MARCHING BAND SHOW DESIGN TIPS FOR SMALLER BANDS

by

Larry Price

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Music Education at Lindenwood University

March 2021, Larry Scott Price

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Music Department in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Music Education at Lindenwood University

By

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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Marching Band Show Design Tips for Smaller Bands

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This project takes an in depth look at the marching band scoring system in the attempt to aid small school bands. The adjudicator sheets of the competitive marching band circuit were evaluated to see what criteria judges are looking for in a performance. To attain the highest scoring rating, it seems that the performance needs to be original, captivating, and executed with high accuracy based on the research. The first two expectations, original and captivating, are objective to the individual and require custom elements, referred to as non-performance variables throughout the paper. This paper sought to find what judges look for and offer suggestions to aid small schools in the scoring process as compared to larger ensembles.

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Intro

The world of competitive marching band offers bountiful opportunities for young musicians across the nation to perform in a unique context and receive meaningful feedback. It is also an unrivaled opportunity to gain exposure to a variety of bands from different regions and skill levels. However, this all-inclusive and competitive activity comes with high demands from performers, directors, and judges. These demands extend outside of the performance itself for the competing band programs. The variables taking place outside of performance, are considered non-performance variables.

Loosely defined, marching band is an ensemble of instrumental musicians who perform various musical selections while moving in a coordinated manner. While there is not necessarily one set style or expectation for what marching band is in modern society, it is rather defined within the modern competitive marching circuit. When a competitive marching band travels to a festival, they are expected to use elements, such as music, marching visualization, body movement, color guard, uniforms, and props, to communicate a show title or theme. Performers may adopt characters or roles throughout their performance to connect even further with their audience.

While creativity carries great significance in the implementation of a marching show, the groups are also expected to present their show with increasing excellence throughout the season. At every festival, there are judges evaluating whether or not the show was done well and if the elements discussed previously are successful in communicating the intent of the show to the audience. In recent years, an increasing number of bands have been integrating props of various shapes or sizes into their performances.. It has also been common practice for judges to evaluate the effectiveness of these props. Bands have even expanded the palette of timbres explored in

marching band shows to include electronic instruments that require full size mixers and audio engineers. Modern marching band has certainly evolved even within the past 10 years.

When a band goes to competition, they are often judged in the categories of musical performance, music general effect, visual performance, and visual general effect (Music for All, 2018). Judges are often assigned to one of these categories as a member of a panel of judges. Their job is to assign a numerical value to the quality of implementation a band was able to achieve in their assigned category. In addition to a numerical value, they are responsible for offering feedback that is meant to help the band strengthen their show presentation and advance their skills throughout the competitive season.

With all of this in mind, an inspection of the elements being judged at marching festivals holds potential for an unintentional bias. Competitive marching band is an incredibly beautiful combination of artistic creativity and military precision. What this does is essentially create a war between objectivity and subjectivity. Artistry fits no mold, but military precision consistently solicits black and white answers. The potential issue lies within the scoring of the artistry of the activity. So much of what is expected and/or effective artistically may be a variable completely disassociated from the performance.

With an entirely new frontier of artistic license and opportunities on the horizon for modern marching bands, it almost seems foolish not to explore them. It is unlikely that any director would not want to better communicate their show, enhance their visual presentation, create greater musical opportunity, and place higher at festivals. However, when we take a step back and evaluate the impact of these marching band elements, are they really what is boosting the score, or is it just pure in-the-moment performance ability by the ensemble?

Some of these additional artistic elements are considered non-performance variables. Whether or not a band has props, electronic instruments, a mixer, or any addition outside of the performer's ability ultimately boils down to availability of resources. There are bands who simply do not have access to these element additions and have no avenue through which to acquire them. Are these bands paying the price through the scoring system as a result, or is objectivity reigning in the current scoring system? If these bands are being penalized as a result, what can directors do to accommodate for these non-performance variables impacting their band's score?

Through the unpacking of this topic, there was an evaluation of the judging criteria to seek exactly what it is they are looking for. Following this evaluation, the non-performance variables that seem to have manifested as point reductions in the bands who are lacking them will be discussed. Finally, there will be offered some specific, practical advice to directors to help accommodate for not having them.

Literature Review

Competitive marching bands have continued to increase in popularity since the 1920s, and the use of competitive marching band has had a positive effect on participating students (Antos, 2019). Antos' (2019) survey of students who participated in marching band during the 2015 season in Illinois found that they feel the competitive marching band has a positive impact on their educational and musical pursuits. Many students say that competitive marching band improved their musical ability, increased their motivation, and provided a rich social experience. Students have also been recorded saying they had felt embarrassed of their performance, wished they were a part of a different band, and even considered quitting marching band all together

(Antos, 2019). How can an activity have polar opposite effects on students? Antos' (2019) research says the effect depends on their band's success, in regards to festival ratings. A comparison of scores of the 2018 BOA Grand Nationals and St. Louis Regionals showed this negative effect may be more prominent in smaller bands (BOA, 2018 Grand National Championships at Indianapolis, IN, 2018; BOA, 2018 St. Louis Super Regional Championship at St. Louis, MO, 2018).

This literature review sought to find if research existed showing the correlations of non-performance variables and festival placements. This was evaluated in three sections; what judges are looking for in a performance, non-performance variable effects on final ratings, and suggested ways to improve ratings for groups who are affected through best practices and show considerations.

Judges Expectations

As we assess all students in our classrooms, we show objectivity and grade specifically on the work we are handed or evaluating. This same objectivity should extend to music performance venues. This provides an equal, unbiased evaluation of the performance (Saunders & Holahan, 1997). "When students are assessed as a requirement for entrance into an ensemble, attempts are made to bring a more objective level of measurement to the evaluation of instrumental performances" (Saunders & Holahan, 1997).

The need for the unbiased evaluation described in Saunders' & Holahan's research tells the reader there must be an appropriate rubric for the evaluation. Alvarez-Diaz (2020) suggested the need for a fair evaluation tool for musical contest. Musical adjudication usually shows differences between judges. Anyone who assesses or judges in any marching setting and

provides a score uses a rubric of some sort to keep scoring consistent from group to group. The use of an appropriate rubric helps close the gap of differences between judges. He also suggested that subjectivity is inherent and is further complicated by any non-musical variable (Alvarez-Diaz, 2020). He advocated for an appropriate rubric to be used during musical competition adjudication. Further research is suggested to evaluate the current rubrics for music performances and offer modifications, as necessary.

This is particularly important when judging performances. The reliability or consistency of judges in these settings was checked to help aid this research, as to find what it is judges are looking for and apply those to marching band show designing. To check the reliability of adjudicators, the evaluation of rubrics and inter-judge reliability have been conducted. The findings are promising, or so they seem. Saunders' and Holahan's (1997) research showed the overall ratings of student auditions to the 1994 Connecticut All-State Band were consistent, but the individual performance quality and character showed to be less reliable. Brakel (2006) suggests these findings may be due to the fact that adjudicators are assigning an overall rating and filling in the criteria-specific to fit that overall rating, leaving little diagnostic feedback as to what made the performance poor or excellent. Brakel (2006) concluded that overall festival ratings appear to be reliable, while individual captions are generally found to be less reliable, suggesting the same adjudication system and problem in Arizona where this study was conducted. Which probes the question; how appropriate and accurate is the current rubric and adjudication system for marching competitions and what are they looking for?

Hash (2012) discovered there were reliability consistencies from adjudicators towards particular groups, based on size, repertoire difficulty, adjudicator expertise and adjudicator bias. The larger the ensemble and the more difficult the music, the more consistent the scores between

adjudicators were. This appeases the bias seen in adjudicators. This study focused on large ensemble contest but further supports the question of adjudicator reliability. Hash's (2012) findings also showed larger choirs earned significantly higher number of superior ratings, compared to smaller groups.

Music for All is a nation-wide organization that is for creating life-changing moments for all through music. Amongst many teaching clinics and sponsorships in America, they are the host of the Bands of America competitive circuit. Their mission is to provide a positive, lifechanging experience for all who attend. I included this organization in the literature review for the purpose of comparing scores using their adjudicator's handbook and scoring system. Many bands use the Bands of America scoring system, and the Bands of America competitions are held nation-wide, which can have a greater impact on the marching band circuit throughout the nation. The adjudicator's handbook provided by Music for All states, "coming from various backgrounds, geographics locations and regional styles, a group of judges brings a broad range of experience to a contest. Individual opinions and preferences are bound to be present. We never want to eliminate this individuality, but it is important that we have consistency" (Music for All, 2018). This sort of individual opinions and preferences puts many ensembles at a lesser advantage. A research analysis by King (2009) found that small bands did, in fact, score significantly lower that larger bands. He compared 124 bands that competed in the same association sponsored competitive circuit to ensure a fair comparison. How much personal preference is making its way into the final scores?

While most adjudicators agree on overall rating, there does seem to be some personal preference impeding those ratings. King's (2009) research found there is consistent rating reliability of judges. Does this reliability mean the same as fair? His findings revealed that 1A

(small) bands were rated significantly lower than 4A and 5A (medium to large) bands, revealing a correlation between rating and band size (King, 2009).

The gathering of local marching band competition scoring sheets was used to see what it takes to achieve Superior Rating at marching band contest. The description of the musical scoresheet explanation states that the Musical Performance- Individual section of the BOA Adjudicator's Guide describes the execution of the music as played by the individual. The Music Performance- Ensemble judges on the balance and blend of the ensemble. The Musical Performance- Effect judges the impact of the music performance (Music for All, 2018).

The description of the visual scoresheet explanation states that the Visual Performance-Individual judge the individual execution of marching technique. Visual Performance-Ensemble judges seek the ensemble with the overall best execution of the drill. General Effect Visual judge ensembles based on what is performed and how it is performed (Music for All, 2018). Is it effectively performed and does it enhance the music?

Looking the scoresheet itself, not just the description, it states, under General Effect Visual, that the performance should have "appropriate interpretation and enhancement of the music, pacing effects, creativity/imagination/originality, use of audio-visual balance/blend/focus, continuity and flow of visual ideas and effective use of movement/form/color" (Music for All, 2018). The General Effect Music scoresheet seeks "creativity and imagination, coordination and staging elements, use of time and pacing effects, appropriate range of expressions, continuity and flow of musical ideas, and contribution for enrichment/enhancement of all elements" (Music for All, 2018).

Non-Performance Variables

"The term 'nonperformance variable' refers to a characteristic of a competing marching band or its director that was not overtly evaluated by performance criteria at a contest" (Rickles, 2009). While there seems to be some bias in the adjudicators between bands of different sizes, are there other variables that come in to play? Due to budget restrictions, smaller schools and bands do not usually have the means to attain additional staff (both full time-staff and seasonal technicians), professionally written drill, music and show concepts that include prop and uniform suggestions, which may impede their ratings at contest (Rickels, 2012; Rickles, 2009).

Feldman (2011), a music educator of different levels, discusses the basic components of the marching band as the music to be played, marching band drill (specific coordinates on the field), uniforms/costumes, and props, which all need to be obtained before the band can rehearse a show for the next season, preparing for performances. Musical components (percussion, winds, and guard) need to be rehearsed separately and brought together at a later time (Feldman, 2011). Feldman suggests there needs to be at least three staff in this marching band to be able to teach effectively. Markworth (2017) suggested the foundational aspects of a marching group include a minimum of three staff, for the major differences in section teaching being the guard, percussion and wind instrument, and a budget for drill and music. The added budget for music and drill allows for a custom marching band show that is unique and entertaining. Reichl (2019) enhanced the need for the extra staff by stating that the most important aspect of a successful preseason prep is a great staff, expanding on the three to include a drum major coach, dance team, majorettes, and section leaders. The number of additional staff that made the biggest impact on scores was non-certified assistants (Rickels, 2008). The non-certified staff are hired help for the marching band season, usually referred to as technicians who assist the certified teacher at the

school in separating the band into sections for individualized instruction. These additional staff members typically specialize in one aspect of marching band, such as brass, woodwind, color guard, front ensemble, or percussion. Understandably, smaller schools would not have an included dance team and majorettes, but the suggestion is there for bands who do, and can, utilize them. In Rickels' (2008) survey, he found the marching band budget range (of the 85 directors who responded) from \$1,600 to \$8,300. Building off his previous research, which included 218 respondents, showed a median expenditure of marching bands to be \$12,000. Small bands would likely not have the budget for paid personnel to cover the different aspects the musical ensemble for effective teaching, which can waste rehearsal time if this is not planned for in advance.

Custom drill has proven to increase scores at contest. Hewitt (2000) examined the relationship between director involvement in show design, music selection, and charting drill. His findings showed that having music professionally written for the ensemble was very advantageous for higher scores at competitions (Hewitt, 2000). The customization of music writing allows the arranger to highlight strong areas of the ensemble and utilize the instrumentation of the band performing. Custom drill for the show is often preferred by directors (Hewitt, 2000). The visual aspect of marching band can affect to as much as 40% of the overall score in competition, putting a massive weight in this category (Hewitt, 2000).

The standard drill writing software, Pyware, is a very intricate and detailed program, which is why most directors source out for their custom marching band drill. If a director were to use this to write their own drill, there would need to be some learning to create the marching drill. Along with Pyware and the competency to utilize it, Steiner (2016) adds in the use of iPad or Smartphone use, instead of printed coordinate sheets. As technology increases and develops

each year, making it more accessible, the use of Smartphones and iPads in the school setting becomes more available. Steiner (2016) also suggested getting the "best in show." Props and costumes should be utilized, adding to the nonexistent budget of smaller schools.

Rickels' (2012) research found budget was not the only non-performance variable to affect scores. The budget has one of the largest impacts, however, because it encompasses so many aspects of the marching band realm (2012). Adjudicators do not look at an ensemble and place them lower just because they do not have money. The predetermining of their max rank comes by number of props or uniform/costume, in comparison to other bands (Rickles, 2009). The predetermined factor then becomes an assumption that the band with less resources will not be as good as one with the resources.

Band size is a big factor in predetermining rank (Rickels, 2012). Rickels (2012) findings showed that band size and higher levels of staffing have repeatedly been correlated with higher rankings in competitions. School size has not shown much variance, but since band size and school size are usually correlated, they can be seen as the same effect, depending on where the source of funding comes from, such as per student capital (fund raising). The effects of budget and band size on competition scores are more pronounced (Rickels, 2012; Perrine, 2016).

Schools in certain demographics tended to have a higher probability to scoring well in competitions. O'Leary (2016) examined the demographic of finalists in the Bands of America Grand Nationals form 2001-2013. He found that bands from numerous states had school sizes ranging from 1,262 to 4,443. When compared to their state's school average, each band was above that average (O'Leary, 2016). The schools also in or near urban areas and had higher economic means than the state average (O'Leary, 2016; Rickels, 2012).

Rickels' (2012; 2009) findings present a model that can predict up to 50% of scoring variance without hearing the bands' performance. All these variables are outside the control of the director and band. Why would these factors be determining placements? Are small bands forever out of finals? Is Box 5 reserved for bigger bands? With the current rubrics collected for this research, yes. There are ways to close the gap with some strategic planning and effectiveness on the director's teaching and show prep.

Suggestions to Close the Gap

The first thing a director can do to encourage their ensemble is to define success in a marching band season. Antos (2019) offers multiple ways directors, administrators, and community members define success. As the director, it is your job to define this for your students. The suggestions are evaluating your bands' effort, longitudinal improvement, divisional rating, degree of musicianship, and number of trophies won (Antos, 2019). For smaller groups, based on the research, err on the side of effort and degree of musicianship. Sussman (2013) supports this with an interview of three directors on maximizing the outcome of festivals. One interviewee said, "for directors of less mature or beginning program, feedback is needed in order to aid in growth" (Sussman, 2013). An interviewee also stated that success should be measured by student learning (Sussman, 2013).

Planning for enough rehearsals throughout the season may promote better chances of higher ratings. Of the 169 bands Davis (2000) surveyed, the majority of bands that earned superior ratings rehearsed two or more days per week and practiced for 1-3 hours after school. The findings did not show significant correlations to contest ratings, but they did stack in favor of superior ratings (Davis, 2000). While the length of time does not show much significance, the rehearsal focus does seem to improve ratings. Superior bands reported more time spent on music

fundamentals, instead of marching fundamentals (Davis, 2000). Implementing teaching resources, such as "The Breathing Gym," yield higher levels of musicality, better physique, improvements in ensemble sounds and mental benefits (Alsop, 2018). Utilizing proper breathing techniques enhances the product and keeps students in better mental and physical states to promote a healthy learning environment. A band that enjoys what they do will work for the greater good.

As the season progresses and students advance in their musical maturity, special awareness on the field becomes more prominent than "dots" (specific drill coordinate). The "dot" is a vital part of learning drill, but as the season progresses, students should learn to see how they fit in the picture, which is an important aspect of cleaning a show (making the marching and music look nice) (Ma., 2018). Ma (2018) followed an ensemble and their learning procedures. Ma (2018) found that there is more than just learning the show. It is being a part of what is happening, belonging to the show. Find ways to get your students immersed in the band family.

The director themselves need to take responsibility in their abilities to improve ratings as well. One of those components is years on the job, and we cannot progress that. But the highest level of degree held and best practices can be improved upon. Directors with advanced degrees shows higher likelihood of attaining superior ratings (Davis, 2000).

Director personality has also shown to have positive effects on marching contest ratings.

Groulx (2010) and Montemayor (2014) found that director personalities can affect marching contest ratings, conducting technique, time efficiency, music concept learning, imagination, modesty, cheerfulness, and anxiety. Some have positive effects and others negative. Anxiety will lead to the ability to not be able to manage all tasks required to run a marching band. Being too modest or humble may lead to passing up opportunities to show case your students' talent

(Groulx, 2010). This was included not to suggest either the director needs to change, or the director is destined for poor scores if they do not display the positive traits stated above. This was stated to bring awareness to the director to see their tendencies, so they can make conscious decisions based on their personality. There is a healthy balance.

Some amazing new technology is available to make it easier to generate and get drill to students. As reference earlier in this paper, Pyware is the go-to drill writing software. It is a little expensive, but once it is purchased, the school does not need to worry about it again. As with many computer software, new editions with upgraded features are released. Upgrading to the latest version will have an upgrade fee, which depends on the previous version of Pyware the buyer already has. The director does not have to upgrade each time, but eventually, there will be a need of purchasing a newer edition, as support for older versions become unavailable. The director should immerse themselves in best drill writing practices and experiment with what works for their band. If the director chooses writing their own drill, using Pyware or finding a drill writer they can afford, the students can access the drill files on their personal Smartphones or iPad with the use of the Pyware App (Tasoff, 2017). Schools can save on paper by asking students to get this free app. Student then will be able to see the big picture any time and see how they fit into the form.

There is beauty in marching band. Marching band involves both aural and visual aesthetics if the director takes the time to understand these values and teach them to their ensemble. By helping the students understand the artistic elements and principals of the overall effect of the show, there may be a higher level of performance (Heselton, 2011). The director will also then be able to relay the beauty they want to see in their show to the drill/show

designer, if their budget allows. If not, the director has a deeper grasp on the beauty that lies within this side of music education.

Recording and evaluating the band has never been easier (Criswell, 2014). By recording the band, the director can assess where the next rehearsal focus needs to be. The use of Charms allows the directors to take rehearsal attendance quickly, providing more actual rehearsal time, stores and provides quick access to student and parent contact info, fundraising tracking, instrument check out, event scheduling and much more (Criswell, 2014). This resource allows the director to focus more on the band side of their job. This comes in particularly handy for the small schools with only one director.

Markworth (2017) offers many suggestions for small bands in his book, *The Dynamic Marching Band*. A suggestion is to set clear, attainable goals for the ensemble. If the small band is just entering marching band, incrementally set goals. Examples would be Year 1: develop playing skills; Year 2: continue playing skills and add marching skills; and Year 3: combine to march a show. Utilize the numbers you have. The band should be balanced, not having more highs and mids than lows. The director should select the show and arrangements that will suit the ensemble. In drill writing, space out the band a little more on wide effects, portion off the field to make the band look bigger, and space out the guard for bigger wash effects. (Markworth, 2017).

Addair's book, *Small Band Big Results*, offers more details detail than Markworth's general suggestion. Addair tells the director to work with what they have, not what they have experienced or wished you had. If the director sees what they have in front of them, they can work to make accommodations to help the band sound and look better. The need for quality leadership is of vital importance in all performing groups. (Addair, 2017). Typically, bands have one section leader and then a drum major. The chances of a smaller band to have experienced

leaders who are great musicians and qualified to lead other is significantly less than that of larger groups.

Addair puts large emphasis on the "wow" moments of the show. He states stock shows lack the "wow" moments. Only through proper planning can the show have those higher General Effect scores (Addair, 2017). Both visual and musical general effects scores keep the audience engaged in the show. The ability to have music written for your group allows the director to have different performance difficulty per section and even to each part (Addair, 2017). This allows the director to increase their potential to be successful. The book further outlines the pros and cons of specific instrument use, balance and scoring suggestions for smaller groups.

Visually, the field should be sectioned off, to give the band a larger presence. A lot of the suggestions made in the book are to create contrasting size. By creating larger spacing, the ensemble will appear larger as well. Staggering blocks give the illusion of a larger group as well (Addair, 2017). There are some things to avoid in a smaller group. Staging the guard needs to be a forethough, not and afterthought. With a smaller guard, the effects of a wash, guard behind the band creating a colorful backdrop through their work, is not as impactful. So, integrating the guard into the form, as well as filling dead space in shapes, is suggested (Addair, 2017).

Given the information of what judges are looking for, non-performance variables, and now ways to plan for effective rehearsals to overcome the obstacles, the small band has options to increase the festival scores. Rickles (2008) says the accommodations are not enough. There needs to be a change in the criteria for each classification to set achievable standards, so each student can experience success.

Methodology

Due to the unique nature of evaluating competitive marching band, a large variety of information needed to be gathered. As previously mentioned, the evaluation process should be objective, but it is an artistic expression being evaluated by humans that easily becomes subjective. As a result, qualitative, quantitative, primary, and secondary sources were accumulated. Additionally, descriptive information on specific show elements that provide examples and understanding for the associated implications to the topic will be presented. No experimental studies were conducted for this research.

The information that needed to be gathered ranged from scoring system examples, scoring results, band classifications, show elements, and the finer workings of marching band show preparation. To begin, scoring sheets from various festivals were gathered to get a better understanding of what exactly judges were looking for. These sheets are physically filled out on the field with each band to provide feedback and evaluate what score would be appropriate for that specific performance.

With the individual judges' scoring sheets, the ability to take an in depth look at each category (or caption) made it possible to figure out if there is any greater emphasis on one band over another, or fallacies in objectivity. They offered clarification of not just the categories being scored, but also what the defining "goals" or characteristics are that have been set for bands in that category. This allowed the opportunity for inspection of how realistic the goals are. In an all-inclusive activity, such as marching band, it is worth determining if the scoring system presents a realistic chance for success for all bands.

With an understanding of how bands are scored, that gave significantly more insight into scores from various festivals. Trends started to emerge from the various non-performance variables previously mentioned. Through the gathering of numerous score placement result sheets published directly by marching festivals, tracing whether or not any trends emerged within the data was made obvious. This information allowed a direct correlation to be formed between contest scores and band characteristics.

These festival score results allowed for direct correlations of scores to show elements and/or resources to be formed. This is where scores start to directly relate to show elements. Any trends that exist within scoring and show elements will start to emerge and can be related to scoring. The scores, coupled with the judge's sheets, revealed whether or not the judges are truly scoring what their scoring systems are looking for. However, if the judges are staying true to their scoring sheet and operating without bias, there is a chance that there is a fallacy within the overall scoring system waiting to be exposed by trending data.

All trends and data considered, the shortcomings impacting band scores can often be directed back to non-performance variables. At this point, it could be determined what exactly is and is not within the performers', director's, and/or program's realm of control. This can range anywhere from budget, personnel, school size, or band size. With every non-performance variable that impacts show quality comes a lack of some sort of resource. Once that is identified, it can initiate some frustration and discouragement. However, this paper was planned to present a means through which a band can potentially compensate for the lack of resources to fill the resulting void from the missing show element. I wanted to take the understanding of what the judges are proven to be looking for from the gathered data and present a way to counter this issue.

Bands cannot make the resources for these show elements appear out of nowhere, but they can try to compensate for what they are missing and/or draw attention to what they have, versus what they lack. The major identified areas where bands see points deducted as a result of non-performance variables, which were taken to make a strategy to present the show element to some extent. As previously mentioned, marching band utilizes great amounts of artistry, which means there is great flexibility in the delivery of show content. This information was synthesized into effective techniques and strategies that are adaptable within the artistry of marching band to help better deliver show content that meets the expectations of the objective evaluations.

The drill that was produced as part of this thesis in Appendix A was written for a composition called Chronometry, by Key Poulan. Chronometry has three movements:

Grandfather Clock, Hourglass, and Stopwatch. The intended theme of the show is centered around time and clockwork. The design and drill concepts that are presented are based around this particular show. The application of these strategies manifested in this production as moving clocks and similar visual ideas. Additionally, strategic design, utilization, and placement of props were implemented, to further emphasize the theme of clocks set forth by the composition.

Discussion

The focus of this discussion has three main components that ultimately come together to form my research question and conclusion: understanding the existing scoring system, understanding non-performance variables, and the resulting implications of non-performance variables in festival scoring. The fundamental issue that needs to be discussed is what appears to be a major flaw in the current marching band scoring system as a whole. When we take a step back, it is clear that there is a rather strong bias in the scoring system that is most likely to impact small bands. With the understanding that change on such a large scale is an incredibly difficult task, what can these bands, who fall subject to this bias, do while the current system remains in place?

Marching band presents a unique take on competition because it is a combination of the artistic and the technical. It is an activity where militaristic precision meets expressiveness, and no two performances are clean-cut comparisons. As a result, there is a borderline unavoidable subjectivity to the artistic appeal of marching band when it comes to judging. After all, the judges are humans with preferences, previous experiences, and specific knowledge bases that change the lens through which they perceive competitive marching band.

When judging a band, the score sheets that were collected largely focus on music, visual, and general effect. A judge will have a specific area that they are responsible for observing, giving feedback, and scoring. This prevents the judge from getting consumed with the overall experience of the performance. As they evaluate what the band is and is not doing well in their given area, they will deduct points and give specific feedback with strategies to improve via voice recording and/or physical notes throughout the performance. The ultimate goal is for

students to have a positive musical experience where they have the opportunity to learn and grow.

However, what if the opportunity is not an actual opportunity for all bands? What if a band does not have the available resources to take their performance to the next level because the true issue exists outside of the performance and the football field? Every season, bands across the country struggle with non-performance variables. Non-performance variables are the behind-the-scenes factors that impact a band's performance, regardless of musical ability.

For example, a band of 60 students may perform equally as well as a band of 120, but they will often score lower at festivals. Due to only having 60 members, this band will not have the same amount of power and/or volume, which can result in a lower musical score.

Additionally, a visual judge may look out over a band of and instantly see two students out of step. This would be a score deduction. However, in the band of 120, they can have four students out of step, and they are likely to be camouflaged by the sheer size of the group. They are less likely to be noticed even though the same percentage of students are out of step in both bands.

While foot timing is certainly a skill that needs assessed by judges and is the responsibility of the band director, the ease of which it is noticed is not the band's fault. They can come from a school with half of the enrollment of the larger band. That is a factor outside of their performance over which they have no control.

Also, worth mentioning are the non-performance variables that are within the realm of control of the directors and/or band members. There are certainly areas where bands are deducted points as a result of their show (being what they had to present), rather than the performance itself. It is at this point that directors must ask themselves what they can do in

addition to cleaning and improving their show throughout the season. Is there a way to apply a judge's feedback, while also boosting their rating from the subjective point of view?

With the understanding that bias exists in the scoring system and scores are not just a result of the band's performance, it makes sense to identify where the non-performance variable losses are and find a way to compensate. A band may not be able to grow from 60 to 120 members in the span of a season, but is there a way they can make 60 sound like 120 or be as visually appealing as 120?

Common non-performance variables that are subject to bias, due to the current scoring system, are band size, budget, and resources. Smaller bands are often victims of this scoring bias because every mistake worthy of deduction is easier to see and hear from the audience's perspective. If a trumpet player cracks a note, audience members and judges are a lot less likely to be heard in a large trumpet section of ten or more than in a section of two or three. The same applies to the example of noticing out of step performers mentioned earlier. It is easier to notice because there is a smaller crowd, and the individuals are more likely to catch your eye. The director can use this to their advantage.

Additionally, the vast majority of bands in today's competitive circuit are using props to better enhance the effect of their show. Props certainly bring excitement and continuity to a show, but what happens when a band does not have the money to buy them? Maybe there is a possibility they don't even have a band-parent organization to provide the labor to make them themselves. Should these bands score lower in general effect for not having props? The reality is that scoring biases similar to this exist and are currently happening. What can a band director do?

Project Thought Process During Design

For this project, it was decided to write a show consisting of a band that would fall into the 2A Class category, between 51 and 74 members on the field. Using a somewhat smaller band size reinforces the idea that the following concepts are accessible to smaller groups, as well as those with fewer "professional" resources. I intentionally wrote on the lower end of this number to get closer to 1A Class classification. The band in the example is 52 members in the following instrumentation: Flute- 6, Clarinet- 6, Alto Saxophone- 4, Tenor Saxophone- 2, Bari Saxophone- 1, Trumpet- 7, Mellophone- 3, Trombone- 6, Tuba- 2, Snare- 2, Quints- 1, Bass Drums- 4, Guard- 7, Pit- 10. This instrumentation was modified slightly from examples of stock drill numbers for small bands (Poulan, n.d.).

Music Selection

The music selection is one of the most important components in a marching band show. The director should approach musical selection with intentionality and consideration of who in the audience they consider most important to reach. Is the purpose of your performance entertainment value at community at football games or competing at marching festivals? Does the show need to accomplish both? This will ultimately determine what your musical goals are for the season. An effective show will be one that accomplishes its intended purpose and is appropriate rigor that pushes ensemble musicianship.

When compiling a marching show, one of the first decisions regarding music is where to acquire it. This can be daunting because there are so many options available to today's band directors. Directors can have new pieces commissioned, new arrangements written, or purchase stock music from a publishing company. With the first two options often being rather costly,

purchasing music from a publisher is common practice. The search began with music at GPG Music, a marching band show writing company.

Companies like GPG are appealing because you can purchase complete show packages or pick and choose what you would like. This is beneficial because it is almost like al-la carte marching band show shopping, where the director can take what they want and leave what they do not need, according to your budget. For example, the director can decide to purchase just the wind parts for a show but have different percussion parts written. Or, they can even have them produce drill and uniform concepts for them. A recently written show, as of the date of this paper, can cost as much as \$1,995 for the music score. However, many of the music scores are at, or under, \$1,000. There were only 2 options at GPG Music under \$500 for smaller/developing groups. Keeping school programs with limited funds in mind, the search for less expensive options continued.

The search broadened to JW Pepper, a sheet music distribution company well known and used in the music world. JW Pepper is a large company with a vast musical selection from various genres for most ensembles. They had some full-show music packages also carried by GPG Music and similar companies. The online store was explored in an effort to piece together a cohesive show with band arrangements they had readily available. After browsing through their available options, many of the marching band arrangements found were arrangements of pop songs and could be pieced together for roughly \$160-\$240 for three musical selections.

Fundamentally, the focus of marching band is the music being performed. When considering the elements of a marching show, it becomes apparent that everything is meant to support or enhance what is happening musically. This leads some to believe that music selection is an area of the show design that is worth prioritizing funding. With that in mind, it is strongly

recommended that directors make quality musical selection an achievable goal through whatever means they have available. Even if it requires fundraising to acquire quality music that will remain interesting and challenging throughout the marching band season, it will pay dividends as they craft the rest of the show and seek to elevate the musical skill level of their band. Trying to drastically cut costs on music will likely result in a show that could be hurtful in the competitive circuit and not suit the needs of the ensemble well.

The less expensive compositions are often pop songs with limited educational value and novelty aesthetic. Additionally, pop songs pose an issue that a traditional arrangement would not, familiarity. Knowing the original version of a pop song arranged for marching band often results in students abandoning written rhythms for what they heard in the original, and the audience can now easily error detect during the band's performance. Outside of the band's performance, sometimes a pop song arrangement does not sit well with an audience because the arrangement may not be quality or resemble the original as much as the audience expects of prefers. As a result, it is advised against using arrangements of pop songs in the competitive circuit.

Having thoroughly explored JW Pepper, the search continued with another marching band show writing company, Key Poulan. Mr. Poulan has over 18 years of experience in public school teaching and 30+ years composing/arranging music, many for drum corps--think professional marching band. While searching his website for marching shows, it could be noted that most of the shows offered come in three orchestrations: full instrumentation, reduced instrumentation, and simplified version. The idea of the different instrumentations was preserving the primary melodic ideas, as the orchestration is reduced to offer bands what is essentially power in numbers. A more complex orchestration that has more independent parts often works well for larger bands because they have more personnel to cover each part. This

allows for stronger players to create an environment where less confident players feel confident in playing along with the stronger players affirming them musically. They can play confidently, knowing they are correct, with the stronger players' examples to guide them. There is a margin for error in those larger groups, since there are more people on each part. This is beneficial because an orchestration with more parts is more complicated and leaves more room for error with synchronization across the ensemble.

In a smaller ensemble, there is more exposure for each player because they possess less personnel. This elevates the level of accountability for each player. For example, an arrangement orchestrated for eight different parts may have eight to forty players per part in an ensemble. This gives some significant margin for players to fall in or out throughout the performance. It would likely go unnoticed and largely not impact the ensemble. However, for a small band that this paper focuses on, that becomes roughly four to twenty players per part or less. However, if the number of parts were cut in half, the safety and confidence in numbers situation mentioned previously is now back in play. The difficulty level of full to reduced instrumentation is the same but with fewer parts, while maintaining the melodic integrity of the piece. The simplified version becomes even more accessible by having the same number of parts as the reduced instrumentation but alters the melodic content where necessary, to reduce ranges and simplify rhythms. All the music scores for the shows on this website in all instrumentations are \$2,000.

Seeking to truly analyze the depths of the arrangements, Mr. Poulan_was contacted for the purpose of requesting his aid in acquiring scores to one of his shows. He graciously sent me the scores for this educational purpose only. He mentioned how these three versions of the music scores are interchangeable. This is hugely beneficial to directors to truly meet the needs of their students and differentiate instruction. Because the parts across the various orchestrations are

interchangeable, they can use simplified versions for developing players, reduced instrumentation for smaller sections, and full instrumentation for larger sections of the band. The three versions can be played together simultaneously, allowing players of all levels to contribute meaningfully to the performance with music of appropriate rigor.

Pre-Drill Design Process

Both of the previously mentioned marching band show design companies have package deals including drill, visuals, and guard choreography. GPG offers stock drill that they adapt for a director's band size, should they choose to purchase it. Essentially, they take the pictures and designs and make it fit the instrumentation of the purchasing ensemble. This stock drill from GPG Music costs \$1,895 and an additional \$950 for guard choreography. While these figures may seem astronomical to some budgets and minimal to others, it is worth noting that these prices are often less than hiring a professional to write these components of the show. Also, writing drill is not a common option for directors because it is a very unique skill within the field that requires expensive and complex software, as well as time to create the drill.

The research conducted for this study provides evidence that a number of bands do not have the funds to pay for a fully custom show. Additionally, budget usually translates to an insufficient number of band staff to assist with the widespread needs of the ensemble that are often unique, specific, and ongoing. A marching band season is a never-ending list of things that need attention, coming from the ensemble as a whole all the way down to individuals. In an ideal situation, there is a low student to staff ratio, allowing more needs to be met on a more frequent basis. Funding seems to be the largest non-performance variable that impacts scores (Rickels, 2012). Through the research, the conclusion was finalized, as the small number of performers itself does not directly impact scores, but more so the poor music and show design choices.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the non-performance variables, how they affect scores at contest, and extrapolate solutions to effectively equip directors with meaningful tips to enhance their performances as a result. The 1A-2A Class directors must take a different approach to their marching season teaching than that of a larger school, due to a frequent disparity in resources. The drill writing suggestions are shown in the file in Appendix A. The teaching modifications are explained later in this discussion.

Drill Design Process

When writing drill, three things guided the writing process: personal experience, recommendations from other directors, and two books which focus on small band strategies for marching band (*The Dynamic Marching Band* and *Small Band Big Results*).

Through these resources, many thoughts rolled through my head with every drill form I observed. In the past, I tended to avoid seemingly awkward passthroughs and seemingly challenging transitions. My primary objective with that choice was to keep the performer comfortable. Adding multiple variables, such as marching and playing with other musicians, is enough to make any musician overwhelmed at first. It is certainly no easy feat. However, for less confident players who still struggle with music alone, it does not necessarily get much easier. Having the performer march a straight line to their position on the field keeps the task at hand as simple and straightforward as possible. Adding things such as an adjusted path just adds another variable to the situation that may or may not even be helpful to the visual presentation at hand in that given moment.

The use of sequential effects was not used, again to keep movements direct and allow students to be confident in their movements. This narrows down the options for the performers.

At any given moment, they are either moving directly to their spot or they are holding. Props were used to section of the field. Props were thought of keeping theme in mind and what would be cheap to build.

The book *Small Band Big Results* proved to be an invaluable resource because Addair really highlights how to use smaller numbers to your advantage in ways I had not previously considered, and I am not sure I never would have. Smaller numbers may mean that visual mistakes are easy to see and create a disadvantage, but it also means mistakes are easy to see and, as a result, easy to clean. Because there is the ability to see and clean more, using more simple shapes, including circles, is very appropriate. Circles, which were something I would have previously avoided due to their difficulty to clean, then became a regularly used option, since smaller bands have the advantage of cleaning them easier. This opened a world of visual possibilities since the chosen show from Key Poulan was based around clocks.

Requiring special consideration with staging drill design is the practical utilization of the guard and drumline. The guard was used to complete pictures, draw attention to sections playing, and fill voids in shapes. Used correctly, the guard would draw the audience's attention in a positive manner to what the director wants their focus to be on. The guard serves as stewards, leading the audience to points of emphasis and demanding their attention. It was vital that the drumline was kept together so they can listen closely and effectively and maintain a tight-knit pulse for the ensemble. Generally, they move in the middle and back of the band. Generally speaking, the drumline should be kept in the middle and/or back of the band, especially as younger groups get the feel for outdoor performance. Acclimating to outdoor performance takes time, due to phasing. Phasing is when a group plays together from different physical locations, but the sound does not line up when it reaches the audience. Sound moves slowly enough that

listening to someone on the opposite side of the marching band and trying to play together will result in mismatched timing. Moving the drumline forward or more to one side can cause musical tears, where one section of the band does not align with the other.

Ultimately, all drill writers should have the music in focus while writing because that is the basis of the production. The music was the primary tool for creating the number of sets using rehearsal markers in the score. This makes it obvious to the performers when they should hit their dot and allows them to visually associate drill with what they see in their music as they practice and learn. The drill writer's goal is to set the ensemble up in a way that makes musical balance easier. Keep the musical parts close, see who has the melody and keep them in mind as you move to that section of the music. Ideally, the drill writer would physically position the melody players in a way to help facilitate their sound being the prominent one, based on how it will physically travel to the audience. Pushing the performers who will be playing the melody far away just before they are due to be the melodic feature is unwise. Also, the demands of a physical movement must be considered, to ensure it will not have a negative impact on the performers' ability to play that section well. Should they hold during the musical motif or would they be fine to move that distance? What can happen visually to enhance this section of the music while keeping physical exertion in mind? If wind players are out of breath from a drill move that is too demanding, what do you expect the musical result to be?

Special consideration to spacing is of incredible benefit in marching band, both visually and musically. It is common for members play more confidently in 2 step intervals because of proximity to be able to hear each other, but that often makes a band look very small. However, 4 step intervals horizontally carries the potential to make a band look larger and more visually appealing. This effect can be greater with larger vertical spacing, 6 steps, and staggered boxes.

Decisions regarding intervals for spacing the band can be largely dependent on the understanding of overall player confidence in various instrument and musical sections. It may be wise to compromise visual appeal for one set in exchange for a closer proximity during a more challenging musical selection. Inversely, there may be less challenging sections of music where the drill writer can take advantage of the band not needing the power in numbers confidence to really stretch the amount of visual real estate being utilized.

For guard, standard practice for spacing is six steps or larger. Spreading out the guard can also assist with making the group seem larger. However, the number of guard should inform the writing strategies used in the production. When considering whether or not to integrate the guard into the form or utilize them as a backdrop (or both throughout), thought must be given to whether or not the desired effect will be achieved. The smaller the guard, the less impactful the backdrop effect will be because the backdrop will not be large enough to have significant presence. Keeping the guard close together and placing them in vertical lines also allows for any mistakes to be magnified. Vertical lines are especially detrimental to guard visual cleanliness because the audience is now able to look down that line to micro imperfections simultaneously.

The use of open shapes was utilized more than filled shapes. Open shapes give the appearance of a larger section and generally will help smaller ensembles seem more visually appearing. Aesthetically, if a vast majority of the front half of the field remains open for the entire show, it can appear that there is not much variation in the show to the audience. Also, it must be considered that the audience is spread out through wide seating, and consistent compressed, filled forms do not accommodate the fringe audience members at all. However, when looking for impact at full band moments, filled shapes were used more often.

Lastly, theme must be communicated clearly, often, and tastefully. The theme of this show is clockwork. The music already communicates the theme well, such as when the trumpet melody moves in half notes, representing bell tones. Drill design and visual effects can enhance musical features such as these or work independently to communicate the theme. The opening set of the show is the face of a grandfather clock, where the hands are moving. Later in the production, the drill enhances the effect of the half note bell tones in the trumpets by marching in half-time (taking a step every other beat instead of every beat). That movement is an intentional way of grabbing the audience's attention with something different that directly correlates to what is happening musically. Circles sprinkled throughout the show have follow the leaders to represent the gears of a clock working independently and in conjunction with music throughout.

Suggested Teaching and Planning Techniques

Staffing is a constant issue for smaller groups. Logically, administrators cannot justify hiring multiple full-time teachers for fewer students; this also largely depends on the schools' funding. Therefore, any additional staffing comes from the band's budget. Most smaller groups can spend that money on more obvious elements, such as music and drill. A great alternative would be reaching out to local colleges with music departments, asking if any students would like to assist with their group. As stated in the drill section of this discussion, having a smaller group also allows for the director to easily spot errors; there is no place to hide.

Conclusion

The current system does have class separations, but they are all judged on the same criteria. The lower-class bands may only be able to achieve a top score of 88 in a season. The minimum score required for a superior rating, Box 5, is 93. Hopkins (2011) draws a parallel to math class. Would we score an Algebra 1 student with the same rubrics as a Calculus student? The Algebra 1 student would only be able to get a B in the class, no matter how hard they tried, implying that achieving an A is reserved for advanced placement students (Hopkins, 2011). When put in those terms, it just makes sense. The proposed change included the change of classification and judging criteria for each class. A suggestion of further research in this area is highly suggested.

Ultimately, as a band director, one must accept that some things are simply outside of your control. However, there are ways to most effectively utilize the resources you do have while providing a quality educational experience for your students and keeping in mind what the judges are looking for. I suggest keeping the biases of the scoring system in mind to best produce a show that does not highlight the non-performance variables that are holding back the band in various areas.

Show design is a huge part of countering the non-performance variables. Show design is usually influenced by budget. If done with intentionality, a director can create a show that draws the attention of the judge and/or audience to what is being done well. For example, if the band is small, taking time to be mindful of the instrumentation and orchestration or your musical selection would be beneficial. If the instrumentation is limited, the director would want to select music that does not heavily rely on high numbers of moving parts. Consider keeping the show limited to just an SATB arrangement, or the director could arrange one. When taking these

accommodations into consideration, individual players are less exposed and less noticeable if, for some reason, they made a mistake or stopped playing for a moment. There would be greater support and clarity in the different parts as well. This would translate well into musical scores. With custom arrangements, the arranger can write different grades of music, by parts or sections, to boost music scores. Custom arrangements can cost quite a bit of money, so proper planning, fundraising, and budgeting is necessary to obtain these options.

As far as visual design, the last thing the director would want to do as a small band is to emphasize the fact that the band is small. Therefore, it is important to use the field real estate well; see Appendix A for an example of this technique in use. The field was sectioned off at the hash and 30-yard lines, to keep the audience focus centered and keep the band closer together to give them more volume at impact points. Spreading the students out too far to take up more space may cause issues. Phasing becomes an issue with students spaced far apart. Also, when students are spaced far apart, it is incredibly easy to see if a student does not have clean and proper marching technique. The director should utilize this to clean drill and reinforce technique. It is wise to get creative with the surface area of the football field. If the band could afford small props or are able to gather community members to make some, they can use them to section off the field and make your performance area smaller. The audience is then focused on the stage you have created, rather than the parts of the stage you are not utilizing. Also, the performers can be closer together for strength in sound, as well as less noticeable feet.

This paper was written with the hope that the use of this research, directors, drill writers, music arrangers, and any staff that assists a small band will feel well equipped to assist. The goal is to offer suggestions that will provide small bands with ideas to enhance their marching band

season and, in turn, provide a positive, learning experience that students will enjoy while participating in music.

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Appendix A- Drill















































































































