



# **Purposeful Percussion: Is Your Marching Percussion Helping or Hurting the Ensemble?**

**CLINICIAN:**

**Ryan Thomas**

## **Texas Bandmasters Association 2012 Convention/Clinic**



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Texas Bandmaster's Association Presents

## **PURPOSEFUL PERCUSSION**

### **IS YOUR MARCHING PERCUSSION HELPING OR HURTING THE ENSEMBLE?**

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James Bowie High School, Austin, TX  
Ryan Thomas, Arnold Haffner, Adam Reidelbach  
rthomas1@austinisd.org

#### Pulse

- Greater pulse consistency leads to greater clarity.
- The metronome in rehearsal and warm-up:
  - Consistent tempos in rehearsal are critical to consistent tempos in performance.
  - Make sure they are using consistent tempo relationships in the warm-up routine.
  - Loud enough vs. too loud?
  - 90-10 ratio. 10-90 ratio.
  - Should I listen to the met or watch a drum major? The answer is YES.
  - Field staff's role in teaching pulse.
- Cone of sound. Who should watch, who should listen?

#### Volume/Direction

- The percussion is always the default volume knob for the ensemble.
- The music is in the accents.
- Balance problems, ask the right questions:
  - Performance issue?
  - Written issue?
  - Drill issue?
- Variety of impact effects:
  - A cappella wind moment vs. percussion support
  - Front ensemble cymbal/bass drum/gong combinations-rolls vs. hits
  - Battery rhythmic drive vs. giant buzz roll (rhythmic motives?)
  - Battery all up through impact vs. crescendo to end of impact (shape within impact?)

#### Color

- Subtract or add parts/voices
- Try different implements in battery
- Add or subtract auxiliary instruments in the front ensemble.
- Ostinatos!

### What else can I do as a non-percussion band director?

Custom arrangers can really help your program make huge musical gains, but they need to KNOW the kids. If they are not on-site working with your program everyday, give them lots of information about the percussion program and its strengths and weaknesses, as well as lots of info about the show and what you want. Don't expect them to read your mind and give you a great product.

Make sure your whole design staff is communicating. Even if your design staff is only two people, they still need to talk and make sure that they are coordinating everything about the show BEFORE it gets handed out to the kids.

There are a lot of great videos of DCI and WGI percussion sections on youtube, vicfirth.com, innovativepercussion.com, and probably plenty of other sites. These videos are great modeling resources for your pit and drum line with tons of musical segments as well as warm-ups and even marching/drill examples. If you can find a couple, your kids will be able to find a dozen. Do a search for your favorite group to get them started and show them what to look for. Be warned-you might see new visuals creeping into the show.

Don't try to fix full ensemble balance or timing in the band hall or in concert arcs-set it up on the field! Listen really carefully at the Friday night football game to figure out where the problems are (why do we always have a tear in that section?) and research through video footage and the scores to find the best solution before you get to rehearsal.

Try to schedule separate rehearsals with the front ensemble, battery, and the drum majors for better communication and pulse control. If you don't have time or facilities for these rehearsals, build it into your full band rehearsals with "visual reps."

Don't be afraid to ask for help! Talk with your drum guy and try to be specific about what you are or aren't getting from the percussion section. The more specific you can be in terms of pulse, volume, and color, the better results you will get for the whole ensemble. Don't have a drum guy, call or e-mail someone!