

CREATIVE MARCHING BAND
SHOW PLANNING
WITH JIM ALLDER & BRIAN CARR

What is in this Presentation?

- Some ideas to help you and your band reach a broader audience.
- Strategies for planning creative & effective shows.
- Suggestions to help your shows be received well at a variety of venues including football games and band competitions.

What is NOT in this Presentation?

- Specific "one-size-fits-all" solutions that are guaranteed to work in every situation.
- Detailed instructions on "winning" show design that have been handed down on stone tablets by the marching band gods.
- Magic fairy dust.



You've put in the practice...



You're ready for the show!



This is how you imagine your crowd reacting...



But sometimes it's more like this..



Meanwhile, the line to the concession stand is
like...

The Problem -

Shows tend to be designed for a particular audience.

Some shows appeal more to the competition crowd and the judging community.

These shows tend to:

- *be more sophisticated and artistic.
- *usually have music and drill designed to meet expectations on judging rubrics.
- *often provide many teaching and learning opportunities.
- *but may not include music or themes relatable to the average football fan.

Some shows appeal more to the Friday night football crowd and average fans in the community

These shows tend to:

- *focus more on entertainment than artistic expression.
- *be designed around popular music with which the crowd is familiar.
- *but may not include enough depth of material to allow for thorough credit from the judging community.
- *and may only provide limited musical growth for students over the course of the season.

Because of these differences...

- Shows that are designed to do well at competitions often lose the attention of the football crowd.
- Shows that are designed to appeal to the average fan often don't have enough intricate content to score well with judges.

Some Common (differing) Solutions:

- Don't worry about how the football crowd responds. Just use Friday night as a run-through to prepare for your Saturday competition.
- Don't worry about how you score. The purpose of band at football games is to entertain, and that should be your priority.

Some Common (differing) Solutions (continued):

- Perform your artistic/creative competition show on Saturdays, but put together an easier "football game" show for Fridays that includes popular music and a few easy drill sets.

A fourth solution...

- With proper planning, it is possible to create a show that appeals to multiple audiences without sacrificing entertainment or competitive objectives.
- Advantages of this approach:
 - One show to accomplish multiple goals.
 - Students can see appreciation and success from the Friday night crowd as well as the competition audience.
 - We have found this process to be fun, rewarding, and educational for our students as well as for us as teachers.

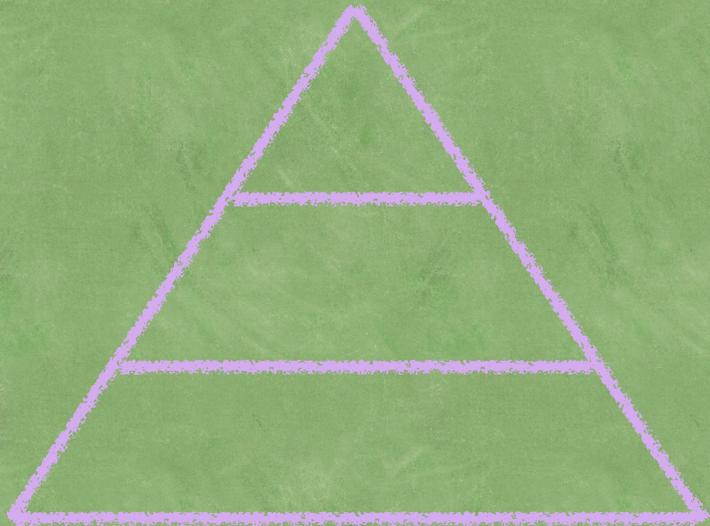
There are many different approaches to successfully designing a show.

We are not here to tell you what you should do for your band, your community, and your situation.

However, we have found a few common links between shows that appeal to multiple audiences.

We've used these concepts in our approach to show planning with good results over the years.

I. Include Multiple Layers of Interest



Surface Level Interest

Mid Level Interest

Deep Level Interest

Surface Level Interest

- Includes music and visual elements that are familiar to the audience or that make an immediate connection with the most casual crowd member.
- Don't be afraid to have a few moments that may seem cheesy or sell-out-ish.
- People will react to what they recognize and know.

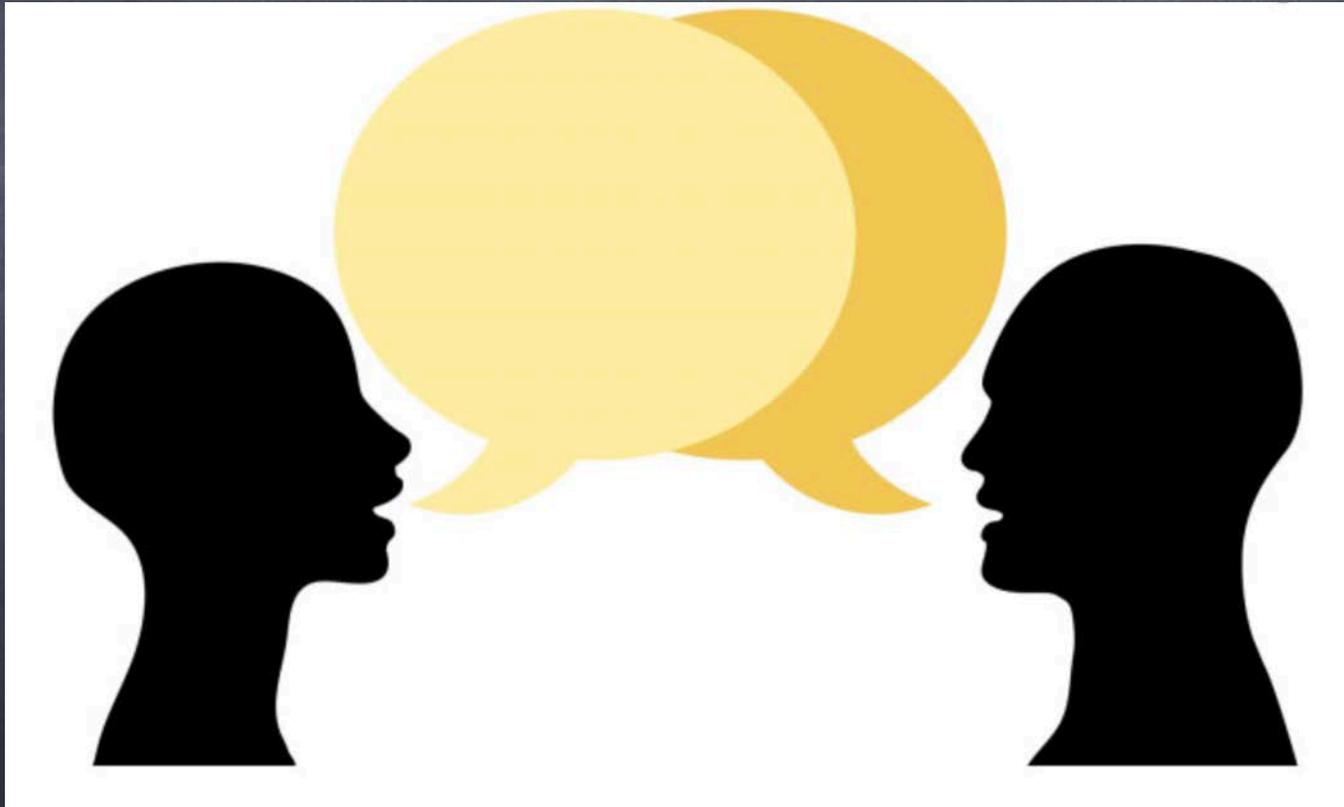
Mid Level Interest

- Band Parents, Alumni, etc. may want more than just surface level entertainment.
- Cool drill effects, musical and visual GE moments, and not-so-subtle "inside concept" points can come in handy.
- These types of fans are likely to be your biggest supporters. You can appeal to them by letting them feel like they "get" a bit more of the show than the average football fan.

Deep Level Interest

- Competition audiences, hard-core marching band fans, and judges are often looking for more detail in order to be able to credit a high scoring show.
- A developed arc from beginning to end (sometimes a story, sometimes not) is an important element here.
- Smooth, logical transitions that are thought out musically and visually are key to competitively successful shows.
- Plan nuances and technical displays that can be appreciated and credited by judges even if they aren't consciously noticed by most crowd members.

II. When Considering Concepts,
Talk to People. A Lot!



Have at Least One Design Buddy

- Many directors are left by themselves when it comes to planning a show.
- Some hire drill writers, buy arrangements, have choreography written, but as far as coming up with a concept, they are often the sole decision maker.
- Others may be lucky enough to have a small staff or an all-out in-house design team.
- Regardless of your situation, try to have at least one person you are constantly bouncing ideas off of.

Who Can Be Design Buddies?

- Colleagues - Other Band Directors, Choir Directors, Theater Teachers, Colorguard Instructors, Percussion Instructors, Arrangers, Drill Writers, etc.
- Family - Spouses, Children, Brothers, Sisters, etc.
- Guest Clinicians - College Directors, Drumcorps Instructors, etc.
- Artistic People from your community - Reach out to those involved with dance, theater, and other artistic endeavors.

Talk to Your Students. Seriously!!!

- Get students involved in the design process.
- When students have input on show concepts, they are more likely to feel personally invested in the show and the program overall.

Some Ways to Harness Your Students' Creativity

- Be open to students suggesting performance material. They may know about a piece of music that you have never heard of, but might be familiar to their peers.
- Students can help design props for the show. Engineering students and art students can be a huge asset when it comes to this part of your show!
- Students may even be involved in coming up with original musical ideas for your show.

Elements of the Plan

When coming up with your plan,
what should you consider?

- What is your theme?
- What is your source material?
- What BIG visual ideas will support the theme and help tell your story
- Who will feel a connection to your show?

Conceptualizing your Theme

- The theme may come first, or may be inspired by a musical selection you really want to perform. Sometimes this is a back & forth process.
- Consider what you want to communicate to your audience. Can you verbalize it in a narrative? Does your theme include an ARCHETYPE?
- Whether or not your theme is story-based, it will be easier to follow if you have an arc from beginning to end that allows for development musically, visually, and emotionally.

Archetype:

In literature, an archetype is a typical character, an action, or a situation that seems to represent universal patterns of human nature.

An archetype, also known as "universal symbol," may be a character, a theme, a symbol, or even a setting.

literarydevices.net, 2020

Selecting Source Material

- Cast a wide net! Be open-minded to a broad range of music, paying special attention to selections that are likely to be well received by your audience.
- Look for musical selections that can provide opportunities for your band to express a wide range of emotion and impact points.
- Be brave enough to think outside the box. Sometimes a ballad can be your biggest impact. Sometimes a "cheesy" moment can create your best crowd response.

What are your BIG visual ideas?

- When planning your show, try to have several attention-grabbing visual ideas.
- Iconic drill sets are great for halftime shows! Be sure you and/or your drill writer plan to get into and out of these sets using logical transitions for the best credit from the judging community.
- Eye-catching, theme-related props can really help set the stage. If used well, props can have people curious about your show before you even start.

Putting Your Plan into
Action

Now we're ready for...

- Arrangements (Including winds, percussion, and any other voices in your ensemble, such as electronics, strings, vocals, etc.)
- Drill Design (Including prop placement and usage during the show, as well as any transitions for equipment/costume changes)
- Colorguard Choreography (Including considerations for equipment changes, costume changes, etc.)
- Additional Production (Including musical and visual elements that add to the overall effect of the show)

Arrangements

- Can be stock, pre-arranged, or custom for your group, depending on your budget and needs. You can also write your own arrangements if you are comfortable with the task.
- Stock arrangements are the least expensive and a wide range of music is available.
- Custom arrangements cost more, but allow the freedom of tailoring your show to meet the needs and strengths of your students while giving you the flexibility to maximize your effectiveness with your audience.

• An example of creative arranging:

• "The Crossroads - Part 1"

The image displays two pages of a musical score for the piece "The Crossroads" by Eric Clapton. The score is arranged for a full band and includes the following instruments and parts:

- Flute**: Part 1 (Mute)
- Clarinet in B**
- Alto Saxophone**
- Tenor Saxophone**
- Melodica in F**
- Trumpet 1 in B**
- Trumpet 2 in B**
- Drumset 1**
- Drumset 2**
- Bassoon**
- Tuba**
- Percussion II**
- Mandolin**
- Chorus**: Part 1 (Mute)
- Bass Clarinet**
- Bass Clarinet**
- Keyboard**

The score is written in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first page shows the initial measures, with a "Mute" instruction for the Flute and Chorus parts. The second page continues the arrangement, featuring a section labeled "A" with a key signature change to two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score includes various musical notations such as rests, notes, and dynamic markings like *mp* (mezzo-piano).

Drill Design

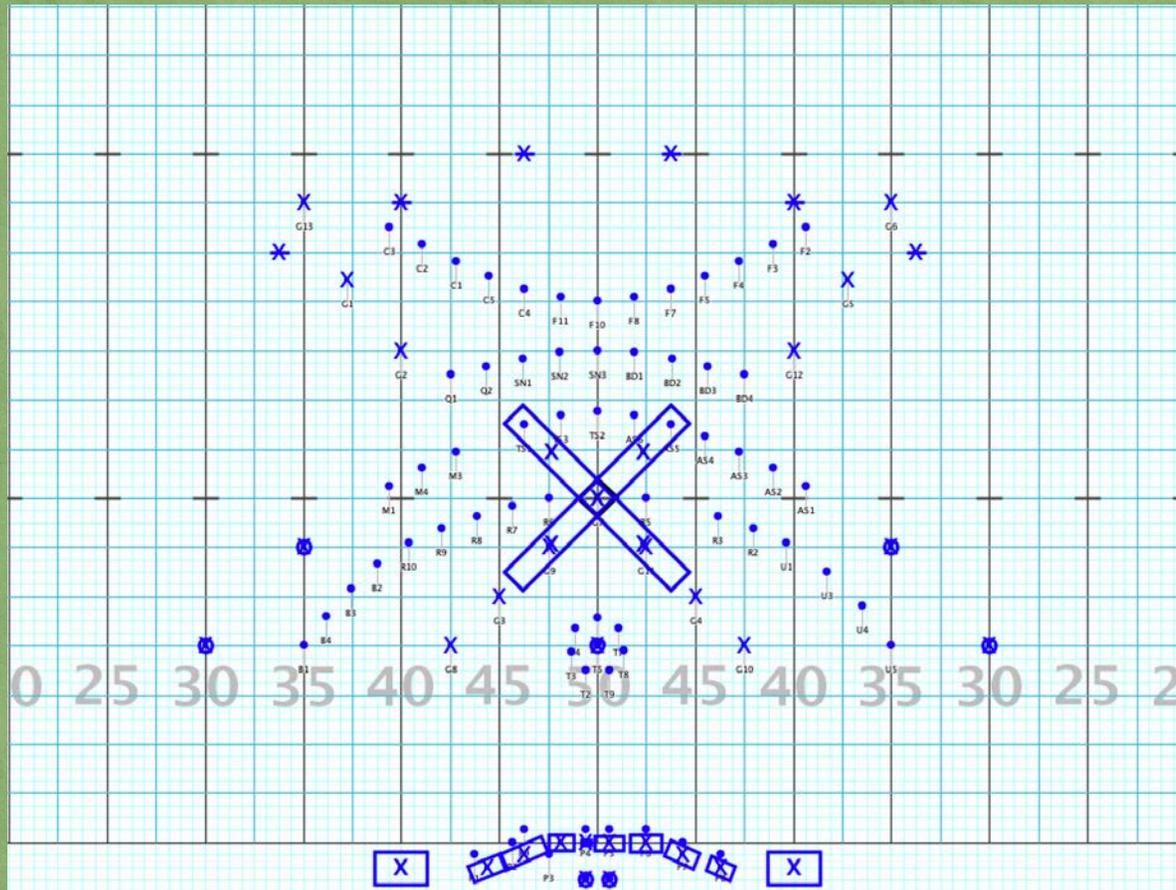
- Can be purchased as part of a stock, pre-packaged, or custom show. You can also design drill yourself if you are comfortable with it.
- Stock or pre-packaged drill is less expensive, but can require additional adjustments to fit your ensemble. This type of drill may not always have instruments grouped for optimal effect.
- Custom drill design costs more, but allows for the best staging for the voicing of your ensemble, as well as the best transitions into impact points.

Drill Design (continued)

- In an effective show, drill and music work together seamlessly.
- Drill should never take away from the musical effect. This includes considering physical demands on the performer.
- Logical transitions and formations are key to an effective show.

• An example of creative drill writing:

• Final set from "The Crossroads - Part 1"



Colorguard/Auxiliary Considerations

- ◉ Whether you are using flags, dance, weapons, batons, or anything else, your auxiliary representation should accentuate and be integral to your show theme.
- ◉ This includes obvious things like costumes and props, but will be most effective if it is considered in all aspects of the auxiliary presentation including styles of movement.
- ◉ The most effective shows will have the auxiliary completely integrated into the production in a logical manner. This is the responsibility of the drill designer as well as the choreographer.

Additional Production Thoughts

- ◉ Production elements like visuals, layered movement, thematic transitions, and minor adjustments to arrangements often take place during the teaching & learning phase of putting the show on the field.
- ◉ Many of these ideas may come into mind during brainstorming discussions with your design buddies. Napkins and post-it notes can come in handy. Keep a running journal of your ideas to be implemented later.
- ◉ Try to free your mind from what you originally planned. Be brave enough to make changes if it will lead to a stronger effect. Sometimes this even makes the performance easier!

Recapping the Main Points

- ◉ Strive to Achieve Multiple Levels of Interest.
- ◉ Talk to Lots of People.
- ◉ Student Involvement is a Good Thing.
- ◉ Consider Theme - Is there an ARCHETYPE?
- ◉ Consider Musical Selections - Cast a WIDE net!
- ◉ Plan your BIG visual ideas and moments.

- Use your arrangements to communicate your theme.
- Use your drill to complement the theme and help support your arrangements. Props can help with this.
- Plan for your auxiliary to be an integrated force to visually tell the story of your show.
- Be prepared to produce your show beyond what is on the page (musically & visually) to make it as effective as possible.
- Don't use magic fairy dust...

With good planning, your
show can be a success
under the Friday Night
Lights and at Saturday's
Competition!

About Us:

Jim Allder & Brian Carr have been creating "outside-the-box" shows for the past two decades. Their unique approach to show design has received compliments from audiences, judges, and nationally known guest clinicians.

They both reside in Greenbrier County with their lovely families.

