

*Make Marches Come Alive: Practical Solutions to Interpretation Issues*

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Why play marches?

1. Heritage
2. Great music
3. Relevant and entertaining

*"Nothing in the band world is more inspiring, thrilling, and musically satisfying to band audiences than a stirring march when performed by a superb band under the direction of vital, inspired leadership. Select marches carefully, rehearse them thoroughly, and perform them with life and vitality. Then, observe your audience reaction."* William D. Revelli

Performance Considerations

1. Tempo - varies according to these factors:

- A. Style of the march (military, circus, nationality)
- B. Technical limitations of the ensemble
- C. Acoustics of the performance venue
- D. Military marches should not change tempo

2. Style

- A. March style is a detached style; the notes should not touch each other.
- B. To achieve proper articulation for a march, the tongue should not be used to stop the sound. Players should use "tah" or "dah" rather than "tut" or "dut."
- C. Accents are essential to characteristic march performance.
  - Emphasize accented notes by playing the notes that precede and follow them with extra lightness and finesse to highlight the contrast in accented notes.
  - A measure with a short note on beat 1 and a longer note on beat 2 requires the stress to fall on beat 2.
- D. Increased clarity will come from separation (space on the dot, space on tied-over notes).
- E. Create obvious stylistic differences between legato and marcato.

3. Melodic Lines *"Every march has a song in its heart."* Frank Piersol

- A. Treat every march melody and countermelody as if you were singing them.
- B. Shape the music by following the contour of the main melody.
- C. **If** the main melody has faster notes, the countermelody (if present) has slower notes, and vice versa. Use this concept to provide interesting contrast when repeating a strain.
- D. Accompanying sections should shape their parts in accordance with the shaping of main melodic line.

#### 4. Percussion Considerations

- A. Arrangement of percussion is a major consideration in proper march performance.
- B. Field drums or deeper concert snare drums are best for marches.
- C. Bass drum dampening/positioning/stroke.
- D. Use smaller cymbals (16") for working with bass drum. If you need extra impact for strong accents use another percussionist on larger cymbals.
- E. Cymbals play only when the trumpets and trombones play.
- F. If a march has a timpani part, use mutes so the sound will match the bass line.

#### Rehearsal Suggestions

- A. Tempo is everything in a march; practice with a metronome if needed to maintain steady pulse. During rehearsal, have the snare drums play a 16th note pulse for subdivision and internalization.
- B. Rehearse the wind parts without percussion to check for pulse and energy.
- C. Repeated notes (esp. quarter notes) will have a tendency to rush. Place them carefully and accurately in correct tempo and style.
- D. Speak or sing the articulations/rhythms without instruments to help match style.
- E. Most marches are played too loudly. The soft end of the dynamic spectrum should be exaggerated for maximum contrast and performance effectiveness.
- F. Horn parts (after beats) and bass line should be rehearsed carefully in a chorale style (slowly and with length) to emphasize the harmonic importance of these parts.
- G. Most American marches have a "surprise chord" in the second strain. Be ready for these chords and make the most of them.
- H. In a cut-time march, a half note pickup to the first strain can be played tenuto followed by a return to tempo at the start of the strain. This pulling back often gives the music a feeling of additional motion to the first strain. Combine this with a crescendo for maximum effectiveness.
- I. Treat the stinger with care; it is the exclamation point to the music. Due to the nature of bands, the high tessitura will always sound louder on a stinger unless adjustments are made. Rehearse it as a chord to achieve proper balance, and then play it shorter.

*"Band conductors who study and look beyond the essentials may discover that even the lowliest march can be valuable music that deserves to be interpreted according to personal musical ideas and tastes. That is the musical challenge a march can offer." Harry Begian*

Thank you for being here this morning. If you enjoyed the session, please help us thank the following individuals:

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