



*Turn a Struggling Program
Around in 12 Weeks*

Clinicians:

Alycia Kemnitz, Oscar Herrera

Sponsor: Texas Bandmasters Association

Texas Bandmasters Association

61st Annual Convention/Clinic

July 27-30, 2008

*Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center
San Antonio, Texas*

TBA Clinic

How to Turn a Struggling Program Around in 12 Weeks

Clinician: Oscar R. Herrera

July 27-30

Step #1 Drill/Music for show

The first step is to select the music and drill for your marching show. This is very IMPORTANT!!! This is going to determine whether you are going to be successful or not in 12 weeks. Set goals and time lines as to where you should be in the show so that you have at least 2 weeks to polish before going to your first contest. If you are still learning drill the week before contest you are not setting yourself up to succeed.

- Suggested timeline for music and drill.

February-pick music

March-April-arrange music (we do our own)

May-read thru arrangement and adjust parts, send music to drill and percussion book writer.

June-half of drill done and percussion book due at end of month.

July-complete show due at TBA

July-week before TBA is used for Freshmen, Guard, Percussion and Section leader camp.

If you just took over the program in AUGUST skip #1 and start right here!

- Do some research: Have you seen last years show? What did the band play last year? How did the band do at contest? What did they sound like? Did they move a lot or a little? How many staff members will you have? (If you only have one or two directors the show must not be to difficult or long) Another very important question is how many of the students pass their classes. The numbers for the show have got to be right; otherwise, this creates major problems right when you are getting ready to finish the show and participate in your first pre-UIL contest. Try to have 20% of the marching members as alternates. (i.e. 100 marching with 20 alternates) You do not want to march with holes in the show. This creates problems visually for the judges and spacing problems for the marchers.
- Don't be pressured in to using the show that last year's director designed even if it's already paid for. You can always do it next year if it seems to difficult, too lengthy, or you don't like it.
- After you have done your homework you can now make a better decision

on what to play, the difficulty level of the drill/music etc.

- Finding a drill writer. This can be very difficult. I recommend learning how to do it yourself so that you are not at the mercy of some of those drill writers that leave groups hanging. If you need a drill writer, get somebody that lives within a one hour drive from your house. This way if you have problems you can drive over and knock on their door. This has worked for me.

Suggestions:

- A) Pick music that will win over the students, win over the parents and the crowd. (Rock & Roll, regional ethnic music and tonal music are good choices. Be very careful with jazz music, it is not as easy as it may seem.)
- B) Stay on the easy side of both music and drill. This will give you more time to work on fundamental concepts. (Articulation, intonation, blend, balance and tone production)
- C) Pick music that will work those concepts. Do not worry about what the other guys are doing. When building a program the most important thing is to start with success and get it quickly. If you can plan a step further, try to get an idea of the music for concert season and work the fundamentals that will be needed for those pieces during marching season.
- D) The length of the show should be between 6 ½ to 7 minutes in length.
- E) Use a percussion feature if possible. (This will help take some of the pressure off the band to play all the time.)
- F) Reprise the 1st selection at the end of the show this will save time memorizing music.

OK, now your show is set. Now what?

Before summer band starts have the following ready:

- 1) Correctly marked practice field- I recommend asphalt or concrete.
- 2) Mark the field in grids with dots every 2 steps.
- 3) Paint pens - one for all band members (same color.) Change colors for the next selection.
- 4) Lone Ranger
- 5) Dr. Beat (programmable)
- 6) Hydration equipment.
- 7) All instruments in playing condition.
- 6) Show Music.
- 7) Percussion book.
- 8) Stand Music - this can be a real consumer of your valuable time and money. (all you need is about 5 tunes; we use in house composed ditties about 32 measures in length with sections for

instrumental & percussion solos. To end I just give a cue and the band closes it out) Iron Man, I Don't Want to Stop, Right Now (NBA Song), Land of A Thousand Dances, Volver (this is the most popular one we play - the crowd goes nuts) and the Hey Song are just some of the ditties I recommend. **This saves a lot of money for stand tunes.**

- 9) Little Red Wagon
- 10) Directors' and Drum Major podium

Step #2 Summer Band

Your first playing rehearsal.

Fundamentals!

Fundamentals!

Fundamentals!

- Start with F concert. Stay with F concert till you come close or arrive at the sound you want. Then move to the next note (E natural) and so on down to low Bb concert.
- Your concept of sound is very important. If you are not sure of what you want your band to sound like ask a fellow director (whose band sound you aspire too) to listen to your band and make suggestions. Do this during the 1st week of summer band; do not wait too long. Another resource to tap is all the retired band directors out there who would love to be asked for advice.
- I recommend and use.
Remington Warm-up Long Tones
Dick Floyd's Rehearsal Magic

Step #3 Marching Rehearsal

- I use two formations:

Block Band- for parades, fundamentals and tracking.
Playing formation- a large circle by sections playing to the center. (If you have a large band you can make two circles with a smaller one inside the larger one.)
You can also use the formation to work fundamentals.
- The first few days work nothing but marching fundamentals in the morning (9-12), music in the afternoon (1-3) and tracking in the evening. (6-8:30 with the first 30 min. being marching fundamentals. WITHOUT FAIL.)
- Getting the band to memorize the music is your next big challenge especially if you have a small group where all the members have to play. Try the following

technique I call tracking. Tracking is lining up the band in a block formation on a track or a long straight stretch with no traffic. (The same block band formation can also be used for marching fundamentals and parades.) Now, with your long ranger clicking away by your percussion section (in the little red wagon) at the desired tempo, work the first set marching and playing. Do this until the 1st set is at a playable level then add the 2nd set and then the 3rd and so on. (Students must have their music and a pencil with them) One thing to remember is that the object of tracking is to memorize the music but this is also a very good time to work the concept of spacing front to back and side so side, posture, instrument carriage, clean feet, balance, tuning etc.

- Rehearsing the drill
 - 1) **Invest** the time in marking your spots with paint pens. Each set will take about 10-15 minutes to mark depending on the complexity. (I usually mark 4 to 5 sets then practice with the band going from set to set. If you have planned it correctly, the band learned the music while tracking the day before or earlier that day and all you have to do is plug it in.)
 - 2) When going from spot to spot, make sure that it is done with good fundamentals at all times.
 - 3) To keep the students energy level up, give breaks every thirty minutes, this also depends on the weather. Water is the best! Cold apples are also a big hit.

A simple concept that I follow comes from learning to play and learning how to practice on my instrument. These same concepts apply: good tone, correct articulation, playing in tune, balance, blend etc. I just solve the problem with the band as if I were solving it on my instrument.

For more information you may contact me at:
oherrera@eeisd.org