

# Ten Principles for Leading a Quality Marching Percussion Music Rehearsal

BY PAUL BUYER

I have always wanted to take a sabbatical and visit different college marching bands during the football season. I think it would be fascinating to be a “fly on the wall” at other schools’ rehearsals, meetings, and games and observe how they prepare and perform. Spending time with these bands and shadowing their staff members would give me the opportunity to see how other percussion instructors and band directors rehearse, teach, lead, and communicate with their drumlines.

I try to teach my students to value and respect the importance of having quality rehearsals whenever we are together. With so many performances throughout the college football season, we cannot afford to procrastinate, coast, or go through the motions. I constantly remind my drumline, “You cannot microwave a piece of music; you have to crockpot it.” The point I try to make is how well we perform will always be determined by how well we practice, and in order to perform at a high level, we have to practice at a high level.

I once had a student ask me what he needed to do to become a great player. After thinking about it for a few minutes I said, “In order to become a great player and improve every year, you need to start by having a great semester. In order to have a great semester, you need to have a great lesson every week. And in order to have a great lesson every week, you need to have a great practice session every day.” Management guru Stephen

Covey could have been talking about rehearsals when he said, “Begin with the end in mind.”

This article will address leading an effective *music* rehearsal, and it assumes that marching percussion ensembles at some point have stand-still music rehearsals at which they do not march. Following are 10 principles and rehearsal techniques I have found to be very effective for developing a routine

good time-management skills and reinforce goals, set priorities, and establish deadlines.

## 2. Answer Questions on Paper

When writing marching percussion arrangements, it is important to anticipate and answer as many questions as possible. Common questions relating to stickings, tempos, style, notation, cymbal techniques, and special instructions should, whenever possible, be clearly included in the arrangement. Having as much information written down as possible will not only save time during the rehearsal process, but will avoid confusion and improve reading skills and memorization.

## 3. Work in Chunks

Working in chunks refers to rehearsing a piece of music and focusing on one chunk at a time, e.g., A to B, or D to the end. This technique

teaches students the value of concentrating on one section before putting it into context. When working in chunks, it is important to tell the ensemble where to start *as well as where to stop*. This will further reinforce that you, the instructor, are only interested in that particular section at that time. It will also get the students in the habit of not always going on and will lead to a more efficient rehearsal.

Another rehearsal technique I use when working in chunks is to go backward. For example, start a piece at the last rehearsal number and play to the end. Then go back to the next-to-last re-



for my students in addition to learning new music, cleaning our shows, and preparing them for success on and off the field.

## 1. Have a Game Plan

Having a game plan for each rehearsal will give your students an edge and put them in a position to have quality rehearsals week in and week out. A solid game plan should include e-mailing or posting the rehearsal schedule ahead of time. A schedule gives students a breakdown of what pieces will be rehearsed when, and how much time will be spent on each. It will also teach them

hearsal number and do the same thing. Keep working your way back to the beginning. This technique will provide balance to a piece of music, ensure that it is well rehearsed from beginning to end, and help with memorization.

#### 4. Use Looping and Repetition

Looping is a technique used to practice a rhythm, measure, or phrase over and over again with four or eight beats in between. These beats can be conducted, counted aloud, or played with taps, stick clicks, or a metronome. These counts not only allow players to refocus their minds between repetitions and work on memorization, they allow the instructor to change tempos and call attention to details.

Another technique used when looping is to start with one section of the drumline—e.g., snares or basses—and gradually add the other sections in one at a time. Note: Looping and working in chunks are often combined.

#### 5. Pace Your Rehearsal

Pacing is an important rehearsal tech-

nique that is mastered through experience and good time management. It involves deciding how much time to spend on each piece, the order pieces are rehearsed, and when and if to have sectionals. Also, be aware that students are more likely to be mentally sharp at the beginning of a rehearsal and tired at the end. Finally, always try to end the rehearsal with a lot of momentum, either by doing run-throughs with the drum majors or playing a favorite cadence.

#### 6. Practice Under Tempo

One of the most important principles to follow when leading an effective music rehearsal is to practice under tempo. Slow practice is very underrated and often overlooked as a means of learning music correctly and allowing the brain and hands time to see, hear, and feel what is being practiced. Slow practice, while using a metronome, will give players confidence as a piece gradually improves. Playing music at performance tempo too soon will only cause frustration and will lead to practicing mistakes.

#### 7. Visualize Your Performance

Visualization is the process of seeing yourself perform in your mind's eye. Visualization can be done lying in bed, standing in the shower, or sitting in a quiet place, and can also be reinforced during a rehearsal. Comments such as “see yourself playing in uniform,” “imagine the crowd,” and “visualize the stadium” will get your students mentally focused on their performance.

If time allows in rehearsal, it is beneficial to practice visualization together, sitting on the floor, eyes closed, singing through the parts, and seeing yourself having a great performance. This kind of mental practice is often as good or better than playing on the drums.

#### 8. Take a Break

Though taking a break may not sound like rocket science, it *can* influence a rehearsal in a very positive way. A break acts as “halftime” or intermission in a long rehearsal, gives students a mental and physical break from working hard and concentrating, and allows players to relax and recharge. Often, just a few

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## 2006 PERCUSSIVE ARTS SOCIETY 33RD ANNUAL PERCUSSION COMPOSITION CONTEST

**PURPOSE:** The Percussive Arts Society sponsors an annual competition to encourage and reward those who create music for percussion instruments and to increase the number of quality compositions written for percussion.

### 2006 CATEGORIES

#### Category I: Unaccompanied Timpani Solo (four or five drums)

First Place: \$1500.00 plus publication by drop6 Media, Inc.  
Second Place: \$ 500.00  
Third Place: \$ 250.00

#### Category II: Duo for Marimba and Pan (one player on marimba; one on pan). Pan part may be for lead (tenor), double tenor, or double seconds.

First Place: \$1500.00 plus publication by HoneyRock Publishing  
Second Place: \$ 500.00  
Third Place: \$ 250.00

First, second and third place winners in each category are allowed to encourage presenters to perform their winning work at a future Percussive Arts Society International Convention or other PAS sponsor event. PAS reserves the right to not designate a winner if the judges determine that no composition is worthy of the award(s).

### ELIGIBILITY AND PROCEDURES:

- Previously commissioned or published (printed, audio or video) works may not be entered.
- Time limit for each category is 6–12 minutes. Total duration of piece should be stated on manuscript. Compositions must be original (no transcriptions or arrangements).
- Composer should send five complete copies of the score. If not computer generated, neat manuscript is required. Composer's name cannot appear on any of the score pages. Five CDs (preferred) or cassette tapes may be submitted in addition to scores but are not required. All entry materials become property of PAS.
- The difficulty of the composition is left to the discretion of the composer, however, high artistic goals should be coupled with realistic demands to allow for performance at the university level. Instrument demands should also be limited to those commonly found at the university level.

**APPLICATION FEE:** \$35 per composition (non-refundable) should be enclosed with each entry. Make checks payable to the Percussive Arts Society.

**DEADLINE:** All materials (application fee, application form and manuscripts) must be received in the Lawton, Oklahoma PAS office no later than April 15, 2006.

For further information and details, contact PAS  
701 NW Ferris Avenue, Lawton, OK 73507-5442  
(580) 353-1455; E-mail: [percarts@pas.org](mailto:percarts@pas.org)

### 2006 PERCUSSIVE ARTS SOCIETY 33RD ANNUAL PERCUSSION COMPOSITION CONTEST

Name of Composition \_\_\_\_\_

Composer's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number (include area code) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax Number \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

#### Entry Agreement

My signature below affirms my acceptance of the procedures and policies of the Percussive Arts Society Percussion Composition Contest, and, should I be named a first place winner, the terms of publication by either drop6 Media, Inc., or HoneyRock Publishing. I further warrant that nothing in this agreement contravenes any pre-existing agreement with another publisher or other party. I understand that failure to adhere to the contest procedures, policies and this agreement will constitute withdrawal of any prize I might be awarded.

Signature of Composer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## PERCUSSIVE ARTS SOCIETY 2006 SOLO TIMPANI COMPETITION

**PURPOSE:** To encourage the highest level of artistic expression in the art of performance and literature for solo timpani. The contest is designed to select four finalists to compete at the PASIC 2006. The contest will include cash awards for the finalists as well as matching grants to their respective percussion programs, as follows:

**First Place:** \$1,000 plus a matching grant of \$1,000

**Second Place:** \$750 plus a matching grant of \$750

**Third Place:** \$500 plus a matching grant of \$500

**Fourth Place:** \$250 plus a matching grant of \$250

The matching grants will be awarded to the institutions represented by the four finalists at the time of PASIC 2006, and can be used for scholarships, equipment needs or repairs, guest clinicians/performers, or other percussion area needs.

**PROCEDURES:** The contest is for college level students who are current Percussive Arts Society members ages 18–25 at the time of entry. Each performer must submit a CD plus 4 copies (5 total) to PAS. Please write the repertoire contained on each track on your CDs (do not include your name). The CD must be no longer than 15 minutes in length. All entries will be numbered to insure anonymity and will then be evaluated by a panel of judges. Each finalist chosen to compete at PASIC 2006 will not have to pay the convention fee but will be expected to assume all costs pertaining to the event including travel, room-board, etc. Finalists will be required to verify age. Selections on the CD must be from the repertoire listed below. The first work must be the required piece listed below; additional selections may be shortened to stay within the 15-minute restriction. Disqualification will occur if the CD is in excess of 15 minutes, the repertoire included is not from the required list, or selections have been electronically altered or edited (other than shortened to accommodate the time restriction).

### REPERTOIRE LIST:

#### Required Composition:

"March" from Eight Pieces for Four Timpani, by Elliott Carter

#### Chose an additional piece(s) from the following:

"Raga No. 1" by William L.Cahn

"Eight Pieces for Four Timpani" by Elliott Carter

"Rituals" by Bruce Hamilton . "Four Verses" by Murray Houllif

"Rhythm Gradation" by Toshi Ichianagi

"Des pieds et des mains" by Frédéric Macarez

"Suite for Timpani" by Graham Whettam

"Variations for Solo Kettledrums" by Jan Williams

**APPLICATION FEE:** \$35 per entry payable to PAS

**SEND CDS TO: PAS, 701 NW FERRIS AVE., LAWTON, OK 73507**

Performer's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ PAS Membership # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP or Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Summer Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

CD Track Information \_\_\_\_\_

**DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES IS APRIL 15, 2006**

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minutes to socialize with friends or get a drink of water are exactly what students need to keep their energy going.

### 9. End with a Teambuilding Activity

A large part of developing a first-rate marching percussion ensemble is teaching the values of leadership and teamwork. Experiment with teambuilding activities such as school traditions,

watching a DCI video, visiting a local college or high school band rehearsal, or "Quotes of the Week." Quotes are a great motivational tool and can be very healthy for developing team chemistry and respect among your members. Simply give your students some quotes each week and ask for volunteers to read each quote and discuss how it applies to what they are trying to accomplish as a drumline.

### 10. Make it Fun

Make sure rehearsals are not all work and no play. Although everyone in your drumline may have a different definition of fun, it is important not to take yourself too seriously. Also remember that FOOD can be a great motivator, so buy your students pizza once in a while. Other fun ideas include inviting a clinician, alum, or guest drumline to your rehearsal.

Finally, don't forget to laugh. If you want your students to be involved, engaged, and responsive, make them laugh!

### CONCLUSION

The secret to performance excellence can always be found in an ensemble's daily agenda. A drumline's work ethic, mental skills, and time management all play an important role in consistently having quality rehearsals. In sports, the best players and best teams often have the best practices. PGA golfer Tiger Woods said, "Every great shot you hit, you already hit a bunch of times in practice." Duke University basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski said, "To have a championship season, you have to have championship practices."

In music, mediocre rehearsals lead to mediocre performances. Excellent rehearsals lead to excellent performances. When excellent drumlines perform on the field, they are simply demonstrating everything they have worked on in rehearsal.

**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. Buyer is a contributing author to the second edition of *Teaching Percussion* by Gary Cook, and his articles have appeared in *American Music Teacher*, *Teaching Music*, and *Percussive Notes*. Buyer is a member of the PAS Marching Percussion and College Pedagogy Committees and is chair of the PAS Education Committee. **PN**

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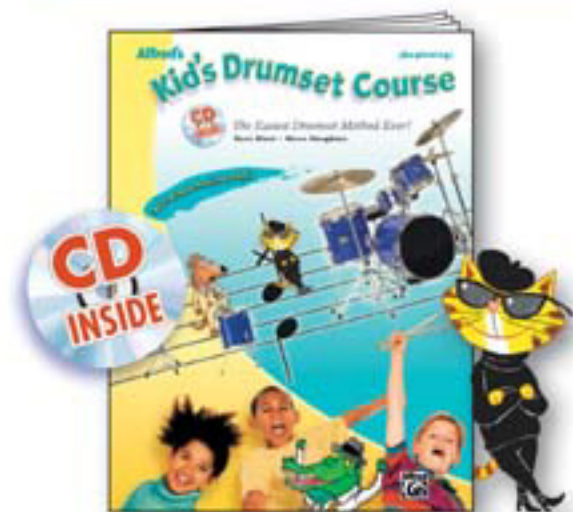
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