

# Your Way to a Successful Marching Season



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Band Directors are rarely satisfied with the amount of General Effect their Field Shows generate. Great Musical Arrangements, Outstanding Auxiliary writing and a top-notch Drill program can still be very disappointing if the performance level of the band is not “Selling the Product.” Great Execution, both musically and visually, equals great effect. Here are 13 tips on how to clean your marching and musical program in a way that will help produce a dynamic General Effect presentation.

## **1. Establish a solid pulse.**

The first thing that any field production must have is a solid beat. One of the first steps to the establishment of a solid pulse is to plan and execute ensemble rehearsals. A large semi-circle or circle with the percussion at the end or in the center of the formation works very well. Having every member of the ensemble mark time while playing will ensure visually that the pulse can be felt. The Ensemble rehearsal also provides an excellent opportunity to evaluate both the percussion and wind arrangements. Parts are often over written for many school groups and are often loaded with syncopation which can provide numerous problems for the ensemble. Work so the rhythms and styles match perfectly and

spend adequate time making sure the musical transitions are secure. When in doubt, SIMPLIFY!

## **2. Rehearse in the drill forms.**

Still marking time, have the ensemble rehearse the music in the show forms. You and your staff members should walk around within the forms while the field commander's conduct, to evaluate the presence or absence of pulse. If there are problems, determine the cause. Occasionally the problem will be percussion or tuba placement in the formation and action must be taken to correct the problem. Sometimes the solutions can be eye contact with the conductor, however sometimes the problem is more complex. If the pit and ensemble are separate, continue to remind the pit players to listen back to the field battery or winds. Telling the pit not to watch can often be the solution.

## **3. Students have a natural tendency to rush the difficult parts!**

Work with a metronome and recording of the show music to help resolve these problems.

## **4. Consider cleaning your show backwards.**

Good marching performance depends on confidence and confidence comes from knowing what comes next. Consider

beginning the drill cleaning process by going from the end of the production to the beginning in a phrase-by-phrase process. Since the end of the production is often the climax, musically and visually, this process will build confidence quickly. If you don't believe this, take notice at the next band festival that the first thirty seconds of the shows are generally the best part. This comes from always starting at the beginning of the show in rehearsal.

## **5. Establish directional changes.**

Many marching errors occur at phrase endings and changes of direction. Carefully clarify the technique utilized in each turn and include them in your basic rehearsal.

## **6. Work on visual attacks and releases.**

Just as in music, the majority of drill errors come at the beginning and end of phrases. Both the first and last steps have a tendency to be too short. The former because of a lack of confidence and the latter because band members often anticipate the halt and stop short of their mark.

## **7. March with your eyes.**

Drill Design these days is as much dependent upon knowing how to use your eyes as it is on how

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to use your feet... Knowing where to look and what to look for are essential to the success of the visual program. Carefully identify the dress points and teach the members when to look and where.

### **8. Establish a terminology for your band.**

The individual members need to understand what echelon, curvilinear, interval, distance and other design terms mean. They also need to know how the cleaning process works as it relates to these terms.

### **9. Understand which things will “fix” themselves.**

Some directors or staff members will stop at each and every mistake. Observe the process and clean the drill problem situations that keep recurring rather than demonstrating that you see every mistake. Allowing the different sections to find the solutions to the problem themselves will help give them ownership in the program and will pay great dividends.

### **10. Establish the coordinates first.**

The proper cleaning of drill sets demand that each individual member take their own responsibility for being at the correct place at the phrase end and beginning. Many bands utilize the current software features to allow students to see the form concepts and the importance of being in the right place consistently.

### **11. Clean transitions.**

Some band programs seem to feel that the show is clean whenever the sets are clean. This is probably the farthest thing from the truth. Learning to control space and step size while transitioning from set to set are vital to the success in cleaning a movement. Often times, the establishment of subsets or half-ways points can be helpful. Determine and explain to each member

whether the path is straight or curved during each drill transition!

### **12. Develop a clear understanding of the mechanics of each form.**

In Linear forms the interval will most often be weak at the ends where there is only one direction to judge distance. Diagonal forms demand the intervals to be correct before the alignments can be established by controlling distance. In curvilinear forms, establish the key people in the perimeters and have the form dress to the form.

### **13. When working on music, don't watch the drill!**

Usually a person will be drawn to either the visual or the musical performance. Block out one or the other if you are working alone or divide the responsibility up amongst your staff if you have help. Take the time to rehearse the music while the drill is going on so that the balance, intonation, dynamics, expression and timing can be attended to as they occur. If the Drill and Auxiliary work are properly written, the students will gain an understanding of why they are being asked to perform things in a particular way. Separating the rehearsal for each entity will help a great deal but only simultaneous work will produce an excellent overall product, both musically and visually.

The Cleaning process can be both rewarding and frustrating, depending on the retention level of the ensemble. One sure thing is this process should continue throughout the season. Once the product works—work the product!

Make it a Great Season!