

Texas Bandmasters Association Convention
San Antonio, TX
Convention Center Room - Hall D
3:30PM – 4:30PM
Friday, July 17, 2026

“Concepts for the Outdoor Percussion Ensemble”

Marcus High School Drumline – Kennan Wylie, Director

A common goal among all music educators is that of developing outstanding individual and ensemble musicians. This is true in the concert and marching settings. As students strive to master the various skills and technical development required for today’s current marching percussion writing, the ensemble performance will be enhanced because of the student’s attention to musical detail. An emphasis on ensemble cohesiveness can effectively set the tone for a very healthy marching percussion program.

Ensemble effectiveness of a group is related to the following factors:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Timbre / Sound | Consistency of timbre should be considered. This starts with good tuning of the percussion. Distinct voices for each section. Sound quality is very important – drums AND keyboards. The technical approach to drumming and keyboard playing will ultimately determine the “sound” of the ensemble. |
| Balance and Blend | This should be evaluated from winds to percussion, ww to brass, high to low, percussion battery to pit percussion. All percussion voices should be evident as well as a bottom end to the sound. The ability to amplify instruments may help improve some perceived balance problems. |
| Pulse Control | Ensemble cohesiveness will diminish when there is a significant problem with timing (pulse). |
| Technique | Technical development plays a huge role in determining the touch and control of the entire ensemble. Defining stick heights will lead to better musical detail. It is very important that a percussion section can match the winds at any and all dynamic levels, especially the lower end. It takes much effort to learn to play with a good touch at “p” levels. Many groups get dynamics through orchestration rather than having the performers actually playing softer / louder. |
| Musicality | Musicality should be exhibited through good phrasing and attention to shape, expression, intensity, and other expressive elements. The percussionists must be trained to know “what” to listen for. One of the top complaints from judges is that the percussion is too loud. |
| Implement Selection | Using different mallets/sticks can help the marching percussion ensemble attain a colorful palette of tasty sounds. Going the extra mile is well worth the effort and the end of the day. |

Writing

An experienced and seasoned writer can make all of the difference when it comes to balance issues. Many of these concerns can be written out of the book before it comes into the hands of the students. Good taste is the key and “less can be more.” Crafty writing can make the youngest of drumlines sound very musically mature. Being very detailed with stickings, stick heights, dynamics, phrasing, and more can produce positive results.

Having experienced over 35 years of consistent success within the marching and concert percussion world, it is my thought that any type of successful ensemble playing starts with a positive attitude. Ensemble playing is about “we” not “me”. From the start, students (and instructors) should adapt a healthy philosophy of ensemble commitment. Many times an egotistical personality can get in the way of great ensemble playing. For instance, ask yourself, “Are all of those rim shots really necessary?” When listening to the full band try to avoid focusing just on the percussion, but rather how the percussion ensemble fits within the band sound. The marching percussion ensemble can be a great vehicle for student percussionists to realize musical element, harmony, and rhythm.

Implementation of Basic Ensemble Concepts

(TBD from selected warmups and musical examples)

The ultimate ensemble experience brings the performer and audience together in a magical way. Achieving a high level of ensemble cohesiveness brings a sense of transparency to the entire group. This allows the listener to enjoy the ability to hear everything that is being performed.

Special thanks to Bill Bachman, Mark Biggs, Paige DeDecker, and Myles Robinson.