

Marching Band Triage— Dealing With and Learning From Marching “Emergencies”

Bill Watson

The word “triage” may seem a bit strong in the marching band context, but definition #2 on *Dictionary.com* states “the determination of priorities for action in an emergency.” At this time of the year your marching season may seem like an emergency due to:

- Not getting the music/drill in a timely fashion.
- Losing practice time due to weather conditions.
- Rewrites due to growth or decrease of numbers or poor staging.
- Music/count changes.
- The show is too difficult in one or more areas.
- Any other obstacles that have altered your practice time/plans.

These are the times that we earn our salary. Even though many factors are not working in our favor we can still have a great season if we...

Realize What We Can Control

We cannot control how the temperature or a hurricane affects our organization, but we can control our attitude about it to our constituency. The facts are that we cannot make up the time lost once school begins, so consider that in working on...

Performance Plan B

Beginning with your last scheduled performance, look at how much of the show you will be able to perform at each event and adjust accordingly. Our goal is to do what is best for our students, and that may mean performing only parts of our show at various games and competitions. If you are doing a cut in your show, make sure that there is some sort of ending, such as a cadence with a big chord or a “ding” for a soft ending that you reinforce visually, such as with a pose. In your choices for how much to do at an event, try to give the performers a week on new material. If you find the drill or music to be too much then strongly consider...

Editing

This is a nice word for simplifying the music or drill. Whether the writing is local or from across the country most marching bands have drill or music that may surpass the skill level of the group. This combined with other “emergencies” may necessitate altering what is on the page. This could be as easy as playing the rhythmic structure instead of the sixteenth notes or re-scoring the chord to keep the upper parts within the staff. If two musical elements are sharing a musical line 80 yards apart and are not able to pull it off, you may have to choose one group to play the phrase while the other is either tacet or playing chords. Another option is to re-score the piece to include groups that are



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adjacent. If it really is a disaster in the winds, make it a percussion phrase or visa-versa.

Consider facing backfield for a variety of color and dynamics if appropriate. Drill editing may be more of a challenge, but sometimes sets can be skipped by using free form or pods. Whatever you do with drill editing, make sure that it is achievable in relation to tempo and step size and that it reflects the music. One positive that may come out of our season no matter what the results are to...

Make This Year's Challenges a Learning Experience for Next Season

While your experience is still fresh in your mind, keep a journal of what went right/wrong and write down possible solutions for next year. For example, if the music arrived later than you want, make sure that next year you are more involved in meetings, music selection, copyright clearance, and setting the timeline. If you wait until after the season to record your thoughts or solutions, you may not have quite the same sense of emotion or urgency. Most people

will just blame the arranger and not really fix the problem. I had two arrangers in 21 years as a high school director and experienced music not arriving in a timely fashion a few times. Instead of always blaming or firing the arranger, we looked at it as how can we better facilitate this process. The plan invariably involved getting the music selection/copyright process going much earlier. There may be ways to include incentives/penalties involving deadlines in your contracts with designers. Above all else, when confronted with challenges and obstacles...

Stay Positive

Hopefully we have established a healthy relationship with students, staff, parents and administration. In most cases the staff and student leaders will set the tone on a daily basis. Emphasize that all we can do is improve every day. The bottom line is that we all want our season to be a positive experience in which all participants, both students and adults, will want to return.

I want to wish all colleagues the best.

Bill Watson is a 1980 graduate of the University of Houston where he received his Masters of Conducting in 1995. Mr. Watson was fortunate enough to be a student of Eddie Green and has benefitted from numerous mentors, including Jack Fariss, Richard Crain and Henry Schraub. Mr. Watson is currently the Director of Fine Arts for the Lewisville ISD located in Denton County just north of the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. He is also in his sixth year as a member of the brass staff for the Concord Blue Devils Drum & Bugle Corps.

Mr. Watson served 30 years as a band director in Texas, working in the Spring and Birdville School Districts at both the middle school and high school level. Mr. Watson has been fortunate to have worked with marching organizations that have received numerous awards, including five Texas UIL State Marching Championships, the 1993 Bands of America Grand National Championship, and five DCI World Championships. Bands under Bill Watson have earned numerous honors including nine TMEA State Honor Band appearances and the 1984 Class C Middle School Honor Band. The Spring High School Band performed at The Midwest Clinic in 1994 and received the Sudler Flag of Honor in 1995.

Mr. Watson received the "Texas Young Bandmaster of the Year" award in 1986 and the 1998 Southwestern Bell Sponsor of the Year. He was also named the 2003 Richland High School "Teacher of the Year." His professional affiliations include TMEA, TBA, TMAA, TMAC, and Phi Beta Mu.