



# *Reaching the Audience in the Medium of Drum and Bugle Corps*

**Michael Nederhood**

Undergraduate Thesis for the Comparative History of Ideas Department  
University of Washington

**Note:** This written work is best enjoyed while simultaneously having access to the video clips contained on this disc.

### ***Introduction:***

I still remember clearly what my impression was of the top performing corps at the first drum and bugle corps competition I attended. I thought to myself “My goodness, these people can’t possibly be human.” I was completely overwhelmed by the level of proficiency of the performers on the field. I quite literally did not think that such a thing was possible before attending the show that warm summer night in Shoreline, Washington. From that night on, I was hooked.

After having two years of limited contact with the activity, I had the pleasure of being able to travel on tour as support staff with the Seattle Cascades; one of those corps which had charmed and overwhelmed my senses two seasons before. That summer I had the pleasure of being immersed in the activity, perhaps in some ways even more so than the corps members themselves. I was able to watch more live performances and parking-lot warm-ups than anyone could really ever hope to achieve in the course of that summer. After all, the performers and instructors scarcely have time to see but a few performances by other corps in between all-day rehearsals and warm-ups.

Over the course of this summer I saw certain shows many times, and began to pick out favorite points to look out for in each one. While some shows could get a little stale (a concept I would have been hard pressed to conceive of just after watching my first competition!) there were shows that I saw 10 or more times, and every time I would feel a rise in my emotions and a tingling on my skin at my favorite points. Something about these performances kept me drawn in time and time again, although I was seeing close to the same thing every time. What factors in a drum and bugle corps show make this happen? What will affect an audience the most, and keep them coming back to the

same show as one of their favorites? These questions are what this writing is all about. Looking into the composition of drum and bugle corps shows, the visual, aural, and the emotional, I plan to find the answers.

A drum and bugle corps show is somewhat peculiar amongst the arts, as it routinely exposes the audience to a combination of both abstract visuals and non-lyrical music. Given this abstraction, it is not only important, it is essential to the enjoyment of a performance that the designers use a combination of both visuals and sounds that will harmonize in order to have the greatest effect on the audience. Before a designer can choose musical selections and drill formations, they must decide on what sort of feel they want the performance to have.

The type of feel that a show piece attempts to have on an audience, broadly defined, may be broken down into two types:

*Entertaining:* A purely entertaining performance appeals less to a transcendent feeling, and more to a diversionary feel. These types of performances use energy, wit, comedy and exciting visuals to tickle the crowd. The elements that the show appeals to are more related to cognition than emotion. Most marching "show" band performances would fall into this category. These bands play pop music that is well known by the crowd, and combine it with hip dance moves intermixed with marching drill. This is energy and showmanship, the heart of an entertainment performance. This type of show is very good at pumping up the crowd, bringing amusement and an adrenaline rush. It is much less likely however, to appeal to a sublime, awe-filled aesthetic than a beautiful performance.

*Beauteous:* If an entertainment performance is the pop-art of the marching world, a beauteous performance is the high-art. This type of performance relies on deep emotional impact. These performances often attempt to be a transcendent, awesome emotional experience for the audience. These shows could be said to appeal to the aesthetic sense in the same way as a brilliant pink and orange sunset, or as light reflecting through an amethyst gemstone. When done well, a beauteous performance will bring its audience to the heights of emotion, sometimes even bringing them to tears, without the need for lyric.

Alongside these broad categories for performance types there are two other important factors which should be considered in the composition of a show:

*Awe:* Awe is the most difficult response to foster in an audience. It is a transcendent feeling, the sublime; a combination of wonder, excitement, and even fear. When awe is felt, it may be accompanied by physical reactions. These may include tingling, goose bumps, and a feeling of lightness within the body. Although not all performances will attempt to incite awe, those that do and succeed will always leave the audience satisfied.

*Skill:* In any display of pageantry, skill is an important factor. This is especially true of the drum and bugle corps, of which precision is part and parcel. Each level of affect requires a higher minimum of skill from entertaining, to beauteous, to awe-inspiring. This is not to say that an entertaining performance cannot be well-performed and awe-inspiring. What it does mean, is that a designer must keep in mind that to have

success with each type of performance there is a certain minimum of proficiency and execution that will be required.

***Entertainment:***

Many drum and bugle corps make a signature of playing upbeat and cool arrangements of jazz, blues, and rock music. Groups like the Blue Devils and Bluecoats routinely perform shows that are primarily geared towards entertainment with recognizable and relatable jazz tunes. Pieces that have a strong groove in the percussion, whether it be jazz, swing, or a rock backbeat are going to appeal to entertainment type of aesthetic response in an audience.

Besides the music itself, display of humor and wit are also important in classifying an entertainment style show. Groups like the Velvet Knights and their successor, Impulse, are known in particular for incorporating humor into their shows. Much like a stage comedian is entertaining, when humor is the goal of a piece it falls into the entertainment category.

In general entertainment type pieces can be considered less *sophisticated* than beautiful ones. This is a bit of a misnomer, as many entertainment performances (especially by drum corps) are incredibly complex. To understand the distinction, one could compare Dave Brubeck and Beethoven. Even though Dave Brubeck's *Blue Rondo* contains much more complex rhythmical arrangements than Beethoven's 9th symphony, the layman would still probably describe Beethoven as more "sophisticated" by nature of its being a classical piece.

Partially because of its lack of aloof sophistication, it could be said that in a selection meant to be entertaining, the performance breaks down the barrier between the corps and the audience. With the combination of militaristic uniformity, attention stances, and the general appearance of a drum corps there is an aura that is set up around a corps. This aura makes the corps appear to be a unit, a single entity rather than a group of humans. In an entertainment piece, this aura is broken down in order for the audience to connect with the humanity of the unit out on the field in front of them. This allows for the members of the corps to smile, hoot n' holler, and generally have a good time in their quest to entertain the audience. This is in contrast to a beauteous performance, which attempts to *build up* the barrier between the humanity of the audience and the performers. In a beauteous performance the goal of the corps is to appear inhuman or superhuman, to affect the audience with the otherworldliness of their performance; not so in an entertainment piece.

Here are clips which demonstrate the elements of an entertainment performance:

No.1, Bluecoats '93: This section of Dizzy Gillespie's *A Night in Tunisia* lets the corps relax a little bit and relate with the audience. The excerpt starts with a drumset solo, which is more reminiscent of a performance by a jazz quartet than a large scale field show. This brings the focus down from the large group to the kit player, making the audience feel more connected with the humanity of that individual performer. The addition of the smiling and grooving observers really adds some fun and drives home the feel of an intimate performance in a jazz club. Nothing says cool like stick tricks and drum-to-drum playing, so naturally the corps places this at the end of their percussion feature, accompanied by some energetic marching moves by the horns. These tricks are

*flashy*, meant to wow the audience; a big part of entertainment performances. Upon reentrance of the horn line, the corps lays back and plays some groovy jams. When the corps stops marching and the players refrain from a uniform step and stance to spread their feet and sway, this brings the audience back to the jazz quartet feel. Although the entire corps is involved, the appearance is of an intimate quality, once again by emphasis of the humanity of the individual players. This arrangement combines flashy, exciting, and fun, all aspects of a highly entertaining performance.

No.2, Velvet Knights '84: In the world of drum and bugle corps, nothing says good fun like the humorous visuals and Conversed feet of the Velvet Knights. In these cuts, the Velvet Knights draw the audience into the show with some immediately recognizable pop-culture references. By using images and music that are icons of popular culture, the crowd is immediately a part of the performance; they know that they have been considered in the design of the show. Firstly, who isn't amused at the thought of a contra bass dressed up like "Jaws"? The Velvet Knights are known for incorporating humorous imagery into all of their shows. Comedy is another way of breaking the invisible barrier between the performers and audience, and thus letting the crowd relate with those on the field. The Knights last tune in their show is an arrangement of a top 40 tune, Lionel Ritchie's *All Night Long*. Part of what makes the Velvet Knights so good is they are able to take a pop song, incorporate humorous visuals, and yet still maintain the mystique of drum and bugle corps. This segment begins with the ballad portion of the tune; the feel here is emotionally moving and has well arranged horn parts, an important aspect for any corps. Following this, the corps is still able to maintain an air of professionalism as one of its members busts into the robot (quickly followed up by the

worm into the front-and-center of the corps). It is notable that the guard members are smiling, inviting the crowd to feel their humanness. All of this is happening while the corps plays proficiently and musically, with a great show of dynamic control leading into their final chords. These ending chords are somewhat ludicrous in that they are based on another pop culture reference, the ABC theme. However, it is effective as the corps once again *plays very well*, with sounds and images that are exciting, loud, and inviting to the crowd. The Velvet Knights offer endless opportunities for the audience to be entertained and feel that they are a part of the performance. Especially by the use of images and songs the crowd is very familiar with, this performance provides an excellent example of entertainment from a drum and bugle corps.

No.3, Santa Clara Vanguard '01: This clip shows Santa Clara being lighthearted and fun in an arrangement of *Jug Blues and Fat Pickin'* by Don Freund. The arrangement begins with a somewhat eerie sounding musical composition leading into a tasty tenor drum feature. When the horns enter, the music has a light air, and the smiles and gestures from the color guard reinforce this mood. Throughout the beginning of this piece, the corps members appear lively, energetic, and yet relaxed, as if the individuals are all simply enjoying themselves rather than engaging in hard-nosed drum corps competition. The performers use individual movements that allow them to break away from an appearance of uniformity. This allows the members to engage the crowd with gestures like pointing. The pointing, jogging, and jiggling gestures visually break down the ever-important barrier between corps and audience. The color guard is very important in keeping the mood consistent with the audience, as when the horn players put their instruments to their faces and begin marching in drill formations they are not able to be as



engaging with individual movements and facial expressions. The guard picks up the mood here by hopping, skipping, and most importantly having big smiles from cheek to cheek. Roughly half-way through the piece the corps stops marching to go into a bit of a rock concert mode, accompanied by a backbeat on the snare drums. This part of the piece also emphasizes the snare's skills by incorporating some flashy stick tricks and a toss in their percussion break. An effective entertainment piece will utilize the fact that enjoying percussion instruments is a visual as well as audible experience, just as Vanguard has done here. The corps then leads into the end of its piece, with a long crescendo followed by a rock influenced percussion break. As mentioned above, backbeat drum grooves are an indicator of an entertainment style performance. The composition finishes with a very nice visual effect; a wave ripple through the entire corps. The performers end in a position which again engages the crowd with their strong smiles. This piece is a great example as it not only provides the fun and energy that is part of a good entertainment performance, but also engages the crowd emotionally with the facial expressions and movements of the individual corps members.

### ***Beauteous***

The archetype of the *beauteous* performance is the ballad; where slow tempos, long notes and powerful chords attempt to affect emotion in its audience. However, a *beauteous* performance can be many things, from charming and delightful to the dark and disturbing; from the quietest solo player to the excitement of a fortissimo company front. What characterizes these types of performances is an aim for deep emotional impact, and an *emphasis* of the invisible barrier between the audience and the corps.

There is a mystique around a drum corps that I feel is best described as the *invisible barrier* mentioned above. This is the appearance of the members of the corps as a single unit. They wear a uniform, march in unison, and create forms that belay the fact they are built up of individuals. The precision and skill with which they perform belays the fact that they are ordinary humans. Whereas in the entertaining performance the corps uses things like smiles and comedy to break down this barrier to let the audience relate, the *beauteous* attempts to emphasize this barrier in order to create a transcendent aesthetic appeal. It is important that the audience in this case forget they are watching a group of performers, get lost in the music and motion, and thus leave themselves open to the feeling of awe.

When it comes to the music of a *beauteous* performance, *musicality* will often be the deciding factor between an ineffective and a well received performance. Musicality is a conglomerate of things, including rhythm, intonation, and the like. Among these is dynamics, of which Drake says, “The control of dynamics in musical performance is probably the most significant single element which differentiates a musically *expressive* rendition from a cold, technical one (6).” It is the opinion of this author that one could replace the word *expressive* with *effective* in this quote and still have a very true statement. In other words, among all of the fundamentals of musicality, for a *beauteous* performance the primary consideration should be that of dynamics.

As with entertainment, visuals are a very important aspect of a *beauteous* performance. In this case, the considerations will likely be somewhat more esoteric than those of an entertainment performance; things like color combinations, lines and curves. It is always important for the designer to remember in a *beauteous* performance that they

are tying for a *transcendent* appeal. The compositions should emphasize the overall effect of the corps, and not draw attention to the individual humanness of those that compose the images the corps creates.

When considering the overall visual composition of a beautiful performance, it can be thought of as a painting; a painting that is constantly evolving. Given this metaphor, it is no surprise that designers should spend a great amount of energy in finding the right color combinations to appropriately enhance each piece of music. Colors not only enhance a piece of music, they may also influence the impression it gives on the audience. Color by itself should be thought of as a medium as potentially powerful as music in influencing the emotions.

Almost as important in the overall performance picture as color and sound is the drill formation. A designer, once again, wants to have formations that provide maximum impact on the audience. Curves are going to be naturally more pleasing to the eye than straight lines and angles, but variety is also important. A show would probably get rather tedious if *all* of the formations were predominantly curvilinear. Straight lines are also very effective at enhancing impact points in the show, especially during percussive features. Straight lines will draw the eye more so than curves, which is an effective tool in the design process.

Some examples of use of the beautiful performance:

No.4, Madison Scouts '03: This clip of the Scout's arrangement of *Reve Rouge* by Benoit Jutros begins with a very pleasing cadence in the mallet percussion that leads into the bass drums. The tenor drums follow with a dynamic swell which is then repeated by

the snares. The effective use of dynamics by the percussion here is a fantastic complement to the long, chorale like tones in the hornline. After the lead in, the corps goes into a half-time feel that lends an aura of power to the horn arrangement. The guard is using red flags that match their uniforms, making the composition of the corps predominantly, red, green, white, and black. White and black are neutral, contrasting with any other colors. Red and green are opposite on the color wheel, making them an optimal combination for a contrasting visual. Red is in itself an intense color identified with strong emotion; this combined with its contrast against the green of the Scout's uniform makes a striking visual which injects passion into the musical composition. In addition to the color choices, the corps forms a *fleur-de-lis* at the climax of the tune. This image is the logo of the Madison Scouts, and so adds a direct visual-emotional connection for those familiar with the corps. The combination of passionate, contrasting colors and powerful long tones are what make this an effective beautiful performance.

No.5, Santa Clara Vanguard '03: The majority of Vanguard's 2003 show has a somewhat cheery and energetic feel to its arrangements. There is a concentration in sound in the higher pitched horns, and a blending of colors (blue and green) that complements this mood. This is the opposite approach to the passionate, striking contrast in Madison's show. At the beginning of this clip, the corps steps up the intensity of its show by moving at a very fast tempo, while the particular arrangement of *Orawa* by Wojciech Kilar adds a bit of eeriness to the lighter sound. To help influence this eeriness and to add to the intensity (especially during the "stabs" from the brass) the color guard picks up flags that are predominantly purple and red. When the corps hits its curvilinear formation and leads back into the predominantly high brass sound, the guard returns to flags of colors that

blend with their uniforms. This is a great example of how the choice of color combination can influence a piece of music; it doesn't have to be entirely the reverse. This musical arrangement is particular as it could probably be described accurately as both "cheery" and "eerie". In this case, the switching of the flags, and thus the principal colors on the field, is a tool the designers use to pick out in which parts of the arrangement they want each feeling to be more predominant.

No.6, Star of Indiana '93 (clip1): The Star of Indiana 1993 corps makes excellent use of dynamics in its arrangement of Samuel Barber's *Medea*. From the beginning of the clip the arrangement uses medium dynamic levels which are punctuated by impact points assisted by the percussion. These minor swells in intensity are all a gradual building of tension, and within this tension building the corps adds different themes in the horn music. This is all realized with grand release as the corps hits the audience with a heavy horn sound while it forms a three arced curvilinear form and marches in a follow-the-leader type drill. The sheer power and intensity of the arrangement is aided by the use of blood red flags by the color guard, and the speed of the marching drill. By taking the time to gradually build its themes and dynamics throughout the ending portion of their show, Star sets the audience up to be blown out of their seats in its final moments. While the notes and visuals are all very well arranged and performed, the key to why this is such an effective ending is the layering of dynamics to build tension within the audience up to its climactic release. This is a masterful beautiful work indeed.

## *Awe*

The feeling of the sublime, that tricky combination of wonder and fear, is important to the art of drum and bugle corps. When it comes to literature on the sublime, a very prominent work indeed is that of Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Within his description, there are many conditions which are applicable to the creation of a sublime effect in an audience at a drum and bugle corps performance. In effect, if one seeks to reach an audience in the ways that Burke describes, they can achieve that mix of feeling which constitutes the highest of aesthetic responses. In relating the aspects of Burke's sublimity to drum corps, I place these connections under the term of *awe*. In other words, in terms of this writing, *awe* refers to the use of Burke's conditions for sublime encounters in order to affect a powerful aesthetic response from the art of drum and bugle corps. These four conditions are loudness, suddenness, color, and difficulty.

*Loudness:* Burke says of loudness, "Excessive loudness alone is sufficient to overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror. The noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery, awakes a great and awful sensation in the mind... (82)" It is true that the sound of thunder or artillery might cause fear so strong as to twist the stomach into knots. In these instances, the fear comes partly from the unexpected arrival of these sounds. Even if one anticipates a thunder clap, its exact timing and intensity may only be known upon the event's arrival. Despite the fear and unpleasantness that can come from an event like a thunder storm however, when it is made into a spectacle, many find the experience of storm watching pleasurable. Watching the majesty of a storm from a properly comfortable position can be a wonderfully

exciting and fun occasion. One scans the sky looking for where the next bolt will strike, and counts the seconds until each thunder clap in high anticipation of the violent release of energy. This setting could be said to be the same as the audience enjoying the performance of a drum and bugle corps. There is an anticipation and building of tension within the audience, who waits for the moment of climactic release. Loud, bombastic hits are an integral part of the drum corps experience. The crowd knows these hits will be coming, but where and when is part of the anticipation. In this setting, the screaming horns and pounding battery become pleasurable; whereas they might be considered frightening or downright undesirable in other circumstances. What is important in design of a corps show is precisely that in this setting, loud is desirable.

The drum and bugle corps instruments are made for outdoor use, and as part of this, their capabilities concentrate on projection and extreme dynamic contrast. Also, the drum corps craft preaches precision and skill which lets the performers gain maximum proficiency at both dynamic impact and projection power. This means that the drum corps has a special relationship with *loud* that most ensembles can only dream of. The *loud* of a drum corps is at a higher decibel level than an orchestra or wind ensemble because of the corps's instrumentation. The *loud* of a drum corps is crisp and clear, unlike the distorted amplification of a rock concert. As such, loudness is not only a path to awe-inspiring instances in performance, it is an integral part of the appeal of the art form of drum and bugle corps. There is a nature to the loudness of a drum corps that the audience comes to find, that they can get nowhere else.

As mentioned earlier, the Star of Indiana 1993 corps has an incredible grasp of dynamic contrast and power. The excerpt below is another example of this corps's magnificent proficiency in the building up and release of tension.

No.7, Star of Indiana '93, (clip2): Here in their arrangement of *Medea* the corps revisits a theme set up at the beginning of the show. The corps leads into the piece, proceeding to play at lower dynamic levels. This builds in intensity until the crowd is hit by a huge, powerful chord. This is followed up by a fortissimo roll by the snare drums, and into a combination of rolls on the bass percussion instruments. This sets up a sort of one-two punch. The horns hit the audience first, followed up by high-pitched snare drums and mallet percussion. Then the second punch comes with the low-pitched percussion. This effect is heightened by the fact that for much of the show preceding this point; the corps has been playing at relatively soft dynamic levels. This combines suddenness and loudness, setting up a prime moment for the crowd to be truly overwhelmed. Here, being overwhelmed is the gateway to the feeling of *awe*.

*Suddenness*: Suddenness is often used in conjunction with loudness in order to have the most powerful effect on an audience. Outside of an anticipated instance, sudden loudness is usually considered unpleasant; whether it be rolling thunder, the sirens of a passing ambulance, or a radio that is turned on at blasting volume. However, in the drum corps show, sudden loudness is exactly what the audience came for! Though, as Burke mentions, suddenness need not be limited to loudness (83). A sudden occurrence of silence or a sudden change of direction in marching drill might all contribute to an awe-inspiring experience for the audience.



No.8, Phantom Regiment '93: This excerpt is from the end of Phantom Regiment's 1993 arrangement of *Danza Final*. The original was composed for the ballet "Estancia" by Alberto Ginastera. This sequence begins with a continuation of the sorts of visuals and music that has come before in the show. The performers are moving steadily around the field accompanied by decent music. Then the corps hits the crowd with a surprise! The horns form a triangle and march side-step across the field, culminating with a spin, a powerful chord, and some quick marching steps. The set up of basic material, then sudden departure from the typical marching drill has a huge effect on the crowd, as can be seen from the recording. Getting a standing ovation from the audience half-way through a show is no small task.

No.9, Boston Crusaders '03: Here the Crusaders, like Phantom in the example above, use a sudden occurrence of the unexpected to wow the audience. This point in the show is based on themes from the familiar *Malagueña* by Ernesto Lecoua. The Crusaders disguise their surprise by introducing the snare drums in small units. These then combine to form a snareline fifteen men long. Typically a division I drum corps snareline tops out at ten members, so seeing fifteen proficient snare drummers on the field at once is a big treat for the appreciative audience. As with Phantom's excerpt, the musical arrangement backs up this surprise visual with a powerful impact of sound from the horns.

*Color*: Color is an important factor in Burke's idea of the sublime. He states that certain colors are less suitable to reflect the sublime (82). White is unsuitable (although common on the marching field) and blue may be less sublime than black.

In drum and bugle corps, the audience is constantly being subjected to an evolution of color and form out on the field in front of them. The designers must carefully consider what colors will be most effective when combined with the music. Burke leans towards darker colors as being more sublime. I would tend to agree, it is harder to inspire awe in a sea of bright yellow than it is while being immersed in deep blue. Awe and the sublime have connections with the dark, deep, and vast. Yellows, reds (excepting dark, bloodish red), and bright colors will be less connected in the psyche with awe. Dark colors will be more likely to inspire awe in the audience.

The importance of dark color being said, the color white needs special consideration. Because of the need for equipment like drum sticks, rifles, and sabers to be visible at a distance and while in motion; there is often a proliferation of the color white on the performance field. When attempting to incite awe, the designer must be careful to take into account the amount of white on field. For an effective awe inspiring performance, there will need to be a great amount of opposing dark, deep color to counteract the white; especially if the corps uniform is majority white.

The examples below demonstrate both suitable and unsuitable use of color to incite awe.

No.6, Star of Indiana '93, (clip1): This example, already cited above, shows a great use of color to incite emotion and awe. The corps's uniforms are predominantly tan, which is, of course, very close to white. To counteract this predominance, the designers have used black accents on the uniform, which is picked up by the color of the battery drum shells. To counteract even more, the guard is clothed entirely in black. So without any additional factors, there is already a close balance between light and dark colors on

the field. To push this balance more in the direction of sublimity, the guard uses two types of flags in this final part of the show. The first is predominantly black with strong contrasting splashes of color. The second is a concentrated red, reminiscent of the color of blood. These flags are used by the designers to spill the balance of light and dark color towards the dark end of the spectrum, helping to emphasize the sublimity and power of the ending of their show.

No.10, Magic of Orlando '03: Magic's 2003 arrangement of David Holsinger's *Abram's Pursuit* is very driving and powerful. Here, the colors on the uniforms of the musicians are black and purple with a splash of red. The flags being used are of lighter pinks, which in turn makes the somewhat in-between blue and purple tones of the guard uniforms appear lighter in comparison to the very dark colors of the corps's uniforms. This creates a contrast in feeling of light and dark between the two sections of the corps. While in a lighter feeling piece this contrast could help to emphasize a cheery mood to the crowd, it seems somewhat off here. In the opinion of the author the composition overall would be much more effective if the flags were of darker red to purple hues. This would pick up and emphasize the colors on the corps's uniforms, making a predominance of dark, deep color on the field to emphasize the sublimity of the musical arrangement.

*Difficulty:* Burke lists difficulty as a source of "greatness" and the sublime. "When any work seems to have required immense force and labour to effect it, the idea is grand," says Burke (77). It cannot be denied that people are fascinated by acts which seem beyond the ken of average human beings. Burke uses Stonehenge as his reference, for it must have required great feats of strength and ingenuity to create the famous landmark. I would argue that the pyramids are an even better example, being as it is that

they are such a marvel for having been created by human hand without the help of modern machinery. To bring feats of difficulty down to a more individual level, crowds have often gathered to view spectacles of physical mastery; whether these be strength competitions, gladiator battles, or sporting events. Because of the popularity of strength competitions and the like, it can be deduced that many, many people enjoy watching others attempt to push the limits of the human body. For Burke this can be a source of the sublime, and I say by extension it is a source with a high potential for awe. Drum and bugle corps is an activity which is very difficult. The performers are constantly stretching mind and body in order to achieve a performance as close to perfection as possible. The appeal to the audience lies in the fact that the corps members at times appear superhuman by virtue of the proficiency at which they perform their shows. The application of this idea of *difficulty* in the medium of drum and bugle corps is what I have categorized as *skill*. An extremely skilled performance, i.e. one that is difficult and performed well, in itself may inspire awe in the observer as a feat of greatness.

The Cavaliers have proven themselves as masters of marching, and the example below is no exception:

No.11, The Cavaliers '93: During the percussion feature in their 1993 arrangement of David Holsinger's *The Symphonic Cantata*, the Cavaliers attempt some extremely difficult drill. The performers are practically running across the field. Since the horns are not playing, they are able to concentrate on their feet in order to achieve great feats of athleticism. To add to the difficulty of the drill, each performer must also be conscious of their equipment's visual effect as well as their individual spot within the marching drill. Part of what makes this sequence so effective is that even the musical

instruments are being included in the visual puzzle, a puzzle which adds up to an extremely intense and effective display of skill.

### *Skill*

The amount of skill that is required for individuals to be an effective part of a drum and bugle corps is one of the greatest assets of the activity to both the audience and the performers. The demands placed on the members of the corps benefit them by an increase not only in their proficiency and coordination, but their maturity and discipline as well. All of these factors are essential for a corps member to appear to be part of the *unit* rather than an individual that sticks out from the group. As far as the benefit to the audience, they get to enjoy the spectacle of superhuman feats that plays out in front of them on the field.

Besides the natural tendency for people to enjoy watching difficult tasks executed successfully, why emphasize perfection in performance so far as a corps does? Well, mistakes detract from the impact of a performance. A drum and bugle corps show can be thought of as a continuous build up of tension that is released at impact points. This is a mirror of enjoying the anticipation, and resolution upon arrival, of lightning strikes and earth-shattering thunder. In a performance, mistakes are undesirable because they break the tension at unplanned points. The audience's visual and mental attention is immediately drawn to members out of place in a drill formation, a dropped rifle or drum stick, or missed notes in a solo. When attention is diverted from the *intended* performance, the tension is resolved early, and this greatly lessens the impact of the show designer's carefully placed impact points. The show designer wants the ultimate

resolution to be the audience members saying to themselves, “Wow! I can’t believe they managed to do something so difficult without making any mistakes.”

*Skill and Effective Performance:* In the quest to effectively reach an audience, each type of performance has a minimum level of skill needed to succeed. An entertainment piece has the least *required* level of skill to be effective. These shows emphasis on identifying with the crowd will depend more on the choice of content by the designer to be effective than the actual level of proficiency at which it is performed. Although many entertainment performances *are* highly skilled, it is possible to have an entertaining performance with only a low amount of skill. A *beauteous* performance, in contrast, requires both a well designed composition and a proficient performance in order to be effective. Because a *beauteous* performance appeals more to the subconscious aesthetic sense, and less to cognitive elements, it *must* be performed skillfully in order to reach the audience. To summarize, the skill required for entertainment is based on the design of the show being able to cognitively connect with the audience. The pop culture references of the Velvet Knights are a perfect example. The skill required for a *beauteous* performance is both in design and performance. Since the show does not depend on cognition but on artistic appeal, mistakes made by less-skilled performers will amount to much greater disruptions in the careful development of a *beauteous* arrangement.

What all of this means in terms of design is that if a performance group is young and inexperienced, doesn’t have an optimum amount of rehearsal time, or is just simply *unskilled*, a designer is better off leaning towards the entertainment side of the spectrum. Also, the designer must be careful not to have visuals and music that are too difficult for the group to perform at the minimum satisfactory level. If a group is playing an emotional

ballad and the audience can hear tuning problems and noticeable wrong notes, no one is going to care for the piece at all. Thankfully, to answer the question of how to create an effective performance by young players or a group with little time to practice, science comes to the rescue.

When designing for a less-skilled group, it should be kept in mind that pitch differences are less noticeable by the human ear at lower pitches and dynamic levels (Drake 10). What this means is that there can be a greater variation in pitch in lower instruments before an audience will notice a difference. In other words, tuning and pitches played need not be as accurate for the notes to sound the same in the lower ranges. Therefore, an inexperienced group will probably be better off with arrangements and instrumentation that have more concentration in the lower pitch range if they wish to pull off an effective beautiful performance. However, it is also notable that in the lower pitches it takes a greater change in dynamics for the human ear to notice a change in loudness (Drake 8). This means that in a bass heavy group effective dynamics will take more energy, i.e. air through the instrument or height in percussion implements, to be audible. Ideally, a balance should be found where the group has few grating intonation problems, and still is able to perform dynamics at a level that makes the piece feel “musical” and not “flat”.

*Skill and Awe:* The greatest amount of skill required, in both design and performance, is to affect feelings of *awe* within the audience. Awe may be inspired as a result of either of the two types of performance, but in order to affect the audience with awe, the performance *must* be highly skilled. Awe is a moment of high emotion, and thus is more easily connected through the beautiful performance than the cognition of the

entertainment performance. So, an entertainment performance depends more purely on skill to incite awe than does a *beauteous* one. In other words, while an entertainment piece requires a lower minimum of skill to be effective in its style than a *beauteous* performance, entertainment requires a *higher* minimum of skill in order to *awe* the audience.

An awe inspiring *beauteous* performance is exemplified in the Star of Indiana '93 clip described under the entry ***Beauteous*** above. This corps uses all of the factors of loudness, suddenness, color, and difficulty to make a great performance.

Below are two examples from the Blue Devils 2003 show of effective entertaining performances that push into the realm of the awe-inspiring:

No.12, Blue Devils '03: A battery percussion feature is one of the best ways to push awe through entertainment. Here the Blue Devils combine many of the ideas I've mentioned above in order to create an awesome performance. The snare drums are introduced as a single player and then small units, which emphasizes the skills of each individual performer. Throughout this introduction, the players are allowed to express their individual prowess, breaking down the invisible barrier with the audience. Also, by having the drums play in smaller units for short periods, this allows for a showcase of many very advanced tricks that are typically not seen in a drum corps performance; giving the audience a show not only of skill but the unexpected. This introduction is topped off by the impact point, with a flashy stick flip thrown in for good measure. This performance does not have the power and "oomph" that a massed hornline does; it is a much more subtly appealing progression of artistry. However, after a show like this the



crowd can hardly be left without a sense of astonishment and wonder at the skills demonstrated in front of them.

The second portion of this clip is from the shout section of the Devil's arrangement of Dave Brubeck's *Blue Rondo*. The original tune is very jazzy and groovy, making for an excellent entertainment piece. Using this as the base, the Devil's add in various elements that serve to turn this spectacle into a show with a high potential for awe. The mallet percussion lead in starts things off at a soft dynamic, building tension into the powerful impact of the horns. It is important to note that with the corps's uniforms, guard uniforms, and flags combined, the predominant color on the field is black. The black is complemented by very saturated colors, lending the entire composition an air of the sublime. After the impact with the entrance of the battery and horns, the intent of the passage is first revealed through the music as the corps stays still. Then, the audience is hit with a skill showcase as the horns execute a quick maneuver, and the drumline weaves in out of each other in a death-defying stunt. While the tone is definitely that of an entertaining performance, the composition incorporates awe-inspiring color, difficulty, and proficiency. Overall, the piece is incredibly well done.

### ***Conclusion***

As I said in the introduction to this piece, drum and bugle corps is a peculiar art form. Its combination of majestic visuals, powerful musical arrangements, and incredible athleticism is something that can likely *only* be found in this activity. Within these pages I have attempted to unlock the keys to what creates a great performance that an audience will remember and cherish for years to come.

In dividing all performances into two basic types, this obviously leaves a lot of room for cross-over between to two. This is of course okay. Many of the example videos I have used contain elements of both types of performances. Any individual piece in a show, however, will be able to be fit in its majority into one of the two categories. Indeed, a designer's commitment to either the *entertaining* or the *beauteous* will result in a concentrated composition much more likely to effectively please the audience.

It is my hope that this work will facilitate fruitful analysis by those enjoying and/or designing a marching show; just as my mind was filled with thoughts such as these while touring with the Seattle Cascades. For the fan, no doubt when watching a drum and bugle corps show much of the multitude of compositional ideas that goes into each show passes by somewhat unnoticed. Hopefully after reading this work a fan can answer the question of *why* a performance did or did not affect them heavily. For the designer, hopefully the divisions and subdivisions of the *entertainment*, the *beauteous*, the *skillful*, and the *awe-inspiring* will add some ideas or definitions to their repertoire that they may not have before considered.

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