



Teacher, Counselor and Critic: The Role of Today's Judge In the Marching Arts

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The role of the marching band/drum corps adjudicator is often misunderstood, and with the constantly changing trends and innovations, judges must stay current and have a keen understanding of today's marching ensembles.

The Basic Mechanics of Judging

There are many types of contests and evaluation sheets, with some designed to evaluate a performance standard (UIL), to caption style judging with opportunities to rank and rate the ensembles (BOA, DCI, etc.)

A strong understanding of all of the terms on each sheet is important, and as a judge you should be able to recognize each descriptor. In the past few years the trend in commentary and written comments has almost evolved to the spoken commentary and a "tote sheet" for scoring.

The Score Sheet

Score Sheet – Descriptors and components of skills that will be evaluated.

Rubric – Describes how the performers (and to what degree) are achieving their skills during the entire performance.

Placemat – Similar to a rubric, divides the sheet into a content side and a performance side (the what and the how). It highlights basic questions of the terms from the front of the sheet and offers thought provoking questions of the performance.

Judge's Recorded Commentary

While the show is being performed, a judge is asked to give commentary, reacting both positively and constructively. Initial impression while assisting the unit with information for improvement, identifying the weaknesses in a positive way and giving suggestions for maximizing the strengths.

Types of recording devices

Hand-held recorder – most common and track is dumped onto either a site or thumb drive.

Tablet – Was used in many of the major shows this year in DCI, with not only a record/pause button with attached microphone, but another tab for recording your score. This is then sent directly to one place and the judge doesn't have to turn in recorder.

What is Achievement?

Achievement – How well the musician/marshcer perform the skills they have been asked to do. The words used in each of the 5 categories of the rubrics are:

Box 1 – (Lowest) – Rarely

Box 2 – Sometimes

Box 3 – Usually

Box 4 – Consistently

Box 5 – (Highest) Always

Depending on the caption a judge is evaluating, the commentary can analyze a set of skills and the achievement level. (Ex. Music Analysis, Field Music)

Scoring

Depending on the type of contest, the judge's evaluation could be a rating (1st Division, etc.) or a ranking (score that is compared to the other units).

Both are subjective based off of the judge's professional experience, but with the help of rubrics it is very easy to identify a scoring area and then narrow down a specific number related to the other groups.

Numbers Management

Many times a judge can give a great commentary, but not sure how to rank and rate groups at a contest. Being able to manage the scores you have assigned to the performing groups does take practice and planning as a contest unfolds. Being able to show relationships, "neighborhoods" of groups, and even the value of the tenth all can help marching bands understand where they scored in relationship to the other bands.

The Value of the Tenth

This spread is in reference to the overall score (not sub captions)

Overall total score spreads of 1, 2 or 3 tenths: *The units are essentially equal except for minor issues; the units might have differing strengths in the two sub-captions, leading to a narrow spread; there could be reversal from night to night, depending on performances and possible changes.*

Overall total score spreads of 4, 5 or 6 tenths: *The units have identifiable, objective narrow differences and varied nuances that make it clear that one unit is better than the other. The judge should always be prepared to identify the narrow differences between the units.*

Overall total score spreads of 7, 8 or 9 tenths: *There are at least 1-2 more significant differences in the descriptive words or common questions that detail the sheet. These are easily identifiable and may include but not limited to overall state of completion, quality and completion of one section of the unit, large variations in performance achievement areas and other qualities. The judge should always be prepared to identify those more significant differences.*

Overall total score spread of ONE point or more: *There are multiple significant differences between the units. The judge should be prepared to identify such differences.*

Show Design

Important Questions That I ask myself now when putting my own shows together:

1. Is the show concept entertaining?

Think back to a show that really got your attention that kept your interest, where the performers and audiences were having a good time. Certain types of shows lend themselves better to letting the performers “bring the show to life”. Shows can be character-driven, with personalities and interaction with the audience, or they can be concept-driven with a more abstract, broad idea where the performers act together to create an effect or convey the idea.

2. Is it educational?

We have a responsibility to design a show that has many “teachable moments”. Programs need to have opportunities to showcase talents, but should also give your group a chance to set goals, understand a high level of achievement and have key.

Here is where you “mold the clay into a sculpture”!

Ask yourself these questions—

- What are the main objectives of my program?
- What are our strengths?
- What are the compulsories that are the building blocks of the show?
- How do I want the audience to feel when the show is over?
- Is there a musical idea that would serve as the centerpiece of the program?
- Is there a visual idea or “hook” that would get to the audience?
- Out of my ideas which one will be the best to draw the audience into my theme and state what the program is about?

- Which one of my ideas will be the best way to conclude my presentation with a combination of musical and visual ideas?
- Which one of my ideas would serve as strong transitional material?
- When I put the blocks in order do they present contrasting emotions?

Some pointers from the “voice of experience” that will save you a lot of time and heartache:

- Characterizations-sometimes tricky with lack of training
- Applause moments – Build in moments that your audience knows when to applaud. If everything has an immediate transition after the event, you prevent this important connection from performer to audience.
- Abstract or broad title trend-audience still has to be able to latch onto it.
- Mishmash songs – Sometimes arrangements combine songs from different idioms in a fast, frenetic way. Be careful of these treatments, do not confuse your audience.
- Don't be predictable- in formula or telegraphing what's coming next.
- Pacing - Hits or major events in your show need to happen every 30-45 seconds.
- Have a clear outline - writing the drill with edited numbers- or cuts.
- Strong transitions! Great example is the 2004 Cavaliers 007 Show
- Narration – It is helpful to design the narration simultaneously with the music. Don't rely on the narration to tell the story only to enhance. Great example is 2013 Carolina Crown show.
- Begin with the end in mind. This can be the end of sections or the end of the show.
- Props – Be careful when using props sitting on the field with very little purpose or interaction by your performers. This will not in itself help create general effect.
- Effect Moments - Sketch out effect moments and what you are going to do specifically to generate the effect. Remember, the moments that lead you to the effect are equally important as the actual moment.
- Compulsories - Keep a checklist that hits on the compulsories of all sections in your band being featured. I would look for variety in who is featured (woodwinds, high brass, low brass, battery percussion, flags or weapons).

An example would be a phrase that has technical based high brass for 16 counts, followed by 16 counts of a low brass lyrical phrase. The guard and the woodwinds stand for the next 32-count feature, etc. Not only will this help with meeting the needs of the “what “side of the general effect sheet, but it will help with the variety of moods, timbres, and pacing.

3 Types of General Effect

There are 3 types of effect used in marching shows – same as we experience in movies, musicals, dramatic productions and many other mediums.

Emotional **Intellectual** **Aesthetic**

Emotional – This is the most commonly used effect in marching shows. Aggressive, Happy, Sad, Calm – anything that can be depicted through the music and the visual drill and movements.

Intellectual – These have deeper meanings or even a creative, clever design that “makes you think”. “How did they do that?” is usually the question that fits into this category, and could be interesting on multiple levels.

Think of it as an onion – The more layers you peel back, then more interesting it becomes. A Show could have cool props and movement and the audience is reacting to, and on deeper levels it exhibits symbolism or thematic ideas.

Aesthetic – search for the beautiful and a performance that “takes your breath away” - Examples in our world that would fit into this category – the Grand Canyon, the Golden Gate Bridge, expansive skyscrapers, gorgeous sunset...you get the idea.

In a marching band show, it can be an expansive, lyrical, powerful passage that has breadth and depth. It can also be a simple melody performed by a soloist with a light accompaniment and performed so eloquently that it really moves you.

The best shows have a balance of these 3 effects. Think of them as shopping bags that need to be filled up – while one could be overflowing (i.e. emotional), the other bags don’t need to be empty.

A great analogy that resonates with me is the “Effect” of the show is the “**Romantic**” approach, and the Ensemble/Individual sheets are the “**Classical**” approach.

The caption of General Effect is more subjective and as a judge you should be the most educated fan in the stands. You should “let the performance come to you” and react, (or not react) to the emotions, design and the communication of the performers. Question include:

Is it compelling?

Do the performers bring the show to life?

Did the performance keep my attention the entire time?

Did the show surprise me or was it predictable?

Teacher-Counselor-Critic – Shirley Whitcomb WGI Judge

An adjudicator functions on three levels:

Teacher

Beginning with young inexperienced instructors or performers requires the judge to be a **teacher**. With units at this level, the judge will find times when his or her commentary will be a clinic in basic techniques. This must be done with patience, setting a logical progression of development for them to follow.

Judges must offer encouragement when these units are confused and enthusiasm when they show some level of success. These units need to be dealt with in basic terms. The nurturing process at this level is of vital importance.

Counselor

At the second level, judges will have to deal with units who have been around for a few years, felt some success, and think they are ready to move to a higher classification. Here the judge find themselves dealing with the adolescent of our activity – convinced they know it all and are very reluctant to accept the fact that they have anything to learn.

At this point, judges become the **counselor**. This role requires the most patience, the strongest concern, and the greatest amount of communication. It is difficult to watch units at this level stumble and make mistakes.

The bands or corps at this second level may be the ones whose performance tends to fluctuate the most. In addition, the scores for these units are often the most difficult to decide upon. The adjudicator must be aware of these special problems and have good numbers management when assigning a score.

Critic

On the last level, the student really has grown up and the judges see moments of brilliance emerge from their creations; one day he/she “has it all together” and in terms of creation and performance, has surpassed the teacher, outgrown the counselor, and looks to the judge to be the **art critic**. At this point, the adjudicator must challenge the teachers and the students; encourage them to set even higher goals and standards.

A good judge evaluates with their head, with their hearts, and in a positive, nurturing and challenging manner, as they contribute to the growth and development of these marching ensembles.



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Band _____

Date _____ Prelims Finals

MUSIC GENERAL EFFECT

Music General Effect is the utilization of all elements to bring about maximum effectiveness of the musical performance. Evaluate each caption below based on the criteria reference. Understand that we evaluate what is being performed at the same time we are evaluating how it is being performed. Since we judge achievement, we must understand that the construction and content of a program, in combination with the performance level which is being demonstrated, will determine the achievement level. It is impossible to consider one of these elements without considering the other.

<p>Effectiveness of the Musical Repertoire (100)</p> <p>Creativity/Imagination Coordination/Staging Appropriate Range of Expressions Use of Time/Pacing Continuity/Unity Contribution for Enrichment/Enhancement of All Elements</p>	
<p>Effectiveness of the Musical Performance (100)</p> <p>Communication of Musical Intent Emotion Professionalism Artistry Involvement</p>	

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Signature _____

TOTAL SCORE
(possible 200)



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Band _____

Date _____ Prelims Finals

VISUAL GENERAL EFFECT

Visual General Effect is the utilization of all elements to bring about maximum effectiveness of the visual presentation. Evaluate each caption below based on the criteria references. Understand that we evaluate what is being performed at the same time we are evaluating how it is being performed. Since we judge achievement, we must understand that the construction and content of a program, in combination with the performance level which is being demonstrated, will determine the achievement level. It is impossible to consider one of these elements without considering the other.

	<p>Effectiveness of the Visual Repertoire (100)</p> <p>Creativity/Imagination Coordination/Staging Interpretation & Enhancement of the Music Use of Audio-Visual Balance/Blend/Focus Continuity/Unity Appropriate Use of Movement/Form/Color</p>	
	<p>Effectiveness of the Visual Performance (100)</p> <p>Communication of Roles Emotion Professionalism Artistry Involvement</p>	

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Signature _____

TOTAL SCORE
(possible 200)