

Cover Down! A History of Texas Military Marching Band Style

Dr. Timothy Rhea

This fall, I very much enjoyed observing high school band programs and students throughout Texas return to a marching band experience that was so needed and important following a challenging year during which so many modifications were in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having been involved myself with marching bands in Texas throughout my entire career, I abundantly realize the varied roles, both educationally and service related, that these most visible ensembles fulfill within one's overall band program.

Growing up in East Texas and having taught for thirty years at the only major university in the nation that continues to utilize exclusively precision drill with its marching band, I have followed the recent emergence of the University Interscholastic League State Military Marching Band Contest with interest. My compliments to Dr. Brad Kent and his staff at the UIL office for providing these band programs with a unique contest experience that allows them to showcase a performance style that is so tied historically to the development of Texas marching bands. Since little has been written down regarding the emergence of this particular style, I would like to share with you some history that has been communicated to me through the years regarding the early development of marching bands in our state.

The first college band to present a halftime show is generally credited to the University of Illinois, in 1907. While early presentations by this band

mainly utilized scatter drill, the Illinois Band later developed a six to five (30 inch) stride that continued in use until the 1970s. Prior to the use of yard lines (six or eight to five stride) for both alignment and drill design, band members simply guided left or right and just ignored the yard lines. A friend of mine who taught Texas high school band in the 1940s told me the story of strapping old cane fishing poles across ranks of young band members to solidify their alignment. "Show band" style was widely accepted prior to World War II, and featured scatter drill to formations such as a moon, complete with performing an accompanying selection such as "Shine on Harvest Moon." High school bands might turn out the lights during their halftime performances and employ devices such as black lights and dance steps. Common musical selections utilized were mainly jazz and pop standards of the day.

The development of military style marching band (six to five precision drill) began mainly in East Texas following World War II. Handed down through several generations of band directors, the military marching, along with the performance of standard march literature, are a spin-off of the armed services. Those credited with the early development of this style in Texas include Edward V. Adams (Texas A&M University), Jimmie Hudgins (Stephen F. Austin State University), and Alto Tatum (Gladewater High School). There was also an influence

with the development of precision style marching from Oklahoma, related to the Tri-State Music Festival in Enid and through the efforts of Pete Long, Director of the Ponca City High School Band.

Ed Lumpkin, band director at Pine Tree (Longview) High School, is generally credited as one of the first band directors to bring the six to five marching style to East Texas. Around 1955 or 1956, the Pine Tree Band marched in a company front, hitting the yard lines every six steps. It was described as "revolutionary" at the time. Six to five started out very simple and became more intricate with time. In the beginning, the music had virtually no musical connection to the marching drill. Some of the early drills have been compared to a postage stamp moving around on the field or watching a band during a street parade. During this early period, UIL required marching maneuvers and inspections had an enormous effect on marching band expectations and style before they were discontinued in the 1960's. The use of six to five marching style with the Stephen F. Austin State University Band under both Jimmie Hudgins and Kenneth Green had a major influence on a generation of band directors who adopted this style for their own public school band programs in the East Texas area. Texas band directors associated with the development of six to five style during the 1960s included Neil Grant (Troup, White Oak & Longview High Schools), Eldon Janzen (Irving

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High School), Vincent DiNino (University of Texas), and Joe Tom Haney (Mexia High School and later, Texas A&M University). Another pioneer during this time was Kenneth Green at Bossier City, Louisiana High School (later Stephen F. Austin State University). His 1960 performance at the Sugar Bowl was broadcast on television, displaying his innovative drill design. His marching was very dignified; utilizing many Kenneth Alford marches, with a marching cadence of 96 beats per minutes. Bill Swor at LSU was also credited with many contributions to the military marching style during this same era.

During the 1970s and 1980s two East Texas band directors achieved the utmost respect for their evolving marching bands utilizing the six to five marching style. Waymon Bullock, director of the Lufkin High School Band from 1969-1986, was a pioneer in the development of a more intricate and musically related style of precision drill design. Mr. Bullock's drills contained numerous individual assignments, gate turns, driving marching fundamentals, and a much faster marching tempo than favored in previous years. Described as "in a class of its own" were John "Pete" Kunkel's bands at Longview High School during this same time. As a high school student, witnessing my first performance of the Longview Band at marching contest was a life changing experience for me. It defined for me what was possible regarding the highest expectations of a high school marching band in terms of both quality of playing combined with flawless fundamental marching. Witnessing that performance, I wrote that day on my marching contest program some things that others were saying about the Longview Band. Those descriptors were intensity, energy, a class act in every way, precise, in tune, wall of sound, and superior in all aspects. I will always be grateful for my opportunity to have seen and heard that great band live several times during my early musical development.

In 1979, the National Association of Military Marching Bands was formed to promote the military style of marching. The founding members of the organization were Butch Almany, Matt Brackin, Mark Brackin, Waymon Bullock, Bobby Goff, Jimmie Hudgins, Bruce Hughes, Barry Johnson, Don Lawler, Blanton McDonald, and Raymond Thomas.

Beginning in 1979, an exhibition of marching was hosted by the organization. In 1987, the exhibition developed into a military band marching contest, hosted during its first eight years of existence at Texas A&M University. This contest, sponsored by NAMMB, continued for many years at various sites until recently adopted as a pilot program by the UIL. At present, East Texas remains the only major area of Texas than continues to promote this style of marching, with Texas A&M University's Aggie Band the only remaining college band that marches exclusively in the 6 to 5 style.

How wonderful it is that we reside in a state with such a rich marching band history that has allowed for the development of the many current exceptional marching band experiences available to students regardless of marching style or musical preference.

Dr. Timothy Rhea is currently in his 29th year at Texas A&M University, serving as Director of Bands and Music Activities. He serves as administrative head of the Music Activities Program, is conductor of the University Wind Symphony, and oversees the Texas Aggie Band. Dr. Rhea holds degrees in music education and conducting from the University of Arkansas, Texas Tech University, and the University of Houston. During his tenure at Texas A&M University, Dr. Rhea has conducted the school's Wind Symphony for conventions of TMEA, the College Band Directors National Association, The Midwest Clinic, the Western International Band Clinic, and the American Bandmasters Association. Additional concerts have included Carnegie Hall and five European tours with performances in Ireland, England, Italy, Austria, Germany, and the Czech Republic. The TAMU Wind Symphony has released several internationally distributed recordings. In addition to conducting, Dr. Rhea maintains a very successful career as an arranger and composer with an output of over 300 pieces, to include over fifty published works. Dr. Rhea maintains an internationally active schedule as conductor, clinician, and adjudicator. He has received the Citation of Excellence from the National Band Association, was selected as the Texas Outstanding Young Bandmaster of the Year and has received the President's Meritorious Service Award to Texas A&M University. Dr. Rhea is Past-President of the American Bandmasters Association and currently serves as Vice-President/Secretary of the John Philip Sousa Foundation in addition to positions with several related professional organizations. He recently oversaw the planning and construction of the new Texas A&M University White-Walker Music Activities Center which opened in July 2019. In this new facility, the Dr. Timothy B. Rhea Concert Rehearsal Hall was named in his honor. Last year, he received the Association of Former Students Distinguished Achievement Award in Administration from Texas A&M University.