



**Texas Bandmasters Association
Convention/Clinic July 25-27, 2019**

Making Your Show Memorable

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SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

MAKING YOUR SHOW MEMORABLE: IT ALL STARTS WITH THE MUSIC

A partnership between Designer, Teacher, Performer, and Judge

“General Effect” is the most subjective and mystifying of all aspect of marching band performance and evaluation. The debate about various aspects of General Effect is continual in any adjudication system that takes General Effect into consideration.

It is a challenge even for seasoned judges to verbalize what General Effect is, so it is not surprising that it remains unclear for many directors. Let’s look at General Effect from the director and from the adjudicator point of view.

THE CONCEPTION STAGE

Mindful listening is the most complex and challenging acts of human cognition. It requires high levels of perceptual acuity.

- Meaning requires that the mind construct the relationships among the sounds of which music is made and portray those sounds visually.
- Feel those relationships subjectively and sensuously if meaning is to be grasped.

Musical sound relationships always exist in a historically and culturally derived framework.

Enormously diverse, culturally derived, historically situated, imaginatively conceived, affectively laden sound complexes (The Music) must be kept in memory at many levels of operation:

- Immediate remembrance of sounds as they are being heard
- How they interrelate over the course of time
- How it is similar to or different from others in terms of genre, style, cultural and historical matrix

Try to close the gap between what is potentially meaningful listening engagement and what is actually grasped in that engagement.

After all, the music being heard is often the result of intensive labor on the part of composers, arrangers, and performers at the highest levels of artistic listening.

IMPORTANT FOR THE DESIGNER'S CONCEPTION, THE TEACHER'S COMMUNICATION, THE STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING AND THE AUDIENCE APPRECIATION - INTELLECTUALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND AESTHETICALLY.

The Designer creates the program plan, selects the music, plans the effects, stages and coordinates the show, envisions the concept - **THE MASTER PLAN OF THE SHOW**
The Teacher communicates the understanding, technique, and motivation for the students.

The Performers bring the show to life.

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The Judge responds, rewarding the designer, teacher, performer through the GE score sheet.

GENERAL EFFECT

Credit all of the musical/visual elements in the band's presentation that combine to display an effective, engaging, and entertaining program. Credit the successful communication of the band's identity and message through the tasteful blend of creativity and performance. Credit the performer's ability to connect with the audience.

The Music gives motivation to the visual design in creating an effective presentation.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The musical selections create the mood and guide the feelings and responses of the audience while observing the show. Do not lose sight of the impact that music choices will have on the audience. These choices will contribute to the connection and entertainment value that is made to the audience.

These musical choices and the arrangements will suggest how, when, and where visual elements will be utilized.

Questions for the Designer:

- Does the program concept inspire CREATIVITY?
- Does the music provide CONTRAST?
- Are there opportunities to DEVELOP VISUAL ideas?
- Does the music have timely IMPACT & EFFECT built in?
- Does the music establish the MOOD needed to guide an emotional response?
- Do the performers RELATE to the concept, the music, and the visual design?
- Will the audience UNDERSTAND the musical program and ENJOY it?
- Will the students UNDERSTAND the program concept and its meaning?
- Is the program ACCESSIBLE, ENGAGING, AND ENTERTAINING?
- Will the program be able to SHOWCASE THE STRENGTHS of the band?
- Do the musical choices tie well together and make musical sense?
- Does each musical choice invite a GREAT ENDING?

REALIZATION OF THE VISUAL DESIGN

Programs can tell a story, be an emotional experience of the music, be written around a particular style, or in any combination. The quality of the musical composition becomes the basis for the visual delivery and will guide the visual designer in orchestrating and arranging the visual presentation - the depth to which these elements are coordinated, staged, and presented becomes an important factor in the General Effect Visual evaluation and comparison.

There are three approaches to creating effect:

The INTELLECTUAL aspect of effect is reflected in the range and quality of the visual plan.

The EMOTIONAL effect is the planned response to the audio/visual presentation that is designed, coordinated and staged for the purpose of evoking a specific, planned reaction.

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The AESTHETIC aspect of effect involves the beauty, artistry, and detailing of the presentation.

Toward creating effect, may be presented individually or in combination - the use of two or three create variety - the simultaneous fusion of all three offers the strongest effect potential.

It is important to stress that great effect depends on the quality, development, range, and detailing of the program design. Consider the following important aspects of successful General Effect: When - Where - How - Why

- How you create the effect
- Pacing - the when factor of planned effects - How close, how often, how large?
- Continuity - the development, connection, and evolution of planned effects
- Staging - where each effect is placed on the field
- Coordination - how all elements work together to enhance effect
- Impacts - the beginning of important musical/visual ideas
- Resolutions - The completion of important musical/visual ideas

The synthesis and depth of the music and the visual blending is a critical factor in the success of a program. How, when and where these effects develop, the designed pathways and placement on the field, the evolution of idea to idea, the many levels of musicality, and how each element works with others, are inherent aspects in the quality and range of the program design, and will elevate the effects beyond isolated moments. The audience and evaluators should understand why particular effects occur.

Creativity and originality are significant factors in General Effect evaluation.
Is the effect:

CREATION
IMITATION
REPETITION

Is the effect:

Cliché	or	Fresh Idea
Trite	or	Original
Usual	or	Exceptional
Replication	or	Innovation
Tradition	or	New Form
Imitation	or	Creation

BRINGING THE SHOW TO LIFE - THE PERFORMERS

After the show has been designed, it is up to the teachers and performers to "bring the show to life" through performance.

Aspects of Showmanship:

- Communication - understanding and commitment to the musical/visual performance
- Identity/Character - the demonstration of meaning through musical and visual display
- Musical and Visual Techniques
- Excellence

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Teachers must be able to convey to students the understanding, passion, and emotional elements of a program, and give them the necessary technique tools. These qualities must transcend the purely technical aspect of performance.

These qualities of performance bring the audience in to share the experience. Teachers and designers must provide the necessary opportunities to demonstrate these communication skills. It is more than just energy and enthusiasm. Obviously, pure excellence is often an effect of its own and great programming with poor technique has a negative effect. However, technical excellence is only one ingredient necessary for maximum effect.

A quality program only exists if it is performed and understood.

AUDIENCE ACCESSIBILITY

Audiences expect a captivating quality performance. It is the blending of a quality program and quality performance that creates the necessary effect for our audience. The quality of the performance, the depth of the training, and the communication of the performers, creates the connection to the audience and judge who respond to them with admiration, appreciation, and scoring.

Avoid trying to educate an audience at a level they will not achieve. Always consider the audience along with what students should know and be able to do from a programming standpoint.

JUDGING THE PERFORMANCE

Consider all of the above information in you evaluation of a performance - YOU ARE EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF:

REPERTOIRE PERFORMANCE

We should strive to be clear that the judge, in the broadest sense, is measuring the entertainment value of the program and not the judge's life experiences. They should respond, value, and reward the synthesis of Music and Visual elements; the development and motivation that create compelling effects, remarkable moments, and reward the program holistically. Judges should listen to the phrase and consider how all members relate to the music over the length of the phrase and production.

- Is the audience engaged?
- Are there climaxes?
- Is there good pacing?
- Is there tension and release?
- Is there variety?
- Are there breaks in continuity?
- Is the pacing and interest maintained?

For Adjudicators, the primary premise of General Effect judging is that you must prepare mentally to allow yourself to be entertained? As adjudicators, we are part of the audience, a widely experienced and critical part of the audience to be sure, but nonetheless, there to enjoy the performance. We each have our preferences, whether they be in choice of music program, manner of presentation, or style of interpretation. Our

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goal, to be effective as a judge in this area, is to allow ourselves to appreciate what is good about a given production based on what is being presented.

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VISUAL ELEMENTS

A short study of how to create memorable visual effect

Michael Gray
July 2019

REPERTOIRE EFFECT

The elements of the design that lead to a desired visual result

Repertoire / Making Good Choices

Repertoire has traditionally been understood in the wider context of the “What”

“What” are the performers being asked to do? “What” are the elements of the program that create highs and lows? “What” is their placement? When are the events scheduled? Do they communicate and support the musical moment? Mood? Energy? “What” tools are used to create these responses?

In more contemporary terms, Visual Effect Repertoire is an opportunity to reward the design for providing the audience with an experience of a concise, engaging, well paced and well constructed production.

The art of eliciting an emotion, a range of emotions, a reaction or an experience of sheer and utter aesthetic enjoyment, intellectual and/or emotional beauty is a very difficult task to master.

Below we will examine the sub caption “EFFECTIVENESS of the REPERTOIRE” in its elemental components.

Creativity and Imagination / Thinking In A New Way

One of the most powerful elements to place your program in a competitive position is to be MEMORABLE!

(I will phrase some of these elements in the form of questions that flow through my own process when evaluating REPERTOIRE)

What makes your thought process and desired result fresh and original?

Every idea can be said/produced by multiple people, it is when we impart our individual experiences to that topic, theme, or musical interpretation that we find a new way of seeing and old theme. Originality is partially about being the first and equally about being the best.

How does your concept intrigue, communicate entice the audience?

Is there a moment of revelation when the viewer associates? is empathetic? finds your offering relatable?

How is your concept presented? What elements of landscape, environment, architecture or lack there of have you considered in order to create a production that will fill the world's largest stage?

Coordination and Staging / The First Power Tool

The mechanics of this element of Repertoire are the most technically aligned with ensemble. They are, however, interpreted in a completely different manner.

I have found over my 30+ year career that Repertoire efforts in general will achieve one of the following results:

- 1- Enhance the overall production of design and focus (most desirable)
- 2- Support the overall production of design and focus (acceptable)
- 3- Detract from the overall production of design and focus (unfortunate)

Where, When and How we use our visual tools... DRILL, COLOR, MOTION, STAGE, PROP INTEGRATION and USAGE, CHOREOGRAPHY, ETC. to enhance the viewers ability to be drawn to musical highlights or accents or support purely visual offerings is crucial to the mastery of the sub caption, caption and the activity as a whole.

Interpretation & Enhancement of the Music / The Artist's Tool

The support of the musical offering, its atmospheric qualities, its emotional elements and its physical soundscape are the number one obligation of the GE Repertoire

I most often find that the we operate on a system of musical statements and visual responses. There are exceptions to that rule and they usually come in the form of a silent passage where drill or guard are elemental to the progression of the through line, but the majority of our time in this activity is music driven.

It is VITAL that every member of your visual staff have an updated score. This is the blueprint that every other architectural motif will be built upon.

What mood does this sound Evoke? Support? Conjure? How is it relevant to the reaction we desire from the audience? Is it true to theme? How does it conclude its statement, phrase, etc? Where have we left the audience emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically at the end of these pseudo resolutions?

If we think of our roll as designers in this caption in purely literary terms, then we begin to see where the “sentence” begins and ends...how to punctuate. What is the goal of the “paragraph” the “chapter”. Find the emphatic moments in the score as a whole, organize your priorities visually within the context of those musical demands and always ask the

TRINITY QUESTIONS Enhance? Support?Detract?

Use of Audio-Visual Balance/Blend/Focus - The Finesse Tool

The ultimate goal of most art is to create a didactic product. Something that educates, elevates or entertains.

If we accept the marching band idiom as an ART form, then the rules of engagement and production are completely opened to all possibilities.

The goal of this element of REPERTOIRE is to utilize all the elements of production, line color, space, speed, technique, dance, landscape etc in perfect harmony with music, rhythm, meter, melody, mood, dynamic etc to complete the whole. Where does the visual begin and the music end? They are one entity with a multitude of facets.

Focus is the heart beat of any production confined by a frame. In my personal life I often finish paintings in the frame which I propose to hang them in. This allows me to adjust for environment, color, light and texture. The image MUST sit comfortably within the confines of the design space.

Once the stage is defined creating focus become a little tricky for the visual components of the REP.

For example a well constructed show based on the mathematics of the score may not at all embrace the artist heart of the piece. Mathematical and musical are two very different words, processes and results.

A simple rule of thumb in looking at the over all design is “Do I see what I hear”? “Do i hear what I see?

There is no hard and fast rule that one solo dancer must circle and entice the solo trumpet, but it works on the most elemental level, now expand that fact. If motion or some visual texture in and or around the musical focal point is utilized, it will bring a harmonious and

effortless focus to your viewers experience at a more complex and advanced level and there-
for ENHANCE your theme and effect.

Continuity and Unity - The Audience's Tool

The cliché answer is to say, “Every good show will have a beginning, middle and end” that is the same as saying a home must have a “floor, a roof and walls”...fundamentally correct at best but uninhabitable physically or emotionally.

I think that a great example of the above is a well constructed roller coaster. In comparison to current marching band trends:

It has a slow and peaceful beginning that calms and lulls the traveler into a quasi comfort zone. Very little sound generation, rhythmic clicking, a sense of being drawn into something bigger than ones self and BAM up the first hill.....the ride has obvious physical highs and lows, intensity and passivity...and always concludes with a big last statement and sets you free to digest the experience of not being in control of any single nor combined moment of the experience.

A great show design works in exactly the same way. Hook them, hush them, and involve them on a well designed ride that has all the elements of speed, texture, color, emotional, excitement and sound at ever dynamic level.

These elements, in a fortunately constructed show, will have a natural flow to them, a unity that is not compromised by short detours down fruitless side streets, tangents that pull the audience into another story line, mood or genre.

Again, every choice should hold up to the trinity assessments.

Appropriate use of Movement/Form/Color - The Mechanic's Tool

“Appropriate” is always one of those that force you to actually judge. It creates an environment where you have to discern between acceptable, appropriate, un- or in- and literally call upon your training, knowledge and life experience to move forward.

It is easy to respond to what we perceive as obviously suspect in the context of how these components are used but it is also an element of the caption where we question design choices and not just their result. That tends to be taken as a more personal assessment.

A few elemental factors in leading you to a broader more open conclusion are below:

1- Was the M/F/C sympathetic to the passage in which they existed simultaneously?

2- Was one element better than another? Was there a true sense of plan and unity?

3- Look for secondary and tertiary layers of design in this area. “A rip your heart out Tango with red flags” APPROPRIATE now how, where and when those flags were used, placed or related to the action of the focal point can elevate the product of that particular moment

4- Be aware of shows that are so caught up in doing things to achieve purposes of outer value that they forget the inner value. You design, educate and entertain from the inside out.

Effect of any kind is the result of solid planning, training, consistent pedagogy and meticulous exploration into your desired communication