

Composing for Color Guard

Program Development Through Educational Curriculum and Effective Writing

John Leonard • Amanda Drinkwater

Featuring selected Marcus High School Color Guard Members

Texas Bandmasters Association Convention • Saturday, July 22nd, 2017

10:30-11:30am • Exhibit Hall 4

Auditions

- Student training begins with auditions!
- Cultivate a supportive, responsive, and 'try anything' environment from day one elements wherever possible
- Set forth performance expectations in all areas
- Choreograph segments utilizing a range of skills (beyond drop spins/exercises)
- Provide immediate movement opportunities and expectations in the audition process
- Reward responsiveness, exaggerated engagement and expression, as these qualities are more important than perfect technique at the audition process
- Try tossing (whether for fun or for the audition process itself)

Training

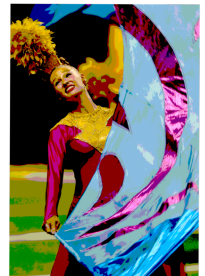
- Training must incorporate dance/movement elements and expressive components (in addition to equipment training)
- Flag training should incorporate simultaneous body movement
- Emphasize training elements useful to the fall program
- Compose 'throw away phrases' to help build repertoire (basically sight-reading with color guard)
- What "events" or "tricks" do you want to display? Identify a handful of equipment effects and try them early in the training process to help students demonstrate engaged performance qualities
- Performers should understand where their focus should be at all times
- Students should be taught from the beginning to understand and appreciate precision and cleanliness

Composing Phrases

- Form shape, direction of travel and facing, tempo, environmental challenges should shape choreography; Adjustments must be made when putting choreography to drill segments- "make it work"!
- There are always options to address concerns within drill sets or segments- don't give up or change everything
- Choreography and equipment work should reflect the musical score- always think of the color guard staging and choreography in terms of a musical score
- Explore a variety of textures and expressive qualities (that reflect the music); Avoid overuse of specific textures or pieces of equipment (For example, A/B or unison segments, ripples, hand flag, 6' flag, rifle, props)
- A well-produced composition doesn't have to be difficult- however, it should be clear, allow for expressive quality, and it should include a variety of demonstrated skills through dance, movement, and equipment manipulation

Compositional Pitfalls

- *Overwriting* can result from the inclusion of too many components at play, the incorporation of advanced techniques beyond the scope of the training program, or an unwillingness/inability to make adjustments in choreography when placed with drill movement
- Lack of clarity or readability of intent is a common issue, particularly when transitioning between pieces of equipment or musical productions; many times this can be addressed through performance quality
- Repetitive phrases have the same effect visually as they might musically; avoid repeating choreography in different musical settings as a short cut
- Variety is more than just having performers face in opposing directions or changing the color of the silk; variety must include a range of movement responsibilities, multiple equipment types, and varied expressive qualities
- Marching band composition must be exaggerated for the size of the venue- should be larger in concept than what might work in an indoor setting (winter guard); Color Guard/ Winter Guard seasons can serve each other if present, and each is a product of the director's work and effort



The 2017-18 Marcus High School Color Guard program includes 50 student performers. Under the creative and administrative leadership of director John Leonard, the Marcus Color Guard program is an invaluable and integral component of the fall marching band program. The program is founded upon the principles of student enrichment and development through expressive movement and technique training. The Marcus Color Guard program sustains an active winter guard program, with student participation throughout both the fall and spring semesters.

The Marcus Winter Guard is the 2014 North Texas Colorguard Association Gold Medalist, and is a consistent Winter Guard International (WGI) Regional Finalist. In their most recent appearance at the WGI World Championships, the Marcus Winter Guard earned the Bronze medal in Scholastic Open class, resulting in the organization's promotion to WGI Scholastic World class. The Marcus Color Guard has been recognized repeatedly with numerous caption honors in the marching band arena. Graduates of the Marcus Color Guard program have extended their participation in and support of the activity through involvement within numerous college marching bands, drum corps, and independent winter guards.

At the backbone of the Marcus Color Guard organization is an amazing group of students and parents who are dedicated to the quality and success of the organization. Both components spend countless hours supporting the color guard and overall band organization through fundraising, event planning and implementation, and many other specialized efforts.

John Leonard, a native of Chicago, began his dance studies at the North Carolina School of the Arts and received his Bachelors of Arts with honors in dance from Columbia College of Chicago. Leonard continued his dance studies at Arizona State University where he was a graduate student and teaching assistant on scholarship. Leonard has performed with the Cavaliers and Crossmen Drum & Bugle Corps, Field of View and Pride of Cincinnati winter guards, Ludwig Dance Theatre, and the national and Japan tours of the Broadway show Blast.

A teacher and choreographer for nearly twenty years, his work has been seen in most of the fifty United States and abroad in places Thailand, Indonesia, and Japan. Mr. Leonard is in his eighth year as director of the Marcus Color Guard program, and has worked with distinguished organizations including Fred J. Miller Clinics, Phantom Regiment, Santa Clara Vanguard, Crossmen, Lake Park High School, Centerville High School, First Flight, Field of View, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, and Arizona State University.

Locally, Leonard served five years on the North Texas Colorguard Association (NTCA) executive Board in various roles, most recently two years as President. Leonard recently completed a two year term on the WGI Steering Committee as the Class A/Open representative.

Acknowledgements

Texas Bandmasters Association

Mike Brashear, Executive Director • Jeff King, President

Marcus Color Guard Student Performers

Marcus Band Booster Organization

Mr. Gary Shafferman, Marcus High School Principal

Mr. Bill Watson, Lewisville ISD Director of Fine Arts

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