

MARCHING BAND ARRANGING CONCEPTS
(Towards a Greater Diversity of Sound)

By Pete Lengyel

Some Basic Thoughts

- I. The greatest arrangement in the world won't sound good if the drill designer hasn't recognized the key musical moments (or worse yet, ignored them!) and presented them properly.

II. **Instrumentation** – (my preferences)

Piccolo – use 2 or 3 -- no more (pitch)

Flutes – 2 pts

Clarinets – 2 pts

Bass Clars – As many as you can afford!

Alto Sax – 2 pts (although lots of unis)
(lines unis. – harmonic pad div.)

Tenor Sax – load up – even if it means switching a couple of altos over.

Bari Sax – Use 2 if possible

UPPER BRASS QUARTET

Trpts – 3 pts (1st can go div. Above G²)

F Hrns – 2 pts but lots of unison!

Occasional divisi – mainly on long chords and doubling Trbs 1 & 2 on low brass choir effects.

LOW BRASS QUARTET

Trbs – 2 pts

Bass Trb – usually a combination of Trb2, Bari horn and tuba

Bari Hrn

Tuba

Other Options:

1. Electric Pno, Guitar, Bass, Strings, Drum Set.

These can serve a number of functions:

- a. New Color
- b. Reinforcement of ensemble lines
- c. Sustained Pno and/or Strgs can soften mallet passages
- d. Give the drill designer more options since hrns can be left out.

2. Also (especially in more symphonic music), oboe, bassoon, "Real" F Hrn(s), Sop. Sax

III. Scoring

1. USE INSTRUMENTS IN THEIR BEST SOUNDING REGISTERS.
2. 8 va's are the strongest basic sound.
3. Voice brass using a polychord approach.
4. Voice wvds. Using a drop 2 approach when the passage gets high.
5. Reinforce color-tones.
6. Bass clars and Bari Sxs. Can do wonders for the bottom of the band.
 - a. Support Tuba and Bari Hrn sound
 - b. Create a good bottom for wvd. Choir.
7. Use div. Tuba on notes around low B^b when linear sense permits. (A ½ div. With the upper note supported by B.CL and B.S. can create a great bottom.)
8. Important point – Doubling the number of players does not double the volume.
9. Do not worry about the sax section sounding complete within itself. (Use them for textural reinforcement first.)

IV. Scoring (additional thoughts)

1. Implying harmony can be effective (Root, 3rd, 7th)
2. Keep low brass on a similar shelf (smooth).
3. E^b Sop. Clarinet can be very effective (especially adding an edge to flute lines)
4. Bari Hrns (especially on mid-range pedal tones) can create a nice bottom for wvd. Choir.
5. If you've got reasonable numbers, a 3 pt chalemeaux register clar. Quartet (with B. Clar) can be very nice.
Key thought: Minimize or eliminate battery perc.

6. Write clars. Above the break in general but rarely above the staff.
7. F Hrn, Trb1 and Bari Hrn are a very powerful combo in the F to F' register.
Note: Use this on a melodic line or cpt. And assign a color tone to Trb2.

V. Texture

1. Use solos, duets, trios and small ensembles.
(The full band will sound fresher when they re-enter.)
2. I like to make some kind of textural change every 4 or so bars (even if very subtle).
Think:
 - a. thin vs. thick
 - b. high vs. mid vs. low register
 - c. color mixtures
 - d. tempo changes
 - e. changing phrase lengths
Example: adding an extension to one of the phrases
 - f. adding cpt
 - g. open vs. closed
 - h. unusual combinations
Example: FI – Bari Hrn duet

VI. Harmony

1. Feel free to re-harmonize
 - a. Tri-tone sub
 - b. sub by plurality
 - c. color tone line
 - d. ii-V sub for V
 - e. workback
 - f. filling in a 2-voice framework
 - g. trial and error

VII. Keys

1. B^b, F, E^b, A^b -- I also like C and G.
2. Figure out what's going to be the most important, then put it in a key that works best for those instruments.
3. Succession
 - a. Keep keys rising through the show.
 - b. The start of a ballad can be in a lower key.

- c. Major to relative minor and tonic-dominant relationships are smoothest.
- d. Chromatic 3rd relationships can be the freshest.
- e. Avoid tritone relationships.
- f. M2↑ relationships are great for a climax point.
- g. Don't do 2 numbers in succession in the same key!

VIII. Transcriptions

Don't get paralyzed trying to stay honest to the original intention of a large piece.

1. Change order of musical elements.
2. Change keys.
3. Re-compose segments.
4. Eliminate fluff.

It's a new piece! Make it work for your band.

IX. Percussion

Make it complementary.
(Not percussion vs. brass.)

X. Copyright Laws

Simple – Get permission!

(While there are a number of works basically off limits or priced absurdly high, most are reasonably priced and obtained with a minimum of trouble.)