on performances

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When the 45 members of the Band of the U.S. Air Force Reserve take the stage July 2 in Warner Robins, Ga., it will be bittersweet.

The band, based at Robins Air Force Base, Ga., will perform for more than 20,000 people expected to pack the city's McConnell-Talbert Stadium, in one of only three Fourth of July concerts broadcast each year by the American Forces Network.

The 30th anniversary of the Independence Day concert promises to be another blockbuster production, featuring country crooner Josh Turner and YouTube singing sensation Staff Sgt. Angie Johnson of the Missouri Air National Guard.

But it also will be the members' last Independence Day performance as members of the historic band.

In March, the Air Force announced the service's band program would be restructured, bringing an end to the Band of the U.S. Air Force Reserve and downsizing or eliminating others.

With all the work that goes into getting ready for a performance — pulling music together, rehearsing — Senior Airman Michelle Hooper said there's little time to worry about the future. After the big Independence Day concert, the band will perform around the Southeast and then deploy for one last time — to Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar — before they play their final song.

The band travels more than 100,000 miles each year and completes 400 performances a year to support Air Force and Air Force Reserve recruiting, and to help bolster troop morale, said Maj. Donald Schofield, commander and conductor of the band.

Appearing with everyone from Celine Dion to Kid Rock, the band has performed for heads of state and military leaders from around the world.

Schofield, who has been with the band for four years, said the group has had many "fabulous and humbling" performance opportunities — including filling a special



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Members of the Band of the U.S. Air Force Reserve perform "God Bless America" with singer Celine Dion on May 2 aboard the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman.

request to appear at the White House this year — but members understand that tough budget choices had to be made.

"It's been evident that the Air Force is under some difficult times," he said. "All the airmen in the building respect the decisions. ... They continue to focus on the mission."

Hooper, a former schoolteacher, has been a keyboard player with the band for 2½ years. She said she has not been told where she will be sent next, but looks forward to continuing to represent the Air Force as a musician in her next assignment.

"I went to college for music. I got

my master's degree in music," said Hooper, who also is Air Force Reserve Command's 2011 Airman of the Year. "It's the only thing I'm good at."

Chief Master Sgt. Mark Burditt, the band's manager, said he has learned in his past year with the band that airmen like Hooper are more than just good musicians: They're good airmen who represent the Air Force and the Air Force Reserve with professionalism.

"The reaction we get [at performances] is that people are so proud to have these kinds of folks representing them," said Burditt, who also plays trombone. "We, in turn, don't take that lightly."

The Band of the U.S. Air Force Reserve regularly performs before huge crowds, including this 2008 Independence Day concert in Warner Robins, Ga.

## DOWNSIZING BANDS

The Air Force plans to deactivate the following bands by Sept. 30, 2013:

- Band of the U.S. Air Force Reserve
- Band of the Pacific-Alaska at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson
- Band of Liberty at Hanscom Air Force Base, Mass.

Two additional bands will be downsized from 45 members each to 15 members each:

- Band of Flight at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio
- Heartland of America Band at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

was recently named first sergeant of the band, has been in the Air Force for 17 years, 14 of which involved multiple tours with the Reserve band.

He said one of his favorite memories is of the 2006 Operation Seasons Greetings tour the band did with Lee Greenwood. He said seeing the citizen-airmen around the world serving their country and being part of the process of taking care of those airmen was a humbling experience.

"It just drives home the point that what we do is important to those men and women," said Granger, who plays tuba. "It's a joy to wake up and do this every day. I have the privilege of coming here to take care of these men and women." □



KEN HACKMAN/AIR FORCE

Vocalists from the band perform with country singer Lee Ann Womack and Little Big Town during the taping of a holiday show at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tenn.

Burditt said he also isn't sure where he'll end up next, but he'll go where he is needed.

Master Sgt. Bill Granger, who