

Body Work for Color Guards

By Erick Bacon & Tim Mikan

Although dance has always been a part of the color guard world, it has become of equal importance to equipment work in the last 15 years. The style of movement has dramatically changed from sharp military placements to flowing modern with weight-sharing. Initially, flexed feet were standard. However, as dance in color guard evolved so did footwork. With the dance ability becoming much stronger in color guard, choreographers are beginning to push the envelope by creating equipment work that is motivated by the body. Examples of this would include allowing the rifle to roll around the wrist, exchanging sabers from performer to performer and spinning flags using the performer's feet and toes. In other words, the equipment is simply becoming an extension of the body. Today, writing equipment phrases takes a great understanding of the interplay with the body. Obviously, more time is spent in a dance class setting working on upper and lower body movement.

In a four hour rehearsal, for example, it is common to devote an entire hour just working on dance. During that time, performers warm up, stretch, work on technique, and execute combinations across the floor. If time permits, cleaning movements might also be incorporated into this routine.

Realistically, an hour is hardly enough time to accomplish all of these goals. Therefore, part of the second hour is also used to concentrate on bodywork. After this, you still have the responsibility to work on equipment. Ensemble flag warm ups should combine technical exercises that improve hand to hand skills and build strength. The last 15 to 30 minutes of your equipment practice should be spent cleaning your ensemble feature number. This process ensures constant repetition which results in performance consistency.

It is impossible for someone to control a six-foot flag without proper body carriage. Many students have difficulty spinning and moving simultaneously, let alone combining complex dance skills with equipment phrases. However, it is this synergistic development which characterizes today's color guards. How can you improve these skills? Start by establishing a program which includes:

Moving Block: Adapting spins while marching for 8 counts and holding for 8 counts in a square formation.

Block Run: Same as above but use jazz runs instead of marching.

Corner Cross: Geared towards weapons (can be done w/flags). Performers jazz run from corner to corner of your floor while engaging in equipment releases.

Triple Tag: Involves triple spins with a hand touch to any part of the body.

Thumb Flips: Utilizes thumb flips with lunges on both the right and left side.

Figure Eights: Perform your cones and carves with some rond de jambe.

Basic Spins: Add variation by having performers stand in passé or back attitudes.

Remember to keep it simple but continue to think outside the box. Combine any equipment exercises that are repetitive with things that are body-oriented. Adding plies to spins, for example, teaches to lower the body using the inner thighs and to raise the arms to head level while maintaining the velocity of the equipment. Adapt contractions while manipulating the end of the pole. These contractions work the center core while building and strengthening the wrists.

It is my experience that what makes a program successful is the time and energy put forth during the learning and strengthening process. Instructors who place most of their energy towards the actual show are not as fruitful as those who spend their time teaching technique. Attention to body work and dance technique usually results in a student's ability to both learn and perfect their program in a shorter time period.

Setting and clearly communicating movement goals aids students in awareness and gives them benchmarks by which you can check their progress.

Bodywork Goals

1. Maintain basic alignment while standing.
2. Maintain basic alignment while in motion.
3. Increase and apply strength and stamina.
4. Increase and apply flexibility/range of joint motion.
5. Grasp and retain the sequence of exercises and combinations.
6. Grasp and retain the nuances of rhythm/phrasing of exercises and combinations.
7. Grasp and retain the qualitative dimensions of exercises / combinations.
8. Maintain whole-body and body part clarity of spatial orientation in movement.
9. Move quickly from learning to performing.
10. Implement technical/artistic corrections consistently & in all applicable contexts.

