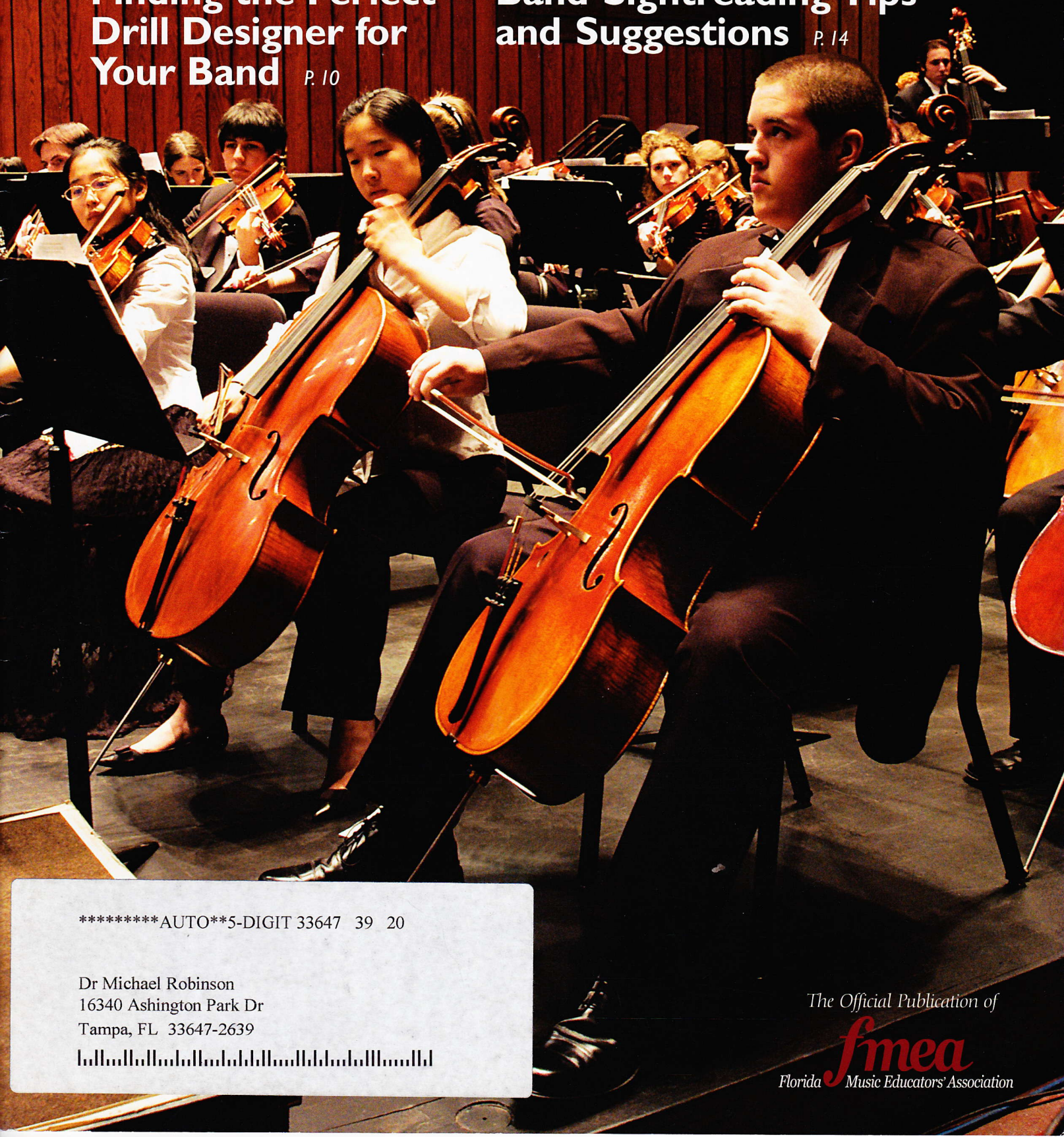


FLORIDA MUSIC DIRECTOR

August 2007
Volume 61 • Number 1

**Finding the Perfect
Drill Designer for
Your Band** P. 10

**Band Sightreading Tips
and Suggestions** P. 14



*****AUTO**5-DIGIT 33647 39 20

Dr Michael Robinson
16340 Ashington Park Dr
Tampa, FL 33647-2639



The Official Publication of
fmea
Florida Music Educators' Association

Finding the Perfect Drill Designer for Your Band

*By Dr. M. Gregory Martin
Associate Director of Bands
Director of Athletic Bands
Florida International University
Miami, Florida*

The high school band director has more responsibility in today's educational setting than ever before. Marching band halftime (competition) shows have become nothing short of theatrical productions requiring time and planning that eat into the band conductor's already impossible schedule. With the emphasis on competition and the increased expectations in marching performance by high school bands, pressure has been placed on the director to provide the most professional looking and visually competitive design available. The purpose of this article is twofold: 1. to aid the director who chooses to seek outside drill designers in finding the most suitable writer for his specific educational situation; and 2. to present a list of possible questions whose purpose is to initiate and guide an appropriate dialogue enabling the director to make the best decision for his group.

One of the first problems is where to begin the search for potential drill designers. The answer may be more obvious than it may at first seem. One of the most accessible sources for a director searching for a drill designer is the football stadium, i.e., during local football games and band competitions or festivals. By attending these events, one is exposed to a plethora of visual designs. If a drill of particular interest and effect is observed, simply



ask the director of that band where he obtained the drill. Likewise, there are always videotapes and DVDs sold following major marching events in each state, be it high school marching band, drum corps or winter guard. Purchase a copy of those recordings (or if you are fortunate enough to be able to, borrow a copy) and watch them with the same analytical eye. Again, if you find one that interests you, contact that organization to see who writes for the group. Today, almost all drum corps, winter guards and many of the competitive high school bands have Web sites that can be easily accessed, and so contact information is merely a click away.

It is important to mention at this point that you must keep your band's ability, experience level and available practice time and size constraints (if any) in mind. Even though most can, not all drill designers write equally well for large versus small groups, so it is prudent to pay particular attention to well designed shows for groups similar in size and makeup to that of your ensemble. In addition, you should pay close attention to the level of difficulty of the design, since that should be in direct correlation to the experience level of your band and the amount of time you have to rehearse during the summer and fall months.



Many times, obtaining an experienced drill designer as recommended by another director or instructor will yield a person who will professionally design a show with all of the extras and mail it to you, but who will be able to provide little or no personal contact with you or your students. You will probably also have to pay more for a designer of this caliber. Remember, you get what you pay for! If you feel comfortable with taking the full responsibility of teaching and interpreting a well-designed show, this route could provide a very satisfying result for you and your students.

If you are limited by financial restraints or if your program is still in the developing stages and not quite ready for a drill design of the previously mentioned caliber, another suggestion that could produce a positive result lies as close as the nearest college or university. Most music schools and departments teach a marching band techniques course to their future music educators, and this course usually includes some basic training in drill design and charting. Many times the professors of these courses are eager to recommend a student who has shown particular promise in the area of show design.

The advantage of hiring a student designer is the increased potential of having him attend your pre-school band camp or even better, your weekly



rehearsals. A more intimate relationship with the designer improves the potential for quick and accurate rewrites and allows for a closer working relationship between the director, designer and any additional staff members. The result is usually a show more accurately suited to the level of your group. In other words, your new designer can grow right alongside of the band, with you as their guide. This process may initially take a little more time, but the end result could be quite satisfying. Additionally, these younger, less experienced writers are so eager to learn and please that they will usually work very hard for you in the hopes of establishing a permanent relationship. Perhaps the most appealing of all the reasons for choosing this route is the younger designers will almost always charge significantly less than professionals do.



However, do not let price be the sole motivation since this route does require more effort by you as the director and many times will initially produce a less superior product as compared to that from a professional designer.

At this juncture, it is important to note that computerized drill design programs greatly reduce the problem of a drill "not working" when it is initially being taught. Professional writers who still design by hand are usually so experienced that they know, without the aid of computers, the step size required to execute a move as well as any inherent pathway issues from chart to chart, so they avoid writing those types of problems or provide an adequate explanation to aid you in teaching the move. It is recommended, however, that you insist on a computerized drill when considering an inexperienced designer. Computer programs analyze each move for problems and alert the writer so he can rewrite a move or avoid the problem altogether.

If there are no music schools or departments within a reasonable proximity to your school or if the availability of videos or DVDs is limited, another source for high school directors is their state conventions or the annual Midwest Clinic in Chicago. Most conventions of this magnitude feature exhibits by fund-raising, uniform, music and computerized drill companies. If your state convention has a drill design company among the exhibitors, ask the person at that booth for names of potential drill designers. Otherwise, the next most knowledgeable people to contact would be those who are in touch with the most band directors—the uniform and fund-raising companies. Oftentimes these people have a wealth of information in all areas of music education.

Whether the contact process is over the phone, by e-mail or in person, there are several questions you should ask of a potential designer. These questions are crucial to deciding whether a designer is a good fit for your program. Again, it is

Continued on page 12

Finding the Perfect Drill Designer for Your Band

Continued from page 11

important to note that no one knows your program better than you, and you have to be the one to decide at what level of performance your students are capable. The following questions were compiled from those provided by several notable drill designers around the country:

1. What is the potential designer's education? Drill writers should be able to read a conductor's score!
2. What is his experience? How long has he been designing? Does he have examples of his work available for you to view?
3. What is his profession (outside of drill design if applicable)? Is drill design a hobby or is it his livelihood?
4. Does he use a computer for design? If so, which program? (You may want to purchase a copy of this program to facilitate speed of reproduction. The designer can send you the drill on a disk, and you can print it out as well

as watch it. Even though most current drill programs are multi-formatted, make sure you talk format so it is compatible with your equipment.)

5. How many shows does he design in a given year? (The more he does, the tighter the time constraints may be, or unfortunately as in some cases, the more generic the drill may become.)
6. What are the delivery parameters? How quick is his turnaround time? What procedures are in place if the drill is delivered late?
7. What is his fee and how is it determined? (Per student, per page, per minute ... all are used. Depending upon the designer, the cost can range from \$500 to \$15,000 or more.)
8. What does the fee include? Charts, student coordinate sheets, animation disk, rewrites, flag/prop designs, etc. Check on availability for rewrites.

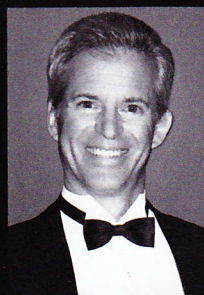
9. In what level of drill design, if any, does he specialize (small band vs. large, simple vs. complex, corps style vs. military/traditional)?

Likewise, the potential drill designer should have several questions for you. If he does not ask the following, you should bring up:

1. What style of show do you want?
2. How difficult of a show do you want? Remember, the difficulty is determined by velocity (step size vs. tempo), frequency of moves (every 4, 8, 16, counts, etc.), total number of charts and the rest time (mark time, halt) or lack thereof between moves.
3. What are the band's current playing and marching abilities and experience? You must be *brutally* honest with yourself regarding this assessment!
4. What interval do you desire? Keep in mind the larger the interval (i.e., more



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19



HIGH SCHOOL MIXED
JEFF JOHNSON
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY



HIGH SCHOOL WOMEN
EDITH COPLEY
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY



MIDDLE SCHOOL CHOIR
RANDY PAGEL
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

UM CHORAL STUDIES • PO BOX 248165 • CORAL GABLES, FL 33124 • 305 284 4162

MUSIC.MIAMI.EDU/CHORALSTUDIES

than a three step), the more space required through the form (layering) to provide readability. Also, changing intervals increases difficulty.

5. What is the music, and who is the arranger? Is there a music concept for the show? When will the arrangements be available?
6. What are the numbers within each section, and how do you prefer to have them placed? (Homogeneous vs. heterogeneous vs. choirs; woodwinds in the front, in the back, integrated, etc.)
7. Auxiliaries—what are the numbers and types of equipment available? Is there a specialist or technician teaching the group, and is that person available for consultation regarding specific areas in the music for features and equipment changes?
8. Is there a video or a DVD of the band available for the designer to view to aid him in assessing the band's level based on previous experience? It also might be helpful to discuss the festivals and competitions the band is anticipating attending. (Designing for a BOA type show vs. a one-time outdoor music festival where ratings are assigned can differ.)

Having someone else design a show for your band can be a potentially stressful and even unnerving situation. However, while the process previously described may seem involved and even tedious, the time taken at the beginning could save you countless hours of frustration and extra rehearsals during the fall. In the long run, the extra time spent early on will free up time during the year to allow you to do what you do best—teach music! This in turn will make the marching band experience more enjoyable and more educational for both you and your students. ☺

**SERVING MUSIC EDUCATORS & STUDENTS
FOR OVER 80 YEARS!**



SERVING EDUCATORS

- One Stop Shopping
(Instruments, Music, Software, Everything!)
- Free Written Quotes
- Great School Discounts

SERVING STUDENTS

**Great Prices • Huge Selection
Convenient Locations**

Educational Services Department

7726 Cheri Ct., Tampa, FL 33634-2419

Toll Free: (888) 615-5904 • Ext. 331

samashed@samashmusic.com



Miami Lakes

5360 NW 167th St.
(305) 628-3510

Orlando

912 Lee Road Shopping Ctr.
(407) 599-1222

Miami

11421 NW 12th St.
(786) 331-9688

Orlando (Colonial Mall)

4644 E. Colonial Dr.
(407) 896-5508

Margate

5460 W. Sample Rd.
(954) 975-3390

Tampa

13133 N. Dale Mabry Hwy.
(813) 908-5556

Clearwater

923 McMullen Booth Rd.
(727) 725-8062

Sarasota

7606 N. Tamiami Trail
(941) 351-7793

Visit our website: www.samashmusic.com