

Marching Arts Design and Arranging 101

presented by Dr. Matthew Jordan

Music Planning Stages

-Discovery Stage

- Listen to as much music as you can, especially outside of your comfort zone.
- Find Music that you truly enjoy, without worrying about practicality... These choices will often lead to things that do work!
- Great resources for new music include Pandora, Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube, among many others.
- Involve your whole staff- most music selections come from a group you might not have known before.

-Analyze Music for percussion practicality

- Music with built in idiomatic percussion forces (soundtrack, chiptune, contemporary percussion works, wind ensemble, etc.)
- Music with usable extra voices (orchestra music with keyboard appropriate string parts, piano parts, or extra WW lines)
- Music with no real percussive source material
- Music with no real wind source material (Vanguard Stained Glass)
- Appropriateness of tempo for use on the field/court-Slower is ok, as long as it is placed in the right segment of the show with regards to pacing
- Think about variety of tempos, meaning half/double tempos for layering options.

-Being Realistic

- A small group will not make "epic" music work well, so take that into account when trying to program Hans Zimmer-ish music that relies on quantity and volume to be effective.
- It's very important to play to your strengths when picking music. A good small group can play with more precision than a larger group, but a larger group has the volume and impact capabilities.

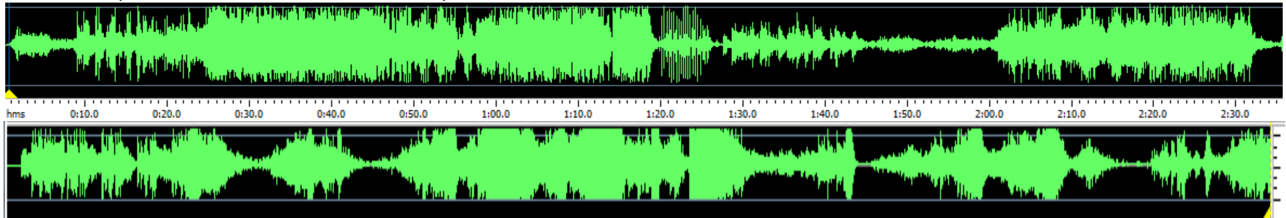
Arranging Process

-Initial Cuts

- Agree among the design team about a general aesthetic or almost "mission statement" about what you're trying to achieve musically with the show.
- Create a "mix tape" of sorts to try out different cuts in the music. Use GarageBand or Logic to slice up music and try different combinations of pieces/orders/etc. This is just for getting a "vibe" of the music. Some of these pieces might not be arranged, but the general idea of the piece is used to compose something original.

- Decide whether the show needs recurring motives based on show theme and map out the timeline of the show to determine where in the music they should happen. (Broken City 2015 vocal line, MCM 2011 Mantra Rhythm, etc.)
- Does the source material work well on its own, or does there need to be original material? Is it a large amount of original material, or is it mainly connective tissue?
- Decide on your major moments in the show, and plan your pacing based on that. Everything in the show should either lead or fall away from those moments. Contrast is key! You need your soft moments to give the impacts context.
- Initial Arrangement

Madison Independent 2011 - WGI PIA A Class Champions



Music City Mystique 2011 - WGI PIW World Class Champions

-Initial Arrangements

- At MCM, we change up who does the initial arrangement of a section of music based on a few things—1. who feels really strongly about a section, 2. If it's original music or an arrangement, or 3. If it's a moment led by battery, front ensemble, or sound design.
- Plays to our strengths (Matt Filosa as a composer, myself as an orchestrator, Shane Gwaltney as the visual designer/battery guy)
- Allows the person thinking about the macro to not always have to think micro at the same time. Able to think in bigger phrases, not the details of the marimba parts.
- Improvisation as a compositional tool (in the style of other composers)
- Approaching arranging through problem solving, rather than “creativity”
- Often times we as composers/arrangers get “writer’s block” by TRYING to be creative. For me, I treat it like an engineer would—let the problem lead you to a solution. Fit the puzzle pieces together.
- Start with the section of the music you feel the strongest about. Authors don't necessarily start writing their novels at the beginning... don't feel like you have to!
- 3 main elements of the percussion ensemble—front ensemble, battery, electronics. All 3 can't be important at the same time

What is the goal of the phrase? How does your writing fit into that?

Melodic or Rhythmic Motivic Statement
Harmonic or rhythmic motion
Transitional
Punctuation
Impact

-Instrumentation and Orchestration

-Making the notes PLAYABLE and ACHIEVABLE is your first role as an arranger. Nothing is more frustrating to a young student or teacher than notes that don't fit on an instrument, or aren't playable due to chord shapes, stickings, etc.

-This is where you will decide the DIFFICULTY of the book. How you ORCHESTRATE is different than how you ARRANGE.

A few things on my "orchestration checklist"-

-What is this player experiencing?

-Do their stickings work?

-Are the dynamics accurate for what I want to hear? Are they clear?

-Rhythm section is MORE important than keyboard parts—I spend lots of time detailing synth/bass/drumset/rack/etc. parts.

-Are the parts legible? Consistent between players?

-Do the parts fit on the instrument the school owns?

-Do the chord voicings fit comfortably on the instrument?

-Aux/Rack Parts - make sure they play more than suspended cymbal!

-This is where creativity really comes into play. What instruments do you have available (or could obtain) that help accentuate the conceptual color palate of the show?

Hope this has been helpful. Let me know if there are any questions!

mattjordanpercussion@mac.com

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