

# You Can Teach An Old Dog New Tricks

Bill Watson

As our marching activity has evolved over the years, it never ceases to amaze me how creative people are in teaching marching concepts. Professional sports teams have long used dance fundamentals for strength, balance, flexibility, footwork and agility. The same principles may be applied to marching band. Simple dance skills can be easily incorporated into any fundamentals block to improve strength, posture, balance, flexibility, footwork, grace, and agility.

As a 47 year old teacher with no dance training, the thought of using dance principles in our marching warm-up was intimidating. How could we introduce this concept comfortably to our students? Who was going to model the exercises? Will the time spent be worth the effort? By the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of learning and educating the students in these concepts, I can now say that, "You can teach an old dog new tricks."

The first step is the buy-in. Your staff must believe in the benefits of movement to the overall marching program. The next step is to introduce these new concepts after your last concert in May, when many students begin to be enthusiastic

about the upcoming marching season. Most students appreciate evolution in marching fundamentals as long as they know the purpose of each new exercise. The professional sports team analogy could be how many students relate movement skills in sports to those on the marching field. Get the leaders on board, followed by the upperclassmen, and you should have no trauma by the time the new members arrive.

Get with a person with dance training, and decide what skills are relevant to your marching vocabulary. Regardless of style, there will be something that can be useful for your students. If you ever have been in the middle of the season and have to suddenly throw in a movement skill, you know how awkward, stiff, forced, and unprofessional the final product can turn out. Your "dance" person may be on your band staff, another faculty member, or a student with dance training. Directors should attempt whatever we expect the average

band student to perform. You may practice at home in front of a mirror or stand in the back while your dance person leads.

Make the dance principles directly relevant to your basics block. For example, use the posture elements for strong upper body presence and

proper alignment on slides. The use of lower body dance principles may help with line, strength, and flexibility of the knees and ankles. The use of arm movements may reinforce proper horn carriage.

If you are interested in these concepts, you may attend two hands-on clinics on Saturday, July 24 during the Texas Bandmasters Association Convention/Clinic. The clinics are titled *Advanced Marching Fundamentals*. Part 1 will be from 9:30 - 10:30 am, and Part 2 will take place from 3:00 - 4:00 pm. The clinicians will be the staff and students from the Richland High School Marching Band. There will be room for many directors to participate with our 25 students. Hope to see you there.

**Decide what  
(dance) skills  
are relevant  
to your marching  
vocabulary**

*Bill Watson has been teaching for 24 years, including the past 8 years as Director of Bands at Richland High School in the Birdville ISD. Mr. Watson spent his first 16 years in the Spring ISD at Wells Middle School, Westfield High School, and Spring High School. Other marching band teaching experiences include 12 years of drum corps experience with the Sky Ryders, Cavaliers, and Santa Clara Vanguard. Mr. Watson has been fortunate enough to work with groups that have earned 5 UIL State Championships, 8 Bands of America Regional Championships, 1 Bands of America Grand National Championship, and 2 Drum Corps International World Championships. He served as the TMAA Marching Band Vice-President from 2000-2003 and has served on the TMEA/UIL Marching Band Committee.*