



Conceptual Show Design Formula: Ability + Concept = Design

Part 1: Developing a show concept: Planning for successes!

By: Brad Buehring, Dan Duffield, and Mike Fogarty

Introduction

The marching activity is continuously evolving each year. Now, more than ever, there is an emphasis on creative custom show designing. Selecting and designing a show is a daunting task. A director is faced each year with a number of variables: student enrollment, performer ability, time, staff, and budget. Every director also wants a quality show that will allow for student success and educational gain. For this reason, a creative as well as custom show design becomes the ideal answer. A custom design includes a complete package of music, drill, and choreography that is uniquely created to the needs and strengths of your program; one that will bring your original show concept to life. We will explore in this series how you can reach this outcome in an efficient manner, whether you do a lot of competing or none at all.

Initial Process

When you begin planning for the marching season, the first thing to do is to create a fairly accurate student enrollment estimate, including a breakdown into sections. This will help reveal where your musical strengths and weaknesses might be. Giving you a chance to ask, “Will this be a year when my upper winds dominate, or will my low brass struggle?” From a design standpoint, a breakdown will give you a guide to the number of students you have to work with for your field visual palette, and staging needs. This will also help decide the type of music your ensemble will be able to pull off, or how the scoring within the music will need to be setup. Some pieces can be re-orchestrated or arranged and still prove to be a successful part of the show program. In other cases, the music may lose its efficacy if re-orchestrated or “watered down” too much.

Choosing your show concept is the most crucial step. It is important to realize that marching band is comprised of two different elements: the musical and the visual. Both should compliment one another. Your base concept can come from either element.

Some guidelines for choosing a show concept include:

- Soundtracks (movies, musicals, etc.)
- A general concept idea where the visual package becomes the vehicle from which that idea is made clear (“Moving Forward”, “Color”, “Energy”, etc.)
- A one-word concept uniting different tunes, and then the musical package is where the idea is made clear (*Time*: “Time Warp”, “Back to the Future”, Kodaly’s “Viennese Musical Clock”, etc.)

- Paint a picture (medieval era, World War II era, etc.)
- Tell a story, relying heavily on the guard and visual package (tragic love story, mythological tale, etc.)
- Unifying genre of music (swing, minimalist, etc.)
- Based around one piece of music (“Firebird”, “Planets”, etc.)
- Music by a single artist (Copland, Beatles, etc.)

Who designs the show?

So now you have your concept and know the abilities of your students. Where do you turn to make your drill, color guard, winds, battery, and pit percussion ideas a reality? If you have a good support staff, plenty of time, a limited budget, or a strong desire to write, perhaps you would take on this task yourself.

Another option is to try and find a pre-made show that fits your plans or chosen concept. This is an easy and usually inexpensive solution, but often does not turn out to be as successful as promised. The musical scoring is generally unbalanced to your ensemble, the drill is frequently lacking motion or coherency, the percussion parts usually need to be re-written by your percussion team, and the color guard design may not be current or exciting.

Many directors choose to subcontract out to individuals who they feel comfortable with to collaborate in designing the show. This can work, but must be heavily micro-managed to ensure that all designers are communicating with one another and are abiding by your individual program’s limitations. In addition, several subcontractors require individual paperwork and payment, adding more hassle and work for the director.

The ultimate solution is to contact a company such as Pulse Productions. We are a group of talented designers who have collaborative experience to focus exclusively on your band and your unique needs. Advantages here come with skill, working relationships, and sole accountability on one company representative. In this best-choice solution, the director is a working member of the design process. You help see the project through to the end, guaranteeing an outstanding end-product that your students will love and succeed with.

Coming Soon: Part 2: A Musical Outline: The Winds Designer

About the Authors

Brad Buehring



Brad holds a Bachelor's Degree in Percussion Performance and is currently obtaining his Masters in Music Composition Degree from the University of Louisville. He performs regularly with the New Music Ensemble, University Orchestra, Wind Symphony, and Percussion Ensemble. Brad has had an extensive career performing with many outstanding ensembles within the marching medium. Many of these include such groups as the Music City Mystique Indoor Drumline of Nashville, TN, the Colts Drum and Bugle Corps of Dubuque, IA, and the Phantom Legion Drum and Bugle Corps of Rockford, IL. Brad has acted as an arranger, designer, consultant, and educator for several high schools, drum corps, independent indoor ensembles, and the Yamaha Sounds of Summer Camp. He has acted as the Bass Drum technician, Music Director, and

Percussion Co-Caption Head for the Americanos Drum and Bugle Corps of Menasha, WI. As an active member of the Vic Firth education team, Brad works as the Percussion Director for Eastern High School in Louisville, KY as well as the Percussion Caption Head for the West Athens Indoor Drumline of Sellersburg, IN while performing other freelance percussion work and teaching throughout the Louisville area.

Dan Duffield



Dan has been an active performer and educator throughout Iowa and much of the Midwest. He obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Percussion Performance and Education from the University of Iowa where during his schooling he acted as the Percussion Director for City High School in Iowa City, IA, and assisted the Davenport Central High School Marching Blue Devils from Davenport, IA. Dan worked with several schools in the Los Angeles area while completing an internship with Yamaha Corporation of America's Band and Orchestral Division. He has been a student of many fine percussion educators such as Dan Moore, Darin Wadley, Michael Spiro, Dave Samuels, Dick Sisto, Jim Dreier, Liam Teague, Los Muñequitos de Motanzas, and several others. As an active member of the Vic Firth Education Team, Dan has taught numerous clinics, classes, and private

lessons for students of all levels. He has acted as a designer, arranger, and educator for the Americanos Drum and Bugle Corps of Menasha, WI, and for the Kilties Senior Drum and Bugle Corps of Racine, WI. Dan was a member of both the Nite Express and Colts Drum and Bugle Corps. He is an adjunct professor of music for Northwestern College, and works with the percussion programs for both MOC-Floyd-Valley in Orange City, IA, and North High School in Sioux City, IA. Currently, Dan is obtaining a Masters of Music Performance degree from the University of South Dakota.

Mike Fogarty



Mike is a graduate of the University of Illinois where he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Music Education. There he played under the direction of James Keene with marching instruction by Gary Smith. Though originally an oboe and piano player, Mike has been putting his music on the marching field since he was in high school. He performed with the Colts Drum and Bugle Corps as a mallet percussionist. Mr. Fogarty has written wind and percussion arrangements for a number of suburban Chicago schools. He also has acted as a designer, arranger, and educator for the Americanos Drum and Bugle Corps from Menasha, WI as well as the Kilties Senior Drum and Bugle Corps of Racine, WI. Mike continues to teach camps and clinics throughout the Chicago suburbs while also performing with various ensembles. He currently maintains a position as the Assistant Director of Bands at Glenbrook South High School in north suburban Glenview, Illinois.