

***Make Marching Band Work for Small School Bands  
by the Light of Gurdon, the Round Mound of Sound,  
Oh so shy (now that's funny right there),  
Allen Wimberly***

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**Al's Philosophy:** I have often told my students, you put the reed on the horn the same way either big school or small school. Good intonation, blend, and balance are the same everywhere. Out of step is bad if students are in a big band or small band. Poor fundamentals show up in big bands as well as small bands. It is harder however to hide in a small band. If students can't march well, put them in the pit. Explain to your students that invitational marching contest are to help you prepare for region marching contest and invitationals are fund raisers. Don't get the big head with getting a first division at an invitational marching contest. Also don't forget the people in the audience, they are listening to you, know your audience

**Music Selection:** You must rewrite if you're a small band. You must play to your strengths. You have to reinforce some lines for proper voicing. It's simple, do you have the soprano, alto, tenor and bass voices being heard? Don't forget your low brass section. I know that tuba players are tough to get, but you must have at least one. Bari Sax doesn't cut it. Low brass is a must, especially since we tune from the bottom up. Band must have a good bottom. For those kids who just can't afford an instrument, make sure they get in the band and they play a school horn like the trombone or baritone. I would rather have more trombones and baritones than a slew of trumpets that muddy up the good players. If they can't play trumpet, they might make a very fine baritone player. If you play those marching band cd's that have a huge brass sound, and you have 15 winds, it's probably not going to work for you. Pick music that will work for your band. 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, a tuba, a baritone, 2 alto sax, 2 flutes, and 3 clarinets can sound wonderful on the field if you get the right music. Simple Gifts is not the right music but maybe a tune written exclusively for your band and it's instrumentation can be. I pay Don Colquitt to write our music, he knows our instrumentation and my strengths and writes it accordingly. It's money well spent when you consider how many times you will play the music and how many people will hear it. If we do a stock chart, it's always modified, cut, spliced, and diced to fit our band. Pick music that you and your students will enjoy working on. Sometimes you have to remind your students that your playing to the audience who is mostly much older than they are. We try to hit several people in our audience with something they can relate to. This last years show music was Atomic Dog, Jungle Boogie, Funky Town, Blue Suede Shoes, Folsom Prison Blues and Simple Man.

**Marching Band Sound :** We work year round with the Foundations for Superior Performance – Warm-up and Techniques for Band, by Richard Williams and Jeff King,

Kjos is the publisher. We work at the beginning of summer band for a nice blended and balanced concert band sound. When the students can handle it and keep the balance, we take it up a notch in dynamics for the field. I love it when a marching band judge tells me that this band will be awesome during concert band season. Our Students sing a lot, if they can sing it in tune, they can play it in tune. If the brass can buzz it on the mouthpiece they can play it on the horn. We have sang our entire show before including percussion when our chops are too tired. Please don't start summer band playing all loud, they haven't played much during the summer and will just wear out quick and sound bad. Work your way up to the outside volume. Only play as loud as you can control and keep in balance. You don't have to be the loudest band to win a contest, we very seldom are the loudest. Small bands should not try to sound like a big band. A nice full sound is very welcome though, regardless of the size of your band.

**Marching:** You must learn to keep your instrument facing the home stand at all times. A good drill writer will help you with this. However, students must learn a box square maneuver drill keeping the horn pointed the same way all the time. Follow the leader drills with a horn in someone's back is absolutely a bad thing for a small band. You need your sound coming to the press box at all times, unless your good enough to face the other way for dynamic contrast. Small school bands should make sure they don't spread the field too much, but should also realize that spreading the field enough will actually enhance the volume of your sound and make your band look quite large. Playing in a big cluster will not make the sound any louder when your sound is going through someone else's uniform. Small school bands can do very progressive shows with lot's of music and moves if you have a good drill writer. We owe it to our students to prepare them for the next level, college.

**Preparation:** It must begin well in advance of marching season for any size band or school. Second semester we are planning show and hope to have music scores ready for the drill writer when summer begins. You have to wait until the end of school and check with your counselor for numbers before you go to your drill writer.

**Summer Band:** All students start morning rehearsal with their instruments. Work sound, blend and balance, it's also a great time to work Star Spangled Banner, your alma mater, fight song, since you want all of your students playing these tunes in the stands. Then work some show music with winds and percussion and let the color guard sponsor go out with your color guard. After a brief break, we all do marching fundamentals together outside. Work some drill only after they have memorized their music. Mr. Burson puts down each spot on the field where students go for their hits or shapes. Bring them all in for the last session and play some stand tunes and have a little fun. End on a high.

**Public Relations:** This is so important in a small school which is usually in a small town. Take the parade seriously. You know where most of your people are going to be in the parade, so stop, face them and let them hear it. Play at the grand opening of a business. Either you (the director) play at the Chamber of Commerce Banquet or a group of your students play, but it must be good. Who needs bad PR? Teach your students to

play Amazing Grace or something for church, people love that. Have a carwash and let the public see you out there with the students some of the time, not just chaperones. Be active in your community, play the Star Spangled Banner for everyone at your town's big festival. Be the master of ceremonies for your 4th of July celebration. Personally invite your school board to your concerts. Pictures in the paper are a must. You must let the town know of your band and students success and it also keeps parents off your back. You know they want to see their baby in the paper. Throw the folks a bargain in the concession stand last home game. You have to get rid of the stuff and everyone loves a good deal.