

Designing Custom Field Shows for Marching Band

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Big Picture Goals for Designing a Field Show

- Create educational opportunities for all performers
- High level of artistic/aesthetic value
- Craft a coherent show
- Orchestrate a clear dramatic arc, such that all elements rise and fall in unison at clearly identifiable moments, appropriately placed throughout the show

Big Picture Goals (cont.)

- Integrate all units; all performers become the focal point at various times throughout the show
- Sculpt seamless transitions
- Create a performance that is interesting and engaging for both performers and the audience.

Other Benefits of Thoughtful Show Design

- More time to teach during the season, due to fewer design flaws
- More time to rest and recover (for everyone) during the season
- Realistic budgets and schedules

RESULT

- A more enjoyable marching season for EVERYONE

Assessment

A realistic, honest assessment of your program is an important step in designing a show.

"Most bands play music that is too hard for them."
H. Robert Reynolds

Assessment

Bret Kuhn, The Cavaliers percussion captain for 20 years, including five DCI World Championships, and Drumline Instructor for Northern Illinois University

“Adding drill will not enhance your chances for musical success.”

Conclusion

Choose music that is firmly within the grasp of your ensemble.

Design Choices

Reasonable design choices in every facet of show design allow your students a margin of comfort to deal with:

- Audience conditions
- Drill
- Field conditions
- Weather conditions
- Life

Ultimately, our students should thrive in performance, not just merely survive

Self-Assessment

Visual Skills and training
Musical Skills, training, preferences
Program goals (competitive or not?)

Self-Assessment survey available from author at Thomas.Bough@gmail.com

Goal Assessment

Show design can change drastically based on your goals for your band and the purpose of the show

Purpose of the Show

- Appeal to Friday night football crowd
- Attend only local competitions or festivals
- Attend prelims/finals type of State or multi-state competitions
- Attend National level competitions

**It is possible to create a hybrid show that can appeal on two or more levels

BE HONEST with yourself, your band, band parents, and administration about your goals.

Above all, be honest with your design team about goals!

MUSIC FIRST!

- Music is 60% of the total score or more at virtually every show I have judged around the country
- Panel discussion in 2007 with Michael Gaines, "Despite rumors to the contrary, I can't write drill without music. Everything I do visually is based on what I hear."

• *Instrumentalist* article, May 2010, with DCI Hall of Fame drill designer Gary "Chops" Czapinski, by Thomas Bough

"It all comes down to music. The right music makes or breaks a show. I analyze lots of music to find exactly the right pacing, which is the backbone of a show. No matter how much you like a given piece of music, if it doesn't work on the field, THROW IT OUT!"

Music Options

Instrumentalist, June 2010,
"Choosing Marching Music"
By Thomas Bough

- Stock arrangements
- Custom arrangements (existing music, arranged specifically for your band)
- Original music written for marching band
- Custom original composition, created specifically for your band

Stock Arrangements

Pros:

- Least expensive option
- Quick and easy to obtain
- No legal obstacles

Stock Arrangements

Cons:

- Instrumentation may or may not fit your band
- Duplication at competition

Custom Arrangements of Existing Music, created for your band

Pros:

- Features your strongest players as soloists
- Features your strongest sections and/or chamber ensemble combinations
- Written to comfortably fit the range and technical limitations of your group

Custom Arrangements of Existing Music, created for your band

Cons:

- Cost of arrangement
- Preparation time to create the music
- Cost and frustration of legal obstacles

Marching band shows do NOT fall under educational fair use

- If copyright is in effect (essentially, anything written since 1940), then you MUST obtain written permission to arrange, from the publisher or an agency representing them.
- This almost always costs MONEY.

Legal Obstacles

- Some composers and/or publishers refuse to grant permission to arrange, no matter how much you might be willing to pay. Verify that permission can be obtained before planning your entire show around a given piece of music
- Bands of America and many state music organizations require written proof of permission to arrange before allowing you to compete

Original Music written for Marching Band

Examples: Alfred Publications, Gary Gilroy Publications, and many others

Pros:

- Reasonable costs
- Easy to obtain
- No legal obstacles
- Value added features

Original Music written for Marching Band

Cons:

- May or may not fit the instrumentation of your band
- Duplication at competition
- Show theme, costume, or story line may not fit your community

Custom Original Compositions

Example

Zulu Sunrise, Mvt. 1, low brass trio.

Gary Gilroy Publications, www.gpgmusic.com

Custom Original Compositions

Example

Daedalus, Alfred Publications, Mvt. 2

Custom Original Compositions

Pros:

- Tailored to the specific strengths of your program
- Capture the imagination and interests of your community, students, and staff
- No legal obstacles

Custom Original Compositions

Cons:

- Costs
- Preparation time to create the music

Design Process Options (simplified)

Independent Creators: Band director buys music; guard, drum, and drill staff create their own aspect of the show.

Hopefully, the show is unified during the course of the season.

(good luck with that)

Pre-Packaged Show

Example: Marching Show Concepts

Pros:

- Reasonably Priced
- Easy to obtain
- Elements reasonably well coordinated

Pre-Packaged Show

Cons:

- May require substantial adjustments in music, guard, or drums
- Possible duplication of show at competition

Unified Design Team

- Wind arranger, percussion arranger, drill designer, and guard designer are in frequent contact with band director
- Consensus is reached regarding the impact points transitions, and focal points
- All elements of the show are coordinated for optimum effect

Designer Credentials

- Proven educators
- Track record of success
- References
- Experience on national stage

My Story

- Phantom Regiment, 1986 and 1987 seasons
- Walt Disney World All American College Band, 1989
- High School Band Director, Westwood High School, Mesa, Arizona, 1992-1999
- Host or instructor for Cavaliers, Arizona Sun, and Phantom Regiment indoor drumline

• Judge for marching band competitions in six states

• Director, Huskie Marching Band at Northern Illinois University

• Owner, Downbeat Design Team

• Author, convention speaker

• 20 years in classroom

Downbeat Design Team

www.downbeatdesignteam.com

- Percussion: Jim Bailey.
- Former caption head of the Cavaliers
- Founder of I-2 indoor drumline
- Middle school band director
- Yamaha drumset artist
- D'Addario, Educational Relations Manager

www.downbeatdesignteam.com

- Drill: Brian Soules
- Former visual caption head, Madison Scouts and Crossmen
- Visual staff for Bluecoats, Santa Clara Vanguard
- Drill design Northern Illinois University
- High school teacher
- Has written hundreds of field shows

www.downbeatdesignteam.com

- Colorguard: Lori Valenzuela
- National championships as a performer and instructor in DCI, WGI, and BOA.
- Guard instructor at Northern Illinois University
- Judge, clinician, consultant on a national scale

Designer evaluation

- Realistically assess your staff and/or designers
- Do they have the experience and skill to create the curriculum for your ensemble?

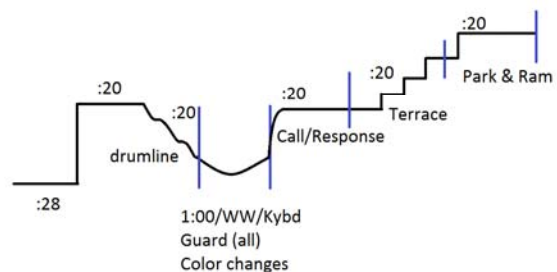
Show Graphing

Utilize a graph to plot all show events on a timeline. System inspired by Pulitzer-prize winning composer Michael Colgrass

Graph the First Movement

- Duration in seconds
- Musical events, soloists, and sections
- Energy flow/dynamic contrats... highs and lows
- Identify focal point...what do you want the audience to watch
- Identify climax of movement

Sample Graph



Plan Everything

- Drill moves or moments without drill
- Props, scripts, banners, or signs
- Costumes
- Story line
- Special effects
- Guard EQ changes

Designers Deliberate to Coordinate All Elements for Maximum Effect

- Musical phrases can be changed to better support other elements
- Plan staging to highlight soloists or to divert attention away from EQ changes
- Plan all guard transitions as integral elements of the show

Wheaton Warrenville South High School, Zulu Sunrise



It's Just Business

- Timeline
- Contracts
- Money

Timeline

- 3-6 months for a complete custom show..winds, drums, drill, and guard
- 1-3 months for any one element
- Order guard costumes and equipment
- Build props or order special items

Time of year has EVERYTHING to do with timeline.

All or none?

The Downbeat Design Team offers "Designer Buffet"

That is, you can hire the entire team, or any portion of the team, based on your needs.

Contracts

- A written contract protects both designers and directors
- Mutual obligations and expectations are clear
- Deadlines for show delivery and payment schedule are in writing
- Specify exceptions

Contracts cont.

- Downbeat contracts include required signatures for the band boosters and a principal, to help remind directors to procure the necessary community support
- For original shows, copyright is almost always retained by the composer, not the band that commissions the work

Costs

- Original compositions or arrangements, winds only : \$2,000 - up
- Percussion arrangements: \$1,000 – up
- Drill: \$1,000 – up
- Guard work: \$1,000 – up

Costs

- What's in a name?
 - Reputation
 - Personality
 - How much is "The Name" worth to you?
- Evaluate: Is the product created by "The Name" truly better and thus worth the difference in price?

Conclusion

- Creating a custom field show can provide an educational, rewarding experience for the performers
- Minimize stress on the band director, both during the design process and during the season
- Increases educational opportunities
- Enhance the possibility of competitive success

Powerpoint slides assembled by

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