

The intent of this article is to share ideas and insight to the creative process that we go through when creating an idea, concept, and show. This article is not suggesting that this is the only way or even the right way to the design

School, I had the good fortune and privilege to have already written for many talented and accomplished organizations both in the band and drum corps genres. To put it simply, I was spoiled! When I finally decided to get my

the identity of the Tarpon Springs High School Band program began and where I, as a designer, had to reach outside my comfort zone and develop a new creative process.

At the time, I remember being very discouraged. I remember

options, it was at that very moment I began approaching the show design process on what's best for these students. I decided that we shouldn't try to reinvent what has already been done or try to replicate what another successful organization has already accomplished. That first year we were able to get about 36 wind players, eight percussion, and ten color guard. However, the real challenge was to keep the audience interested in our students' performance for the entire ten minutes. It was and is our philosophy that because our symphonic band is the centerpiece to our band program, our approach to our instruments regardless of whether we are inside or out does not change. We were determined to play with good technique and tone quality. This meant that we would not be able to make an impact through volume, so we needed to explore other alternatives in order to create a dynamic impact. We accomplished that during those forte sections through choice of color for our color guard and by the size of equipment appropriate to the music. It should be noted that sometimes what will give you the most impact will not be a traditional piece of color guard equipment. We actually look forward to and embrace those moments when we can introduce something less conventional that really relates well to the effect we are trying to portray.

The next thing we did was incorporate the use of props in order to eliminate some of the field coverage. We felt that with a band our size we needed to manipulate the size and shape of the field and create an intimate stage for our performers. This also

helped the audience maintain their interest on our student performers and prevented them from getting lost in all the empty space that would have engulfed our students. It was our philosophy from the beginning that we were not going to spend an exorbitant amount of money on our props but we were committed to create something that represented quality. It was remarkable to me how many community businesses were willing to donate supplies and equipment, not to mention the amount of things that can be recycled from one year to the next. We were also very fortunate to have a band booster that designed custom furniture, who along with many other devoted parents created our props at a very reasonable price and labor free. They are truly wonderful people. We chose to use the props as a part of our story line much like page turning in a picture book.

It has had great appeal to our community and football crowd, who are at the forefront of our consideration when we are designing our shows. It should be noted that props while they can serve as a nice back drop to your presentation, if you choose to use them, they will not march the drill, nor will they play the instruments, or spin the equipment. Our primary focus first and foremost is the performance of the performer, the quality of the musical arrangements and drill, our attention to the musical line, and the appropriate choreography.

Three Important Questions: Educate, Entertain, and Challenge?

1. Does the show we are selecting have content

Thinking Out of the Box

Programming and Show Design

by Kevin Ford, Tarpon Springs H.S., Florida

process. It is simply the approach we have taken at Tarpon Springs High School for our students, community, and organization.

I have been fortunate to work with some outstanding, creative and talented individuals throughout the years. I have tried to approach each conversation or viewing with an open mind and a burning desire to learn more. Many things that I will be sharing with you have been handed down to me by the many individuals that have shaped our activity and for whom I have a great amount of respect. It is my purpose to share what I've learned through those experiences and, hopefully, to assist others who might be approaching this sometimes intimidating creative design process.

Background:

Before taking the position as Director of Bands at Tarpon Springs High

music education degree and took the position at Tarpon Springs High School in 1994, it was literally sight unseen. I was out on the road touring with a drum corps, when the principal, Mr. John Nicely, called me on the phone and hired me. At that time, I had no idea what I was getting into. At our first rehearsal, eleven students attended. The band room only opened one period a day and it was hardly what I imagined my first teaching position to be like. I took the job on the first of August and band camp was starting the next week. I share this with you because it was at this time in my life that I learned the true meaning of "thinking out of the box." I was faced with a dilemma that I had never experienced before. How do I approach a band with very little tradition, terrible facilities, no budget, and no identity with only 11 students? However, it was from those obstacles that

thinking to myself "What am I going to do with eleven students?" Coincidentally, I was studying the life and work of Richard Strauss. There is a quote from him that has inspired me and has had a profound effect on me. I've kept it with me throughout the years and I would like to share his words with those of you who might be confronted with a similar situation.

Strauss stated: "I can tell you from my own experience that an ardent desire and fixed purpose combined with intense resolve brings results. Determined concentrated thought is a tremendous force... I am convinced that this is a law, and it holds good in any line of endeavor."

Philosophy:

One panic stricken night before band camp, I took these words to heart and began moving forward. With no other foreseeable



Tarpon's 2001 show garnered two BOA Regional Champion titles as well as Class AA Champion & 6th place at the Grand National Championships.

that will be educational to our students? For example, this year we performed a show entitled "Life is A Journey" which depicted many of the human emotions we experience throughout our lifetime. We depicted events in our society or focused on individuals that all of us as a society have experienced together. This left a great opportunity for us as a band to research and discuss the various moments we decided to interpret. Before our final show, all of our seniors choose one of the events in our show and had the opportunity to get up in front of the band and make a presentation based upon their particular chosen event. It was a remarkable experience! They spoke in the order of the show and brought in illustrations, made poster board presentations, and various other things to support their show subject matter. It truly took all of our understanding of what we were trying to perform to a new level of appreciation and understanding.

2. Is the show concept we have selected entertaining? Is there a wide range of emotions, genres, and styles being explored? Since we perform more in front of our community and football crowd, will they enjoy and be able to relate to our presentation? Notice, we

do not concern ourselves with whether or not the judging community is going to approve of what we are doing. I am a strong believer that if your show is universally entertaining, well put together, and the students are performing at a high level, the rest will take care of itself. Quality and excellence must always be the standard to which we measure our success. Some of our most disappointing moments with our organization, have been shows that we have actually won and walked away knowing that we could have done better. Our emphasis is to be the best we can be and that is the standard to which we base our success or failure.

3. Will this show challenge our students both physically and mentally? Does the content of what our student's are being asked to achieve make them better student musicians and performers? *I want to emphasize, you must write your show to the ability level of your performers!* For our organization, we only rehearse two nights a week. This is a major consideration when we choose the material for our student's to perform. We also try to do things technically in our marching band show that help our students when they are playing their symphonic literature. For example, if we know we

are going to be performing literature that requires our students to double tongue, then we try to incorporate that somewhere into their marching band program. We also try to incorporate as many different styles and emotions into our show design to expose our students to various styles, approach to articulations, and techniques. We choose to make the stylistic content of our marching band experience different from what we are doing symphonically. For us, it helps create a more well rounded interesting experience throughout the course of an entire year for our students. However, it should be noted that what makes our marching activity so wonderful, is the variety that each individual band program shares with us, the audience. Remember, it is the right and privilege for each organization to do what they feel is in the best interest of their students. It is the responsibility of all of us, to support each other's vision and respect the decisions and approaches upon which each organization chooses to embark.

The Creative Process: I get approached quite frequently and asked "How do you come up with your ideas?" I know that this is a frustration for many people including myself when designing a show. Especially, for those

of us who have limited time to think about marching band because we are so busy and focused on all the other aspects of our band programs and most importantly, trying to balance our personal and professional lives. I want to share with you some methods of working out your ideas at times that might seem a little unorthodox. I ran across this a few years ago when studying a book entitled *Higher Creativity* by Willis Harmon and Howard Rheingold. This involved being an actual "dream student" and here are some of the things I found useful for me.

1. Keep your recording equipment (notebook or tape recorder within reach of your bed.)
2. Record the date before you sleep.
3. Repeat to yourself, or write in your journal, just before you go to sleep, your intention is to remember your dream.
4. Try to ask questions while you are dreaming and think of ideas for your presentation.
5. Reenter the dream while you are awake. If you can't remember to ask questions during a dream, then try to reconstruct the dream in your mind's eye and ask yourself the same

questions when you are awake.
6. Record every thought, phrase word, image, or emotion you can recall, either in the middle of the night or the first thing when you awake.
7. Look over dream notes written at night as soon as you awaken.

When I read about this method, I thought these guys were crazy. However, most of my ideas already happened in the middle of the night anyway, so I found this works for me because it doesn't take time away from spending time with my family and other things I want to focus on during the day. While I don't follow this process exactly, I do use a variation of this method.

Another thing I would recommend when putting your show together is research your material. To give you an example of what I mean, I've just been recently hired to choreograph the Opening Ceremonies to the International World Cup Soccer Championships in Seoul, Korea. The Korean Government is emphatic about this presentation representing the Korean culture. Embarrassingly, up until a few weeks ago I knew very little about the Korean culture. With the assistance of some of my students, we searched

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Tarpon Springs H.S. Band

Recent Marching Band Honors 2001 BOA Atlanta Regional Champions and Orlando Regional Champions, 2001 Grand National Class AA Champions and 6th Place Finalist, 2000 BOA Atlanta Regional Champions and Orlando Regional Champions, 2000 Grand National Class AA Champions and 3rd place Finalist.

Spotlight The TSHS Wind Ensemble was invited and performed at the 2001 BOA National Concert Band Festival.



Poodle-skirt flags illustrated "the 50's" in Tarpon's 2000 show.

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out as many books that related to fashion, art, tradition, etc. that we could find on Korean culture. Within one book I had all the material I needed. We found the patterns for the various flags and props we are going to use. Based on our research, we are going to base the production off the Korean flag. We will be using the "yin and yang" as our center piece and the harmony between the contrasting elements that the various bars on the Korean flag represent which are Heaven and Earth and Water and Fire. Essentially, we are going to try and bring their flag "to life" throughout our presentation. Without this research, I had no idea where to start. You will be amazed at what ideas you can generate from your research. Usually nine times out of ten, that's

where we find our flag and uniform designs. This research helps us to create levels to our program and sometimes helps point us in the direction of musical selections.

You Are Creative:

I truly believe that each of us has the capacity to become much more than what we think we can be, if we choose to stop believing otherwise. We must sometimes search out those ideas that are out of our comfort zone and give the impossible a chance. This is your opportunity to revisit that imagination that each one of us so vividly explored while growing up.

According to creativity researcher Frank Barron:

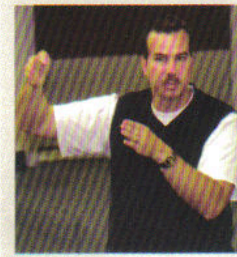
"The creative individual in all of us is when we not only respect the irrational in ourselves, but we court the most promising source of novelty in our thoughts...The creative person is both more

constructive and more destructive, more primitive and more cultured, crazier and saner, than the average person. The creative process... is the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, people, or circumstances of his or her life on the other... The mainspring of creativity appears to be... man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities." (*Insight to A Creative Mind*)

I find it very beneficial and educational to research those individuals that have created the timeless master pieces that have shaped our world and culture. I want to share with you a passage that I found that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart who was sharing with a friend in the latter part of the eighteenth century about his creative process.

Mozart stated: When I am, as it were, completely myself, entirely alone, and of good cheer say traveling in a carriage, or walking after a good meal, or during the night when I cannot sleep; it is on such occasions my ideas flow best and most abundantly. Whence and how they come, I know not; nor can I force them. Those pleasures that please me I retain in my memory, and accustomed, as I have been told, to hum to myself. If I continue this way it soon occurs to me how I may turn this or that morsel to account, so as to make a good dish of it, that is to say, agreeably to the rules of counterpoint, to the peculiarities of the various instruments and etc.

All this fires my soul, and provided I am not disturbed, my subject enlarges itself, becomes methodized and defined,



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and the whole, though it may be long, stands almost complete and finished in my mind, so that I can survey it, like a fine picture or a beautiful statue, at a glance. Nor do I hear my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them, as it were, all at once. What a delight this is I cannot tell! All this inventing, this producing, takes place in a pleasing lively dream. Still the actual hearing of the tout ensemble is after all the best. What has been

throughout the country, and is nationally renowned for his abilities as a show designer, drill writer, and consultant for the marching activity, as well as the show designer for the DCI World Championship finalist Boston Crusaders. Most recently, he has been selected to produce and choreograph the Opening Ceremonies for The International World Cup Soccer Championships in Seoul, Korea. Mr. Ford is also a member of The Bands of America Advisory Board. Consistently recognized for his creativity, work ethic, and his continuous commitment to excellence in music education, Mr. Ford was most recently awarded the prestigious National Band Association Citation of Excellence for his outstanding contribution to bands and band music. He was also awarded the Tarpon Springs Community "Teacher of The Year" in 1996 and 1997 for achievement in education and service to the community. In 1997, he was the Tarpon Springs High School "Teacher of The Year" and a finalist for the Pinellas Educator of the Year in 1998. Kevin and wife Jeannine currently reside in the Tampa Bay area and are the proud parents if their 3 year old daughter Madison Riele.

produced I do not easily forget, and this is perhaps the best gift I have my divine maker to thank for.

While I hardly contend what we are doing is anything remotely close to the great works of Mozart, I do believe there are bits of insight to his thoughts that can help us in opening our creative minds and going through and exploring the creative process.

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Blue Print for The Show Design Process

The following is the step by step process we go through in our initial design stages at Tarpon Springs High School, when actually designing and conceptualizing a show. This is not suggesting that this is the only way or right way you do it. In fact, there are many organizations out there who are far more successful than us who I am sure take a different approach. However, with our unique situation in regards to size, it is simply, the questions and process we use to develop a concept and idea.

I. Choosing the Program

- A. What comes first, the music or the concept? Simply go with your strongest ideas. Sometimes the idea can generate the selection of the music and vice versa.
- B. Who is my audience?
- C. What is the skill level of my performers?
- D. How many ideas, thoughts and concepts do I have for my presentation?
- E. Is this a program that will engage and involve my community or one that will alienate my community?
- F. How much will it cost and do the expenses still allow me to maintain a balanced program throughout the year?
- G. Am I inspired and interested by these ideas and concepts?

II. I Have Chosen My Concept and Music, Now What?

- A. I have lots of ideas and no music or I have music and no ideas? (Don't worry, keep moving forward.)
- B. What is a "Story Board" and how do I use it?
- C. Who should be involved in developing the " story board." (Generally your design team.)

III. How Do I Fill Up My Story Board?

- A. On a large poster board write down as many visual and musical ideas that support one another as you possibly can think of. Stretch your imagination and don't worry about logistics. Go into this thinking anything is possible!
- B. Now go back and see what ideas or music needs the most attention and then repeat step A.
- C. The key is to fill up each moment in your program with as many ideas and options you can give yourself. This will be very important to you when you get further along in the process and when you begin creating levels to your presentation.

IV. Now, I Have My Story Board and Ideas And I'm Ready to Write My Show...WRONG!

- A. Go back to your story board and do not go past this point until you consider the following questions:
- B. How many different levels of emotions does my show explore?
- C. Does this program and musical ideas allow the audience to be Intrigued, Laugh, Cry, Sing, Dance, Think, and Be Inspired?
- D. If your program lacks these characteristics or a variety of emotional appeal, then STOP! Do Not Move Forward!
- E. Too much of any kind of emotion becomes less effective and very redundant! Go back to the story board step III.

V. I've Collected Many Visual and Musical Possibilities, Where Do I Go from Here?

- A. Begin matching together your ideas and the music that best supports those ideas.
- B. Begin placing them in a logical order that will keep your audience's interest.
- C. While considering your order of events, keep similar emotions away from each other. Take your audience on an emotional journey!

VI. Begin Pacing! Now I Have Matched My Musical Ideas with My Visual Ideas & I Have a Show That Is 45 Minutes Long....Argh!

- A. Believe it or not this is a positive situation for you. You are now at the most important aspect of the architecture of your show. Remember, we live in a society that is based on sound bites and instant gratification. You will not change the way society is programmed, so don't try!
- B. How much is too much of something?
- C. What is the best musical piece or excerpt that represents my concept the best? At this point, do not worry if the musical genres match. Just match the best ideas.

VII. Now I Have Matched My Musical Ideas with My Concepts and My sShow Is 20 Minutes Long...Argh!

- A. Believe it or not you are exactly where you need to be! Remember, you are in the middle of your process!
- B. Now, go back and continue to pull out your best musical and visual ideas that begin to work together. Keep in mind, you are trying to take the audience on an emotional journey. Keep the variety of the emotional content as a priority within your selection process.

VIII. Finally, My Show is 8 to 10 Minutes with a Consistent Story Line That Takes the Audience Through a Wide Range of Emotions, but There's One Problem...

- A. My musical selections range from Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* to Benny Goodman to *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy* to singing *Simple Gifts to America the Beautiful* to M.C. Hammer to Michael Jackson to cell phones ringing everywhere. What do I do?
- B. Stay relaxed and keep an open mind! It is at this point, where most people begin to be less creative, the exact opposite needs to happen here. This is the point where the fun really begins!

IX. It's Now Time for You to Pull Out Your Needle and Thread! Ask Yourself the Following Questions:

- A. What is the Main objective of my program?
- B. When the show ends, how do I want the audience to feel?
- C. Is there a musical selection from my ideas that could serve as the center piece to which I build my presentation around? If not, what visual motif or idea could I use to connect the presentation?
- D. Out of my ideas what will work the best as an opening that will draw the audience into the presentation and best state what the program is going to be about?
- E. Now go to the end and select what will best conclude the presentation and give you the complete visual and musical picture of the program.
- F. Now begin putting together the infrastructure of your program. Keep the order of your emotional content varied. Try to not put like emotions together. However, unless you are presenting these for a specific effect try to gradually and smoothly go from one emotion to the other. Return to your story board and look for transitional material.
- G. Now you have your program organized, before you begin charting this out, field test your program. Call and discuss your presentation from beginning to end with people from a variety of age groups and backgrounds. This is where you will find out whether or not your program has emotional appeal. You will learn a lot from this Seek a master designer! You will be amazed how willing most people are help!

- X. **Begin to write your program!** Make Sure Your Music Arranger, Percussion Arranger, and your Color Guard Designer are all working together and most importantly, Enjoy the process!

dance

as though no one is watching you,

love

as though you have never been hurt before,

sing

as though no one can hear you,

live

as though heaven is on earth – unknown