

# **Gearing Up!**

## **20 Years Ago in Bandworld**

**by Gary Wiese**

The marching season again!

It seems as though we band directors have just finished putting away all of the equipment at year's end and once again it's time for that first football game.

Many directors just don't find the time to devote to their percussion sections once the season begins. However, with just a little advance planning, the percussion line will greatly increase the efficiency of rehearsals and allow the director to devote more of his time to the total program.

One of the most important steps a director can take in gearing up for the season is to select a student who will act as a section leader--or "drum captain." The section leader should be chosen on the basis of dependability, leadership, playing ability, and maturity. With the many details that must be handled in running a successful and efficient percussion section, it's important for the director to delegate authority. The section leader's duties could include:

1. Acting as a liaison between the section and director.
2. Assigning parts and passing out new music.
3. Informing the director when special instruments are required or extra personnel will be needed for performance of a particular piece.
4. Keeping the director aware of broken or damaged instruments in need of repair or replacement. The following is a check list which could help:
  - Check all drum heads for holes or tearing.
  - Remove all heads and clean dirt from inside the head, under counter-hoop, and edge of shell. Apply paraffin.
  - Remove all foreign material inside the drum shell and tighten any loose nuts inside.
  - Clean and lubricate all tuning rods with petroleum jelly.
  - Check all snares for loose or broken strands.
  - Check working order of snare strainers and throw-off mechanisms.
  - Check all accessory percussion instruments for damage.
  - Polish and hand buff all cymbals; check to be sure that all straps are secure and tied correctly.
  - Check cords, bumpers, and bars on all mallet instruments.
  - Determine which warped, cracked, or broken sticks and mallets need to be replaced.
  - Clean and polish all percussion instruments with a good quality paste wax or metal polish.
  - Check to see that all carriers, straps, etc. are clean and in proper working order.

Following these simple "common sense" suggestions will help ensure not only a good-sounding percussion section but also a good looking one.

5. Rehearsing the section on selected patterns and cadences.

Many times a short repetitive drum pattern can be substituted for the written drum part and still sound very effective.

There are many standard drum section patterns from which to choose; the key is to choose the one that will best fit the style of the music being played. Using such a pattern with your section is also helpful when the written part is either too simple or too difficult.

Several simple patterns can be memorized and assigned a number. It then becomes a simple matter for the section leader to call a particular pattern appropriate to a particular musical selection.



As with patterns, cadences should be memorized and named. This will allow the section leader to quickly signal the members of the section which cadence to play.

The drum cadence must provide a strong sense of pulse which the marching band can

follow. The parts should be rhythmically interesting but not so difficult that the members of the band have trouble finding the pulse.

For the young band which is not accustomed to marching or for the percussion section which is limited in ability, keep the cadence simple so that it can be played accurately and correctly. As a general rule it is also a good idea to keep cadences quite simple for rehearsals, long parades, or fast tempos.

Once patterns and cadences are established and memorized, uniformity is important for effective visual interest and ensemble unity on the field. All sticks should be the same size and drums should be worn at the same height. This is, of course, basic to all phases of marching and should be fully implemented in the percussion section.

Sticking should be uniform for all players of the same part. To accomplish this, the drum patterns and cadences should be written out with sticking indicated so that each member will learn the part correctly. An effective way to accomplish this is to have your section members face one another during rehearsals so that they can watch each other's sticking pattern and stick height.

With a strong section leader, proper equipment maintenance, plus memorized patterns and cadences, your percussion section will be able to significantly contribute as you gear up for another successful marching season.

◆ Tips

S.D. = snare drum  
 T.D. = tenor drum  
 B.D. = bass drum  
 Cym. = cymbals  
 \* = (in snare) on rim  
 • = on head

More complex cadences can be used for transition movement between formations, special features, or slower tempos.