

Philosophy of Marching Band

The marching band is a performance ensemble that offers the opportunity to develop a very unique set of skills in students, and therefore is an integral part of any high school music curriculum. Marching band helps develop fundamental technical skills on the instrument, specifically at the extremes of the instrument. Additionally, the physical energy that marching requires ensures that musical endurance and proper breathing techniques are also skills addressed in the marching band. Finally, the marching band requires significantly more involved leaders to run smoothly than any other ensemble. These positions can help foster leadership skills as students work toward contributing to a successful program. All of these skills could not be taught in the concert setting (at least not to the fullest potential). For this reason and many others, marching band is a fundamental and necessary part of the high school music curriculum.

Because marching band performances take place outdoors, and because of the nature of the activity, students are usually expected to play with a much fuller sound and in higher tessituras of the instruments during marching band. While some argue that this has a negative impact on the student's playing, it also can in fact have a positive impact. This type of playing allows the student to build technical proficiency not only in the middle registers and at moderate dynamics, but also in the extreme registers and at extreme dynamics. This helps turn students into well-rounded performers on their instruments.

Marching band is also unique in the fact that it requires performing on instruments while also taking part in physical activity. While this may seem to be a negative aspect of the activity, it does in fact allow for the development of a few more unique skills. First, the physical exertion required to perform in a marching show makes the need for endurance in the embouchure (especially in brass instruments) even greater. Constant repetition of physically strenuous activity leaves the body fatigued, which has an effect on musical endurance. Marching band helps build this endurance, which helps students, both on the marching field, and also in the concert band. Also, marching bands many times require a much larger dynamic output than concert bands do. This necessitates the building up of lung capacity in students, to ensure they will be able to meet the needs of the music. While students can build lung capacity in a concert band, the unique dynamic requirements of the marching band allow this capacity to be built at a much more rapid pace, benefitting the students in the end.

One of the most important and unique teaching opportunities that marching band creates is the ability to foster leadership in students. While concert bands may have section leaders, their job is much more musical in nature. Leaders in the marching band (drum majors, section leaders, band captains, etc.) generally have to do a little of everything, including but not limited to: motivating, problem-solving, working with people, rehearsing, and teaching. All these are life skills and can be translated into any field a student could choose to go into after high school, and these skills could not be taught as effectively though a different medium.

Marching bands across the country have different purposes. Some are competitive groups, some are spirit organizations, and some are simply halftime entertainment at football games. Whatever the purpose of any given high school marching band, there are unique skills that the activity allows to be taught. These skills, which include technical skills at extreme dynamics and ranges, lung capacity and endurance, and leadership, could not be taught to the same level of effectiveness without the presence of marching band. For this reason, it is imperative that marching bands remain a part of the high school music curriculum.