



Programming an Indoor Percussion Show

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# Innovative Percussion<sup>®</sup> Inc.

## Programming an Indoor Drumline Show – Playing the Game

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Let's face it. The days of picking a concert score for your indoor percussion group and playing it straight down are over. There are a couple of key points to keep in mind regarding the basics of show design. As you read, remember that everyone has a different

thought process on how to put their show together. Without these differences, everyone might still be marching in band uniforms using a polished hardwood gym floor as a backdrop. Even with all of this diversity, there is one common denominator, "communication."

Drumming is one of the oldest forms of communication. From a cave man beating once for yes and twice for no to revolutionary war drummers calling out commands, communicating with percussion instruments has been around long before WGI. Today we can typically tell the genre of music that we are listening to by what kind of beat we hear, even without any melody.

We lecture communication to our members on a daily basis, but are we giving them something to communicate? I think it is important to find your groups personality and let them perform something they are comfortable with and believe in. A good way to model your show would be after a great speaker. To set your group's "plan of attack," think about a good ole' southern Baptist preacher and his ways to keep your attention. He will get in your face with intensity and then talk softly to keep you hanging on with suspense. These inflections are used throughout his sermon and help portray to his audience his speaking personality. Personality is one of the first things you notice about a great speaker or a bad speaker. Imagine watching a drum show that sounded like the teacher calling roll from the movie *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

"Bueller...Bueller...Bueller..."

The scene shows students falling asleep while listening to the teacher talk. You have to keep the

attention of your audience by hitting them with a great personality all of the time.

When picking a concept for a show, it is helpful to involve a group of people for brainstorming. Five minds are better than one and a little ownership of the show makes it more enjoyable to teach. Some get hung up on the question, what do I pick first, the music or the concept? You should pick whichever idea comes first and feels the best. It is similar to impulse buying. If it is catchy to you, then someone else might dig it too. Your plan of attack could be aggressive, intellectual, comedic, a storyline or all of the above. One word of caution: If you come up with your concept before you pick your music, keep in mind that first and foremost, this is a musical activity. Your music selection should not be an afterthought to your visual program. Whatever you choose, be confident that the idea will be clear throughout the show. PLEASE remember this - don't make your members dress or perform anything you wouldn't do yourself!

Now that you have chosen an idea and the personality for your show and you know how you are going to communicate it, the design and pacing of your show will come next. Pacing is planned effects throughout your show that are executed in a way to convey the message to the audience. Think about writing in the form of an essay, on the subject of your show, to include an introduction, body and conclusion. An example of this idea is a show about water. Tell us that you're going to splash us in the face, and then splash us in the face. In the end, tell us that you just splashed us in the face. You only have a few minutes to get your point across, so keep it simple. A show on world hunger is probably not the best subject for the time allowed.

All of the planning mentioned up to this point must happen before the first musical selections are cut. When cutting your music you need to think about building the paragraphs in your paper. Avoid using sentence fragments and run-ons, and make sure each phrase has proper punctuation. Think about each section of music as a paragraph. It is good to think of the visual idea or phrase when cutting the music, but not so much that it loses musical integrity.

So far, you have paced out your show and you are happy with the plan. Let's write! This can and should be in conjunction with pacing. You should have planned out when each section is going to play. When writing, remember that clarity of intent is the way to go when you consider the venue we are performing in - a big, boomy gym! Consider it to be like a conversation where everyone takes turns speaking and interacts with each other. Keep in mind that conversation also includes situations of

silence and times when everyone breaks out into laughter. When you get a chance, close your eyes and listen to your group. Without the visual distractions, this will be helpful when you are fine tuning the music.

Remember the southern Baptist preacher and the effects he uses on his listeners. You don't want to go a long time without grabbing the audience's attention, and to keep someone's attention you don't want overuse any one emotion. All too often, effect is mistaken for loud moments with lots of shots and begging for points with your arms in the air, making sure everyone sees you. Your effect will set up the mood in the music. Good effects will coordinate with the music - pulling the mullet wig off your neighbor timed with a ping shot, or stick flashes that would compliment a keyboard run. It is only an effect if it is planned and coordinated. Using a variety of effects is a good idea. If you choose to do back flips while playing inverted flam para-diddle-diddles all the time, it will eventually lose its effect.

In the indoor percussion activity there are no horns to hide behind and no color guard for visual effect. We are it! One of the great things about this activity is that it is all about percussion, and as far as parameters are concerned, almost anything goes! It is amazing to think how far this activity has grown in 10 years and exciting to think about what is in store for us in the future. Personally, I would love to see a group explain their show over a microphone and say, "we are going to play and move for you now". Until then, we shall continue to play the game.

***Shane Gwaltney** is the Battery Arranger and Visual Designer for Music City Mystique, WGI PIW five-time champions and he is an integral part in defining the "Mystique way" of drumming. He was an original member of the group and has served on staff since his age out year in 1999. His innovative and trend setting musical and visual designs have become a mainstay in the WGI, BOA, and DCI arenas. Shane resides in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida where he serves as Percussion Program Director for the Choctawhatchee High School Drumline. He is also in his 3<sup>rd</sup> year as Battery Arranger and a member of the design team for Spirit Drum & Bugle Corps.*

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