

Movement for Color Guard

by *Scott Chandler*

Learn the basics, expand them, learn new lessons, use the music, and most of all, let the hard work be fun!

With a rich history based in military procession and precision pageantry, the evolution of color guard has included the influence of every art form imaginable. With the diversity of motion and manipulation of flags as well as changes in the size and shape of weapons and props, one consistent player has remained...the body. It has been a natural progression for movement to evolve in color guard especially when one considers the motion of equipment or props manipulating themselves at random in the performance arena. Obviously, this would be impossible. As designers and instructors have continued to search for new ways to communicate the intent of the music and the messages in their performances, it seemed inevitable that advancements in movement would parallel that of equipment and show design. Each aspect plays an important role in the development of the performer's communication with the audience. Thus, at the foundation of all skills, is the performer's ability to control and express through the body.

It is imperative that the performers understand the philosophy behind movement training, its potential and the commitment involved. Quite often, young performers are over eager to develop their equipment work skills rather than concentrate on body movement. It is important that these performers understand the role that movement plays in color guard. You need to reassure them that once they start to become more comfortable with their own sense of motion, the possibilities for dynamic choreography will increase exponentially. Your approach in dealing with the attitudes of your performers will vary with each personality although most of them will experience the same insecurities and growing pains that we have all felt at one time or another. Try to tailor the movement program to meet the specific needs of your performers' mental and physical abilities to create a 'comfort zone' for them. Also, ensure that you provide a 'safe haven' practice area so that your students can develop their confidence. You want to avoid areas where other groups are practicing or ones that other students use to congregate. Once your performers are comfortable with their equipment, bodywork, and movement, they will not mind and might even relish the opportunity to practice in front of peers not involved with color guard.

It is important to establish a consistent rehearsal procedure that should always include preparing the body for the work ahead in the choreography. The most effective warm-up time should concentrate on flexibility and technique. Use exercises such as plies to warm the body and work on a sense of alignment at the same time. Incorporating 'across the floor' exercises will create a practical application for performers who are on the move for the majority of your program. It makes sense to utilize warm-up time to develop the skills needed in the traveling process.

Developing a vocabulary for the program should be based on the information that needs to be communicated to the performers. The music and the intent or theme of the show provides this information and gives a basis for the character of the performer; this in turn helps the show designer discover how that character should move. Personally, I want my students to know how to jump, run and kick. If they have that knowledge, they have a good springboard through which to interpret. I also work with 'effort changes' that involve release work 'hard to soft', 'bound to light', 'sustained to motion', etc. The dynamics of the music and the character give the message depth and any style of program, from the humorous to the dramatic, can be successful within this framework.

The body is the vehicle through which the art of color guard comes to life. Mastering the performance through movement will enhance every aspect of the color guard performer's experience.

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