

The Drumline Experience: How Much is Too Much?

BY PAUL BUYER

Marching percussion has steadily become one of the most popular percussive arts in American culture. The performance level, creativity, and artistic achievement of marching percussion ensembles throughout the country continue to grow year after year and provide many young percussionists with an experience they crave.

What exactly is it about playing in a drumline that attracts so much interest? Certainly, some students thrive on competition and the challenge of achieving perfection, while others are drawn to the technical demands of the music and the thrill of performing in front of thousands of fans. Additional factors include the enjoyment of playing the instruments themselves, the visual and aesthetic aspects of the activity, and the opportunity to perform drum features and cadences. It is also very motivating and meaningful to be part of something bigger than yourself, collectively achieve a common goal, and develop lifelong friendships.

The greatest benefits of the marching percussion activity, however, may be the life skills students learn as a member of a marching percussion ensemble. In my 2003 PN article, "Lessons Learned On and Off the Field," I state, "Marching percussion [and marching band] activities can serve as a vehicle for teaching our students some of life's most valuable lessons." These lessons include hard work, preparation, confidence, consistency, commitment, attitude, leadership, teamwork, and focus, and can provide lasting value that reaches beyond students' drumline experience, impacting the rest of their lives.

During this period of incredible growth and popularity, percussion educators have started to question whether today's high school and college percussionists are spending too much time playing marching percussion. I was recently made aware of a high school band in the South-

east where no percussionists are enrolled in the wind ensemble or symphonic band during the school day. Instead, they are enrolled in drumline class. For the past two years, the band director has called weekly 7:00 A.M. rehearsals for the entire band, leading up to concert festival and concerts, so the percussionists can learn the music. According to a parent of a percussionist in the feeder middle school, "When my son reaches high school, I want him to have a concert experience as well. When he graduates from high school I want him to be able to say that he is a percussionist—not just a guy who plays bass drum #3."

On Saturday, November 11 at 9:00 A.M.,

"The greatest benefits of the marching percussion activity may be the life skills students learn."

the PAS Education Committee will host a panel discussion entitled, "The Drumline Experience: How Much is Too Much?" This panel discussion will focus on the role marching percussion has and/or should have in high school and college percussion programs in the United States. The panel will focus on our commitment to outdoor drumlines, pros and cons of indoor drumlines, and developing a well-rounded and balanced percussion curriculum. Issues such as recruiting, motivation, and competition will be discussed as well as transfer value between marching and concert percussion.

Without question, this topic should provoke a healthy discussion at PASIC. The purpose of this panel will be educational, providing a forum for discussion. The distinguished panelists will respond to questions followed by a Q&A session with the audience.

Some of the potential questions being considered are:

- How much time should students/ band programs be dedicating to marching percussion during the school year?
- How do we as educators incorporate marching percussion to provide our students with a balanced percussion education?
- What are the greatest benefits of participating in an indoor drumline? What are the cons?
- Is transfer value taking place between marching and concert percussion, and are we fully using the learning potential of the drumline experience?
- What skills or values does indoor drumline provide that outdoor drumline does not?

• Should we be concerned that the drumline is the only musical experience some students are receiving?

While many percussion instructors offer a balanced program including marching percussion, concert/orchestral percussion, percussion ensemble,

marimba ensemble, Latin percussion, jazz, and various world percussion ensembles, there are still young players who only want to play in drumline and have no interest in other percussion. The real question is *when*, and more importantly *why* did they decide that marching percussion was the only thing they wanted to do? Ironically, most educators would agree that the drumline is an integral part of training the well-rounded percussionist.

The distinguished panelists for "The Drumline Experience: How Much is Too Much?" are **Dennis DeLucia**, DCI and WGI Hall of Famer and former Associate Professor at Rutgers University; **Ward Durrett**, WGI Hall of Famer and drumline instructor at the University of Northern Colorado; **Julie Davila**, PAS Marching Committee Chair, WGI Adjudicator, and member of Caixa Trio; **Brian Hanner**, Assistant Band Director and Director of Percussion at La Porte (TX)

High School; and **Robert Carnochan**, Associate Director of Bands and Director of the Longhorn Band at the University of Texas at Austin.

Paul Buyer is Director of Percussion and Associate Professor of Music at Clemson University. He received his Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music degrees from The University of Arizona and his Bachelor of Science degree from Ball State University. Dr. Buyer is a contributing author to the second edition of *Teaching Percussion* by Gary Cook and his articles have appeared in the *American Music Teacher*, *Teaching Music*, and *Percussive Notes*. Buyer was a member of the Star of Indiana Drum and Bugle Corps and a staff member with the Dutch Boy Drum and Bugle Corps. He currently directs and arranges for the Clemson drumline. Buyer is a member of the PAS Marching Percussion and College Pedagogy Committees and is chair of the Education Committee. PN

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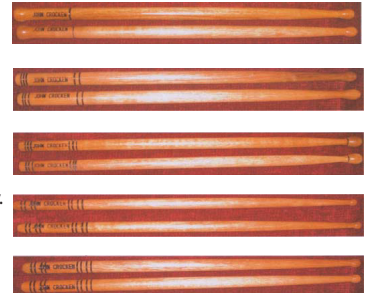
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