



The Sound of Music: *Some items to consider when selecting music for your winter guard show.*

By Chris Casteel

As I write this article we have entered the month of November, and the Fall Field show season is quickly approaching its conclusion. However, as with all things in the color guard world, this is no time for rest & reflection. In actuality, this is the time when all instructors should be frantically searching for musical inspiration in their winter guard shows. In fact, I believe a good many of you have been on this hunt for an inspired revelation since the end of last indoor season.

As artists we tend to extract our creativity from the world that surrounds us. The premise for a show may be found in something as simple as traffic on the freeway, nostalgia for the past, the colors in a work of art, or a piece of music. There are indeed multiple levels of motivation that go into the creative process. In fact, the development of creativity is so multifaceted that one could write a novel concerning it and still not skim the surface of motivation or inspiration. Rest assured there is absolutely no novel writing potential in me! No, I prefer to take the simple approach to this huge topic and tackle it one step at a time.

Step #1: Music Selection.

It is essential that both the instructors and performers understand this vital concept regarding the musical selection of your show:

Your Color Guard is the Visual Orchestration of your Musical Selection.

Thinking Points:

- Your musical selection will open up lines of communication with the audience. What message, mood, and concept do you want to communicate?
- Considering this, it is important to know your audience. There is a big difference between the musical selection for a pep rally and that which would support a competitive show. Pep rally music is often very 'thin' and does not allow for a broad range of emotions or choreography. The music for a competitive show can have the same element of energy/enthusiasm, but it will offer you greater opportunities to showcase your team's talent and ability.
- Will the audience understand the music? Will they be able to grasp the message or intent of your show in just one listen/view? You don't want to leave your audience with more questions than answers after the performance. Make sure that, as a choreographer, you have the ability to communicate all of your ideas through your musical choice.
- Always consider the need for contrast and development in musical selections. The same beat, lyrics or orchestration quickly becomes mundane and generally does not offer opportunities to fully develop a show. Look for music that offers a diverse sound in the bridge, or a change in tempo, dynamic or mood.

- Think of your music as a journey of varying intensity, tension and release. Ultimately the entire show should be a journey, but the music must have the ability to offer that prior to actually placing content over it.
- Search your musical selection to determine the availability of choreographed impact points and visual/audio resolutions.
- Does the selection have a good ending? Your final opportunity to make an impression on the audience could be lost if the music simply fades into oblivion. This aspect can be frustrating, because we have all seen shows where the ending just doesn't have the impact or resolution that it should. If the piece of music that you are using simply fades away at the end, take it upon yourself to create an ending for it. There are so many sound effects out there that can be manipulated onto the track to give it an unforgettable conclusion.
- Take your performers beyond pop or current trend music. Audiences often have a predetermined expectation of popular music (via music videos) that your performers may not live up to. When I hear a Beyonce song, I think of the video (which is often amazing)...can your performers live up to that visual all the way through their show? Do you want to place that somewhat unrealistic expectation onto them?
- Can you count to it? If you can't count to it, how will your students be able to connect choreography to musical structure? I learned this the hard way. There have been a few pieces of music that I couldn't count to, but I was so taken by them that I used them for shows. Because of this, I decided to sing to my guards instead of count the choreography. Singing is not my forte. Poor kids – I am sure damage was done in that season!
- Will your performers be able to relate to the music? If they can not relate to it...the chance that they will be able to communicate your show to the audience is slim.
- Just to be sure, check out the Restricted Music list for the WGASC. Stay away from these selections.
- Finally, understand the skill limits of your performers. Do not select music that demands a skill that your performers may not yet possess.

There is no doubt that in the pursuit for your 'sound of music', you should seek to explore as many avenues as possible before making that final choice. Hopefully, I have given you a few things to think about as you embark on this process. I leave this article with a final quote.....

“Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent.”

Victor Hugo