



**Texas Bandmasters Association  
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**Marching Design for Small Schools**

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In the ever-evolving world of marching band show design, how do small schools keep pace?

Do you need a five or six-figure budget with all the bells and whistles, or can effective design be achieved within a modest amount?

What strategies are needed for planning an effective show that will appeal both to your Friday night crowd and judges on Saturday?

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## ➤ Evaluation

### Music Ability Of The Ensemble

-Be realistic about your band's ability:

*What can you play sitting down?*

*Count on the 80%, not the 20%*

*Soloists (understudies), Small Groups, and how to pick them.*

*What is the relative "age" of your band?*

-What UIL/TMEA/ATSSB "Concert Contests" tell us:

*How did your band do at All-Region/Area/State Auditions?*

*How well do you do Solo & Ensemble?*

*Jazz Band? Winter Guard? Percussion Ensemble?*

*What did you play at Concert & Sight-reading Evaluations? How did it go?*

*TMEA Honor Band and/or ATSSB OPS Process*

### Marching Ability

-Experience level of your band?

*Do you march 8<sup>th</sup> graders?*

*Do you have more underclassmen than normal?*

-Section by section

*Do you use alternates?*

*Do you have strong sections?*

-Program Development

*Does your program have a firm grasp of fundamentals?*

*Do you have written out marching procedures?*

## Resources

### -Inventory

*What equipment do you have?*

*Instruments, Guard Equipment, Props*

### -Financial

*What can you spend and last the year?*

### -Staff

*Marching Techs*

*Guard Techs*

*Music Techs*

*Leadership Training*

### -Transportation

*Can you get the props or pieces of equipment to the show?*

*How will you load it?*

*How will you get it on the field?*

## ➤ Design Leader

### How we used to do things - one extreme

Head Director selects “stock” show

Head Director hires drill writer (might even be the director!)

Head Director selects design elements (guard uniforms, silks, visuals? props?)

### How we do things now - the other extreme

Program Coordinator selects show concept from scratch

Coordinator oversees all aspects of the creative process

Coordinator hires arrangers, sound designers, choreographers, drill writer

Coordinator handles music licensing

Coordinator selects design elements (all things guard, props, aesthetic, etc)

### Program Design is a Spectrum (not two sides of a coin)

Most programs are somewhere between the two extremes

How involved is the Head Director?

How involved are other educational stakeholders (additional directors, techs, etc)

Where does the buck stop?

## ➤ Show Concept

Know your community, your administration, and the average “non-band” football game audience member when planning your show.

New waves of style & adjudication: Engagement - the intersection of entertainment and education.

What is the pebble in the pond? (“Wouldn’t it be cool, if...?”)

Making responsible “winter” decisions to allow for a smooth summer and fall.

Can someone, on the first time that they view it, tell exactly what they are supposed to be focused on in your show?

## ➤ Story Boarding

Break the show into movements.

Have a music idea for each movement. (Playlists)

If you have a specific song, be able to tell the composer / arranger what it is in that song that you like.

Pacing

Impact points and recovery points

Variety

Do you have body work/ choreography in mind?

If contest is important to your program, keep the judge sheet in mind.

Make sure you give them what they are looking for.

Look at the rubric (They will be)

Who is your audience?

(Both Friday night and Saturday)

Is this entertaining to the audience?

Keep in mind, these are the people who vote on bonds.

Will they be able to follow it.

## ➤ Music

### Music Selection

### New Custom Show versus Stock Customizable Show

Budget

Regional Protection

If hiring an arranger for a Custom Show, ask these questions:

- What is the timeframe to hire an arranger?
- What sort of reputation does the arranger have?
- Do we need a “name” arranger?
- What does it cost and what is the guaranteed timeframe?
- When does this person expect to be paid?

If buying a stock show, consider these concepts:

- Take the time to really study the score
- Seek out the opinion of those who’ve done the show before and/or watch videos
- Don’t let the Grade Level sway you too much
- What things might you want to have customized in your show?
- Customization Reality: it’s better to make something easier than it is to make it harder.

### Music Licensing

- Much easier than it used to be.
- Might be more affordable than you think.
- DO NOT use music without getting the licensing!

### General Effect & Pacing

- What is General Effect?
- What General Effect is NOT.
- What are the 3-5 things you want the audience to remember about your show?
- Effects are created in the Storyboarding process.
- How does the musical arrangement create and lead into the effect?
- Tightness of Pacing.
- Variety of Scoring.

## ➤ Drill

### What to send the drill writer?

- Numbers
- Resources (Scores, Recordings)
- Timeline (When are you planning on teaching what?)

### Do not let the drill writer ruin the music with the drill.

- Moving on challenging passages.
- Timing issues

### Outline / Count Sheet

- This will probably be done by the drill writer.
- Make sure there is one.

### Choreography

- The guard choreographer and drill writer need to work together.
- Plan out your horn line visual well before rehearsal.
- Make sure your techs / leadership can perform the choreography.

## ➤ Extra Issues

### Guard Uniforms

- Sizing
- Fit
- Appropriate for your community

### Props

- Do you need them?
- Dealing with wind
- Put together / take apart time

### Logistics

### Power

- What do you need for what you are powering?
- What is allowed where you are going?
- Is there power supplied and can it handle your system?