

Parent's Guide



**Vista Murrieta High School
Marching Band & Color Guard**

Origins of the Marching Band

The origins of marching band could technically date back to when the first musicians got up and moved around. For the comparison of what marching bands do today, we start with the military band. For several centuries, larger military regiments around the world have had “bands” of musicians to herald their arrival and provide moral support in the way of familiar tunes. Some had groups as small as a fife and drum duet, others larger with instruments varying with ethnic tradition, such as bagpipes or rams horns. As better technology in instrument manufacturing quality and quantity in the early 19th century merged with the orderly precision of military tactics established in the earliest of the colonial British empire era, the basis was set for practices still in use today. The musicians were usually located in the front of the combatant soldiers, usually in close proximity to the person(s) carrying the flag(s) identifying the group.

The concept of rank and file, left-to-right being “rank,” front-to-back being “file,” is a basic staple of how marching bands still organize at the beginning of a marching rehearsal, and form up for a parade. The term “rank,” as used in the military, refers to the level of command or responsibility. Such titles as private, corporal, sergeant, lieutenant, captain, major, colonel, and general refer to successively higher levels of responsibility and respect. A block of soldiers, or corps, facing review by a commanding officer would be headed by those in charge of the “file” of soldiers in line behind them, and soldiers of equal rank would be in the same “rank” to his left and right. This serves many purposes in a large group. Keeping track of personnel (attendance) and maintaining a visible concept of order being the most important. In the modern marching band, we still use terms like “squad leader,” section leader,” “band captain,” and “drum major” to denote certain levels of responsibility.

The concept of placing people in a block formation for military purposes naturally gave purpose for ordering larger groups of musicians for formal affairs. A group of 30 bandmen might be organized into a block 5-by-6 (5 ranks, with 6 in each file) or maybe 3-by-10, depending on circumstances. The commander of this group, the drum major, would lead and command the group, so-called because commands to play were usually given to the drummer to begin music. The drum major usually possessed a ceremonial mace (a large baton usually 4’ - 6’ in length with a decorative top-cap) to signal certain procedures to begin. The drum major would typically lead the group from the front.

At times, the group would need to stop and do a presentation of music, or to move as a group in a different direction. Using standard commands used with infantry, the drum major would give orders to the band to turn in unison to the desired direction. If the band needed to turn to the left, the command would be, “Band, left hace!” The word “hace” is used instead of “face” because the consonant “f” is difficult to enunciate loudly. The group then would perform to the appropriate audience. A command of “left face” or “right face” would turn the group 90 degrees in the respective direction. A command of “about face” would snap the group 180 degrees in the opposite direction. Sometimes these commands are given from a standstill, or more impressively, on the move.

Military bands, due to their ceremonial nature, usually perform in conjunction with the color guard, soldiers charged with the responsibility of presenting and protecting the colors, or national flag. In times of active duty, there were usually 2 persons to handle the raising and lowering of the flag, and 2 soldiers to protect the soldiers and the flag itself. The guardians usually possessed rifles or sabers or a combination of both (more likely during a ceremony.) Though the modern color guards that perform with marching bands are much different, military color guards still exist today to protect the flag, and to present the colors at ceremonies.

Most countries have ceremonial bands that are their military musical ambassadors to the world. Great Britain and Scotland are well known for their traditional military bands that still perform elaborately staged shows today, such as the Black Watch, or Coldstream Guard. Perhaps the most well known throughout the world since the late 1800's is the United States Marine Band, also known as "The President's Own." Most fame for the group is attributed to its' 17th leader, John Philip Sousa. While known today for an endless list of marches and orchestral transcriptions that are still popularly played today, such as the "Stars and Stripes," Sousa helped to create national popularity with band music. While known as the March King, most of his marches were played sitting down. Many of the first wax cylinder recordings of band music were done using members of Sousa's marine band, and their national distribution helped with the popularity of the marine band and band music in general.

Another origin of marching bands of a different sort would be the Dixieland era bands, which still exist today. In particular, funerals and street parades feature small groups of jazz musicians leading the processions. Their style is much more relaxed and improvised, and showed more of the feeling of the music outwardly, as is generally the case with jazz music. Today, the southern college bands and some southern high school bands' styles reflect this attitude, being much more of a show band, with R & B music at the center of their repertoire. These bands perform at home games and travel to away games where rivalries between show bands are legend, and the competitive spirit more geared to pleasing the audience.

The availability of sheet music and quality mass-produced band instruments from C. G. Conn helped sprout hundreds of community bands. In 1915, C. D. Greenleaf purchased the Conn Company, and began to focus on educational programs to teach band directors and provide smaller working instruments for beginners. As more students became involved in public school band programs, colleges and universities began to create larger marching bands that would perform in parades, and as luck would have it, football was becoming a widespread sport. The football field, with its equally marked surface, provided a near-perfect fit for a moving music spectacle. A few years prior, in 1907, the University of Illinois created the letter "I" and Purdue University created the letter "P," both on the field at their respective school's football stadiums during home games. These are loosely documented as the first incidents of non-military block formations.

In the 1950's, Albert Casavant revolutionized the approach to marching band with his Precision Drill concepts, utilizing a system that equally maps the entire football field onto a mathematically accurate grid for precisely placing performers during shows. Casavant also invented the modern drum carrier, and wrote several books on the design of marching band shows. This influence lasted nearly 20 years without much change to the block-style based drill.

History of Marching Competition

The concept of marching bands competing is as old as the first time two groups ever performed to the same audience. Regardless of whether there are official judges, there is always a question of who is better, be it the audience deciding, judges, or the musicians themselves. Sanctioning scholastic contests is a way for educators to make comparisons, and receive input from peers or other outside, unbiased sources.

In the early 1900's, drum and bell corps, both independent and school based, as well as drum and bugle corps, which were mostly supported by communities or charitable organizations, were coming into wide-spread operation. The V. F. W. organization sponsored both organizations and contests, and became the governing and adjudicating body of the national contests.

Drum and bugle corps became popular, and very competitive, and were often started as youth alternative activities – in other words, to keep kids out of trouble! The Boy Scouts of America was one of the largest supporters of the early drum and bugle corps, and in fact some current corps are still affiliated with Boy Scouting. Many corps directors felt that the V. F. W. organization placed too many restrictions and rules upon the competition, and they formed a new organization in the early 1970's... Drum Corps International. The main differences between drum corps and marching band at the time - there were no woodwinds, and the brass instruments were all pitched in G, which is the traditional key of the military bugle. Instead of being called trumpets, mellophones, and tubas, they were called sopranos, alto horns, and contrabass bugles, respectively. In addition, these horns began with only one valve, then a second rotor valve (like that of a French horn,) was added, then two upright valves were allowed, and not until the 1990's were three valves allowed. Finally, in 2001, the brass instruments no longer had to be pitched in G, and traditional band instruments could be used. While the quality of drum corps has increased dramatically over the last 30 years, the number of units has been drastically reduced, due to skyrocketing insurance, transportation, and instrument costs.

One interesting aspect of the competitions for both drum corps and marching band was the process of inspection. Units were lined up prior to performance, and each person was inspected head-to-toe and evaluated on the condition of uniform, shoes, instrument cleanliness, and poise. Groups were given awards for top inspection. This was eliminated in the early 80's. Another interesting aspect of competitions that lasted until the mid 1980's was the use of a starter pistol to mark the official start and end of the show. In the drum corps performance, it signaled the end of judging, and the corps usually had another minute or so left in their shows, which is usually where they took the most risk, and "let it all hang out" without criticism. Many recordings bear evidence to this practice.

Another organization in the 1970's also came into existence, Marching Bands of America. This organization began having national contests in 1976 both in the summer and fall, and began to establish a national scale of what high school marching bands were doing across the nation. The "Grand Nationals" competition, while not a true national competition (anyone can enter) this contest has evolved into several regional sites, and does attract arguably the best bands in the country. Now known as Music for All / Bands of America or "BOA," this organization focuses on all facets of band music and leadership, and has begun to incorporate orchestral activities in its scope. The Grand National competition was held in the RCA Dome in Indianapolis since 1989, and recently moved to the Lucas Oil Stadium. BOA has since moved its headquarters to Indianapolis, seen as a "hub" for the marching band activity.

Today, most states have music organization sanctioned contests. Many foreign countries, such as Malaysia, Australia, Italy, and Japan, have similar forms of marching band and drum corps competitions.

Why Compete?

Many results in life seem to be the outcome of some form of competition. As children, we compete for toys and attention. As young adults we compete for affection seeking a mate, or try to outdo each other academically, whether for prestige or scholarships. As we enter the workforce we compete against other potential employees for the best jobs; at work we compete against fellow employees within our workplaces for a higher position, or to demonstrate our need for a raise, as the company itself is competing against other companies to stay alive and be the top company. At home, the term "keeping up with the Jones's" refers to our need to have as good or better material items as our neighbors and friends do - we might not think about getting a new car until we see our neighbor pull up in one. For good or ill, competition exists widespread.

Competition in the fine arts has been met with some resistance, with critics citing that music and art should be for enjoyment and cultural uplifting only, and not compared to one another to establish a winner. Yet one painting is sold for \$2, and another for \$2 million; the difference being quality in most cases and rarity in others. Both traits have their equivalents in the competitive marching band.

Competitive marching shows differ from one another, and the marching show of today differs greatly from that of 20 years ago. So, why compete? Competing compares. While the shows are different, (comparing “apples to oranges” as the saying goes) one item remains constant, and that is quality. Competition brings several groups together to develop the new standard of excellence. Often it is enough for one band to see another great band, and want to be as good as, or better than they are.

The Judging Process

Competitive athletics have been widely accepted for thousands of years in various cultures. It is easy to see strength and skill accomplish sporting tasks that most everyone can understand. While the officiating might occasionally come under scrutiny, the general public understands that the winner of a basketball game is the team putting the ball through the hoop the most. The results of most sports are objectively attained; that is to say that there is little or no interpretation of the score-making process, that they are relatively obvious. However, sports such as diving, synchronized swimming, figure skating, and gymnastics, all require that a panel of judges assess not only the quality of the execution, but the difficulty and demand of what was executed; this is subjective, meaning that a large part of the score is determined by the judge’s interpretation through his or her intuition and experience. Many spectators might be “wowed” by one dive that is more flashy and difficult, than another that is less difficult but better executed, and be surprised that less exciting dive was better. Such is the dilemma behind marching band...

It is always important, before choosing a game plan, to know the rules of the game. In football, knowing the boundaries, knowing what moves are illegal and knowing what wins the game are critical. In marching band, you must know the rules as well, but also what is being looked for in a quality performance. This has become increasingly more difficult to grasp, as marching shows are now more complex than ever. There are several categories to be judged on. These captions are: Music Performance, Visual Performance, Music General Effect, Visual General Effect, Color Guard, and Percussion.

The music performance caption is judged by trained musicians, and they are typically educators, but not always. They are looking for the same qualities of music performance as are looked for in solo and ensemble contest, and concert band contest. The music caption is the most important of all captions, and carries the most weight in terms of the overall score. They are looking for a band that is well balanced in instrumentation and in sound production, has good intonation, plays tightly together, and with good musical expressions. The music performance judge also must weigh the demand placed upon the musician, both from a music difficulty standpoint, and simultaneous responsibility – or doing more than one thing at once, like marching and playing. What constitutes the most difficulty isn’t always who is playing the most notes the fastest. Other factors, such as exposure (one person playing a solo is “being exposed,” and the entire band playing the same pitch, while trying to keep it in tune is an exposure) and timing (being 40 yards apart trying to play exactly in time) are factors in determining difficulty. Students must be given a variety of musical ideas to demonstrate. A floor exercise gymnast who does the same move several times is not demonstrating that he/she has a very large repertoire, and is scored accordingly. In a marching band competition, a band playing fast/slow, loud/soft, pretty/aggressive, short/long, etc., is demonstrating to the judge

that they have a larger repertoire of concepts. They must, however, demonstrate these concepts well to get credit. An incredibly choreographed triple-axle with a poor landing will still not score very highly.

The visual performance caption is judged by persons with experience in the marching activity, and may have experience as a director or show designer. Judges are looking for the feet to be in step, and closely synchronized, flags spinning in the same direction and closely synchronized, and for each performer to demonstrate the same style of posture, movement, and poise as the group as a whole. If one person looks different from the rest, it is a minor issue; if no particular style throughout the group can be recognized, then that is a major issue, and reflects poor training. Difficulty is also an issue, as it is in music. The physical stamina required to perform the show in itself may be rewarded, as some shows are proven to be as aerobic and cardiovascularly demanding as most sports. There are many differences in design concepts from group to group, which creates difficulty for judges.

The music and visual general effect judges get to react in the emotional sense to a production. Typically, these judges are more experienced, because it takes a great deal of insight to determine which is more “cool,” more “beautiful,” more “interesting,” more “powerful,” etc. These judges will also comment upon the design quality of the show, which is, for the most part, out of the hands of the performers. It is this set of judges, although they will not admit it, who can be swayed by audience reaction. When the crowd goes wild, they may “feel the moment” more so than if there is no reaction to something of interest.

The color guard judge is looking for how well the color guard spins equipment together, be it flag, rifle, or saber. They are also evaluating the quality of movement and dance work integrated into the routine, and the uniformity (sameness) of technique (method/style) between all members. A judge might comment on the design of a flag or an outfit, but will typically not “take points off” for what he/she considers a taste issue. It is usually understood that some groups “use what they have” and may not be able to afford the most up-to-date costumes and equipment.

The percussion judge is looking and listening for uniformity in stick/mallet technique, “tightness” of the percussion section while playing together, and challenge to the performer. Many of the same concepts utilized for judging in the music captions are focused onto the percussion section by the percussion judge.

It is worth noting that at most contests, there are usually two music judges, two visual performance judges, one music general effect judge, and one visual effect judge – this is called a “double panel.” In order to save money, some contests will hire only one of each category - this is called a “single panel.” Though different judging organizations have different philosophies, there is usually agreement on the priorities of judging. They are:

1. Rank
2. Rate
3. Justify
4. Educate

Each judge must rank, or put the groups in the proper placement order. Even if the scores might be drastically higher or lower than they should be, the top priority is, as they say, to “pick a winner.” It is equally important that all rankings below first and second place be awarded with the same importance.

Each judge must rate, or put a numerical score to a performance. The judging sheets include a set of definitions (the fancy term is criterion reference or rubric) for what is superior, excellent, above average, average fair, poor, etc. The judge uses these specific definitions when evaluating the group to try to arrive at a suitable number or rating.

For example, if a judge finds himself using the descriptors “usually,” or “very good”, or “frequent,” (in the positive) he/she may target a number between 70 and 80 out of 100. It is this rating that helps determine the ranking as well.

Adjudicators have two methods to justify their score to directors: written comments, and recorded comments. Typically, judges use limited written comments, and rely mostly on the comments made on tape as the group performs. If the adjudicator writes very little on the sheet, and makes few comments on the tape to justify the score given, it becomes difficult for the director to assess what needs to be addressed in the following rehearsals.

Last, but not least, judges educate. By making comments suitable for students to hear, and comparisons for directors to understand, judges provide educational feedback from an unbiased (hopefully) source. In addition, many contests provide a critique session where the directors and staff can talk one- on-one with judges to better understand and interpret comments and scores given by judges.

The judging system is not perfect, and it never will be. When a band signs up for a contest, it is consenting to the fact that even though it may have put on the best show in history... it may not win. The judges are not perfect. All it takes is illness, a long drive with little sleep, or a bad cup of coffee to influence the mood and reliability of the judge. Try as they might to hide their biases (favorites, or favorite pet peeves) some judges will comment more upon what they feel they know more about.

The only thing that the students can control is the performance itself – they cannot control the judges’ final decision.

The Contest

There is almost always a cost for spectator entry. The typical fee is anywhere from \$8 to \$15 depending on the format of the show. Some contests will have lower prices for students, seniors, and children, while others may not. Some contests will include a program with the price of admission, and others charge separately. The host school will always have concessions, usually reasonably priced. Depending on the time of performance, students may be allowed to eat at the concessions. There are almost always vendors at the contest sites who sell marching band related items, such as t-shirts, hats, buttons, flags, ornaments, etc.

The Vista Murrieta Marching Band generally will compete in 2 different judging associations... Western Band Association (WBA), and Music for All/Bands of America (BOA). Each invitational contest will have varying numbers of competing units in each class, and some classes may have several competitors, while others may have none. Some show will be a single performance format, while others will have a “Preliminaries” competition, with the top bands competing again that evening in a “Finals” competition. Bands are given warm-up period, and then escorted to the field for performance. Band shows are generally around 10 minutes. There are penalties for going over a maximum time, as well as other infractions, such as adults on the performance field during the performance, and bands failing to cease all audible sounds after the two-minute exit period.

Show up early to get the best seats. The best seats are on the fifty yard line, right underneath the press box. This is no secret, however, and everyone will be vying for those same seats. If you follow the busses to the contest, you will likely not get good seats, so you will have to leave early. The contest schedule will be included on each itinerary.

Always applaud for other groups, even our competition – it shows class and sophistication. You will likely develop both a rapport and a reputation with parents from other schools. Remember, you want them to applaud for your kid as well. Never boo or gasp at a less than favorable result during awards. Marching band is unlike any other competitive activity, in that there is a great deal more cooperation between directors and staff, and even parents and students. When equipment fails, there are always other bands willing to help out.

After the last competing band is finished, scores and caption awards are tabulated. Bands that have already performed usually gather in the visitor side stands, or on the outer perimeter of the track to watch the remaining bands. For WBA Championships, and BOA, awards are done in a “full retreat” fashion. All bands will parade onto the field, in full uniform, for the announcement of awards. At the conclusion of the last performance, drum majors are summoned to the track in an orderly fashion, to line up front-and-center before the audience to receive awards. Some groups will have elaborate salutes, others very simple when receiving awards. Some contests will announce caption awards before placings, (3rd place, 2nd place, 1st place) some will intermix them. Some contests will award a Sweepstakes award for the best score for the entire contest. After the contest, the band will go back to the busses to be “de-briefed” and to load the trailers, if not already done.

The Support Team

If a band performs on a football field and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?

How unfortunate that on the average only 25% of students will have parents in the stands to watch them perform. You can look at the schedule of the season and know that on any given Saturday in October or November, there is a contest. Prior to every show, an itinerary is sent out to all parents. Every student should be represented by an audience member at every performance, whether it is a football game, or a contest. Some will say, “It’s the same show each week – I’ve already seen it,” but it isn’t the same show, it’s a better show. How many times do you wish you could say you saw your kid improve right in front of your eyes in one of their classes? Here’s your chance. If you can’t be there, make sure an aunt, uncle, grandparent, or sibling can attend. Your child will probably never tell you how much it means to them for you to be in the audience, so I will tell you – ***it means everything!***

There are, in addition to being an audience member, some specific groups that need the help of parents to operate. Some responsibilities are behind the scenes, others are during the contest itself...

The *pit crew* and *truck drivers* are ***The Band Dads!***, who’s responsibility it is to see that large equipment and props get loaded on the trailers before going to contest, and unloading when it arrives at the contest. They are also responsible for carrying or pulling this equipment onto the field. Every year they have their own specially designed shirt to match the theme of the show.

The *chaperones* are a group of parents responsible for maintaining “adolescent civility” on the buses and at the contest sites.

The *uniform crew* insures that all “wardrobe malfunctions” are dealt with promptly, right up until the band steps onto the field. This includes general fitting, shoe issues, plume/adornment problems, etc. These individuals are armed with extra uniforms, parts, spare shoes, needle and thread, duct tape, black socks, and in severe cases, super glue.

FIELD SHOW ETIQUETTE

The VMHS Marching Band & Color Guard has earned an incredible reputation both on and off the field not only as great performers, but also as the truest example of our school's motto of doing "all things with CLASS". As fans in the stands, you are an important and visible extension of that reputation. As we begin another season, it is appropriate to share some basic guidelines, common sense, and show etiquette for those that will be representing Vista Murrieta High School.

- Map out your drive and know where you are going before you leave home. Allow extra time for traffic, especially as you get closer to your destination.
- Arrive early – seating at field show venues can sometimes be limited, and the best seats go quickly. Those "best seats" are located between the 45 yard markers and as high in the stadium as possible. The same holds true for parking. Remember, band trucks and busses will typically take up a majority of the parking and cars often have to park on the street or in lots further from the stadium.
- Bring cash, most venues charge between \$8 - \$15 for entry. The host band will generally also sell food/drinks and programs.
- Bring blankets, stadium seats and jackets. High school stadiums are usually not very comfortable and it will get cold at night.
- Out of respect for those around you, once a performance starts please do not stand or leave your seat until that performance is over.
- Please do not talk during performances (unless cheering for a soloist or particular show attribute). You might not be very interested in the performance on the field, but you may be sitting next to, behind or in front of someone who's child is on the field performing. On that note out of respect for each band, **if you don't have something good to say, don't say anything!**
- Just as we expect all our students to reflect only the finest behavior, we also expect that of all our parents. When you are at a show, wherever you might be, please be mindful of your comments about other bands.
- Turn cell phones to "SILENT" mode and **NEVER** answer it during a performance. You can check to see who called between shows and if you need to call back, leave the stadium seating area. No one wants to listen to your phone conversation while their student is on the field performing.
- Please no flash photography. If you have a point and shoot digital camera with adjustable ISO settings (check your owner's manual), set the ISO between 400–1000. Your results at most high school football stadiums should be fine. Perhaps a bit grainy, but a flash will not change that.

Lastly, **applaud for every band**. Every student taking the field to perform has put in just as much time, effort and dedication as any other, including our own. Recognize that effort at the end of each and every performance by showing your enthusiastic appreciation. Do it the Vista Murrieta way... give every band (especially the smaller bands) a standing ovation!

Most importantly... ENJOY THE SHOWS!!

Involvement

Often people will ask me why I am so involved in the VMHS Music & Guard program, and my response is always... “How can I not be involved?” Our lives are judged by the impact we have on others...

Someone once said, "Kids will be kids."
He forgot to add, "Kids will become adults."

And so they will. They will, most certainly,
shape the world of the future to meet their
own desires. They will dictate a morality
that matches their moral codes. They will
dispense justice according to their ideas of
right and wrong. They will wield power to
achieve their own ends. And we will be able
to do nothing to prevent them, not then.

But today we have it in our power to define
the world of the future. By molding their
desires, by helping them set their ethical
values. By guiding them as they try to
decide what is right, and what is wrong. By
teaching them that the use of power carries
with it a responsibility to others.

It is much easier to build a child than it
is to repair an adult.

That is our obligation; as parents, as citizens,
and above all as Vista Murrieta Band
Boosters.

Join us, get involved. Make a difference in the lives of our young adults... for in turn, it will make a difference in your life. Help us to continue our mission of ***“Providing Positive, Life Changing Experiences.”***