Creative and Effective Instrumentation for the Marching Percussion Section/ The Front Ensemble Becomes the Field Ensemble

CLINICIANS:

Lamar Burkhalter, Glen Buecker

DEMONSTRATION GROUP:

Willis High School Percussion

-SPONSOR-

Yamaha

Texas Bandmasters Association 2016 Convention/Clinic

JULY 21-24, 2016
HENRY B. GONZALEZ CONVENTION CENTER
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

CREATIVE & EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENTATION
FOR THE MARCHING PERCUSSION SECTION

The Front Ensemble Becomes the Field Ensemble

by Lamar Burkhalter

Featuring the Willis High School Percussion Section – Willis, TX

External factors in the public school setting can greatly affect the number of performers of a percussion section in modern marching bands. These factors can include:

- Size of school
- Demographics
- Enrollment
- Attendance
- Band participation
- General interest in percussion

With a creative approach to instrument and performer selection, a strong percussion product can be realized with any size of program or numbers of players.

Many programs have learned that by eliminating the tenor line, mounting the bass drums on the sideline, eliminating the cymbal line, and grounding the entire percussion section into the front ensemble, they can greatly increase the efficiency, quality of education, and presentation of the marching show with any number of performers.

THE TENOR DRUM MYTH

Some very successful percussion programs around the country have decided to eliminate the tenor line, when applicable.

Benefits to eliminating the tenor line include:

- When only marching snares and basses, this can be more appealing visually as there are two larger sections and not three, visually divided, smaller sections
- Better development of your bass line as they now provide any melodic content from the battery
- Better development of fundamentals for snare or bass drummers that might not possess the kinesthetic sense of the lateral movement of tenors or ability to carry the drums
- Elimination of the mid voice of the battery for more clarity of the upper and lower voices
- Far less tuning and maintenance required by staff throughout the season

THE BASS DRUM MYTH

A common misconception is that there must be a full complement of marching bass drums, even when the percussion section is small.

Benefits to eliminating or minimizing the bass drum line are:

- Visually more appealing as there is less room for error with the "accordion effect" of interval fluctuation due to less intervals to monitor
- A better sense of time as less players involved
- Less of a chance of percussion overbalance, especially with smaller bands

INSTRUMENTATION OPTIONS

To maximize the number of players available

With efficient planning and programming, bands of all sizes can produce a percussion section that makes positive contributions, regardless of the number of players available. Provided below are some options for various sizes of percussion sections and the instrument possibilities.

4-6 players	March 2-3 snare drums and 2-3 bass drums (eliminate the tenors for the competitive show)
6-10 players	March 3 snare drums, 3 bass drums and have 4 players in the front ensemble (eliminate the tenors for the competitive show)
10-14 players	March 4 snares, 2 tenors, 4 bass drums and have 4 players in the front ensemble

CREATIVE INSTRUMENTATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF EFFECT

I have often used alternative instrumentation for the purpose of effect as it would directly relate and contribute to a specific show. Utilizing unique instrumentation can differentiate your percussion section from others. Examples from my past include:

- Marching ten bass drums for a small part of "Rite of Spring"
- Marching sixteen cymbals for a lush cymbal effect on "On a Hymnsong of Philip Bliss"
- Having the snare line march to the front line for a very technical, unison tambourine feature
- Marching no tenors and instead, using two different colors of snare drums. White covered snares represented the tenor voice and were played by younger, smaller players. They were assigned easier technique while also avoiding the weight of the tenors. The students playing black covered snares were given the challenging, more typical snare parts.

GROUNDING ALL PERCUSSION TO THE FRONT ENSEMBLE

There are many benefits to grounding all percussion to the front ensemble, either on the sideline or placed on the field. When the front ensemble is on the field and using electronics, plan to go with a wireless system, use local generators for power or plan to run extension cords to the stadium power source. Rules for UIL electronics are posted on the UIL website.

Benefits of grounding the percussion section include the following:

- Helps to produce more "well rounded" percussionists as they are asked to learn both battery percussion instruments: i.e., snare drum, tenor drums, drum set, impact drums, concert toms, hand drums, while they are also required to learn to play the mallet keyboards; i.e. marimba, xylophone, glockenspiel, chimes, vibraphone and concert instruments and electronic instruments
- Develops players that are often more open to concert percussion ensemble literature in the spring semester instead of only being interested in marching percussion and indoor drum line
- Helps to develop the more regularly used "legato stroke" approach that is applied to many other genres of percussion as opposed to developing the "staccato stroke" approach used primarily only in marching percussion on traditional battery instruments i.e. snare, tenors and bass drums
- Much easier to rehearse the percussion section as there is only one unit to rehearse. This saves rehearsal time and staff usage
- The source of time that the percussion section provides to the marching band is coming from one stationary source, thus avoiding many hours of attempting to line up ensemble "tears" due to staging and constant movement of the marching battery section
- Allows traditional battery performers a better understanding of how to treat the keyboards, electronics and concert instruments as they are moving the equipment for the entirety of marching season
- Far less tuning is required when a battery does not exist. This frees up staffing time demands and need for knowledge of battery tuning. This also reduces costs for drum heads as the drums are only used in the stands at games or parades or pep rallies

Tips on how to successfully ground the percussion section

- Represent "low frequency" battery instruments thru the use of impact drums, concert bass drums, low concert toms, timpani, low pitched hand drums and electronic pads.
- Represent "high frequency" battery instruments thru the use of concert snare drums, marching snare drums, drum set, high concert toms, high pitched hand drums and electronic pads.
- Assign strong battery players with a good sense of time to the primary drum and or "rack" parts as they will be the primary source of time for the percussion ensemble and marching band.

THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Glen Buecker, Jamey Kollar and Tyler Lemmond for their direct input, time and talents to make this clinic a reality. They have displayed extraordinary commitment to this project and it is appreciated.

Many thanks to the following Willis ISD band staff members:

Willis High School Band – Chris Allen, Andrew Hicks and Matt Martinez

Brabham Middle School Band – Joe Dittfurth and Heather Lemieux

Lynn Lucas Middle School Band – Emily Hicks and Brenden Johnson

I would like to thank the following friends and colleagues for their ideas, input and friendship during this project and over the past many years: JD Guzman, Rick Rodriguez, Gregg Rinehart, Brian Perez, Chris Johnson, John Carroll, Jeff Whitaker, John Jones, Kevin Riley, Bryan Waites and Bill Holden.

Thank you to the following companies for their endorsements and support over many years.