

ENSEMBLE ADJUDICATION

INTRODUCTION

When evaluating a pipe band performance for ensemble, the adjudicator is taking an overall view of the musical performance. Consideration, however, has to be given to individual components of the performance and how these detract from, or contribute toward the quality of the overall performance as a total package.

Few adjudicators have a background as both a piper and a drummer. The purpose of the first part of this document is to present the components of the piping aspects of the performance for adjudicators with a drumming background, both to introduce the aspects of the performance they need to consider, and also to provide the type of terminology required to adequately comment on this aspect of the performance. A similar treatment is given in the second part of the document but this time presents components of the drumming aspects of the performance to assist the ensemble adjudicator who is from a piping background.

Considering the Piping Component

Brett Tidswell National Principal of Piping

THE START OF THE PERFORMANCE

The first aspect of any performance by a pipe band is the introduction. Generally two three-pace rolls leading to the note E. From an ensemble perspective consideration should be given as to the balance between the words of command, the two rolls and the tune starting and maintaining the set tempo. Removing the drumming components, the togetherness of the drones striking in, at the appropriate time, the togetherness and timing of the introduction E, and the intonation of the note must be considered. Often the note is not brought in at the correct pressure and is not in tune; sometimes it rises or drops in pitch. The tune may then rise or drop in tempo and adequate expression may not be given to the first notes of the tune, or indeed the first notes of the tune may be over expressed affecting the flow of the tune.

Examples of some appropriate comments would be:

- Drones not struck in unison.
- Intro E early.
- Intro E dropped in pitch.
- Good solid attack with well presented intro E.
- First bars of tune dropped in tempo.
- Pipe Corps did not maintain the tempo set during the uptake of the first tune.

INTERPRETATION

Consideration needs to be given to the way tunes are presented. Are these played at an appropriate tempo for the type of tune being presented? Is a march played at a tempo appropriate to a march? The same with strathspeys, reels, jigs, hornpipes etc. Do they present the appropriate idiom with regard to expression and phrasing for that type of tune? Are the arrangements and the changes between tunes musical? Is the composition appropriate and musical? Is the appropriate mood conveyed by the performance?

The appropriate and tasteful use of harmonies must also be considered. Are the harmonies discordant, are they poorly composed or spoiled by poor blowing or lack of unison within the corps? Are the harmonies in balance during the performance with a suitable number of pipers playing harmony as compared to the melody?

With the construction of a musical selection, consideration should be given as to the interest of the performance and the quality of the arrangement in total. This should include appropriate changes between tune types, keys of tunes, tempo changes and arrangement of transitions. It is the role of the ensemble adjudicator to comment on the quality of the musical presentation, not just unison and tuning.

Mistakes throughout a performance that are a distraction must also be considered. Technical detail, minor mistakes and the like will be considered by the piping adjudicators; however anything that distracts the attention of the ensemble adjudicator must be commented upon and given consideration.

Examples of some appropriate comments:

- March dropped in tempo in third part.
- Strathspey played too slow.
- Appropriate strathspey idiom not demonstrated.
- Reel lacked phrasing.
- Numerous notation errors in the Jigs created a distraction.
- First half of selection lost interest as too many tunes of the same key were selected.
- Inappropriate selection of reels with differing expression affecting the musical transition between these tunes.
- Harmonies over-bearing and drowning out melody line.
- Discordant harmonies in slow air.
- Musical transition between slow air and strathspey.

SOUND QUALITY

There are numerous components that go into the making of a good bagpipe sound within a band. You should listen for the harmonic balance of chanters against drones, over and above whether the chanters are well tuned together and at an appropriate pitch. Drones should be tuned to the chanter pitch and hold throughout the performance. The drones should also be set together to form a solid oneness of sound, not a wavering distraction. They should be of an appropriate balance of volume to

provide a harmonic backing for the chanter sound. The quality of the components should then be taken into consideration. The sound must then hold for the duration of the performance.

Are there variations in blowing or intonation that distract from the overall performance? These can be particularly noticeable in slow airs and breaks between tunes.

Examples of some appropriate comments:

- Drone sound harsh and buzzy.
- Chanter volume too loud and brassy in tonal quality.
- Chanters not well set with shrill top hand.
- Chanters thin and lacked presence.
- Pipers dropped pitch during transition between hornpipe and jigs.
- Unsteady blowing techniques spoiled sound in slow air.
- Pipers lost intonation in last part of reel.
- Drones did not hold in tune through entire performance.

Of course, consideration needs to be given to the balance of sound between the pipe corps and drum corps, bass and mid-section and the appropriate tuning of each corps and how it contributes to the overall sound of the band.

MUSICAL UNITY

The drum corps is obviously the accompaniment to the pipe corps. That however does not mean that breaks between the musical unity of the two corps are always caused by the drum corps. Any break in unison should be commented upon; however it should be mentioned if it was caused by the pipe corps rising or dropping in tempo in various parts of the tune, losing expression or rhythm. Often, a drum corps is maintaining a rhythm but pipers for example may be playing up-beats early and destroying the unison.

Are the corps playing with similar expression (and phrasing) and identical consideration given to notes of similar length? Is there intra-corps unison from both corps as well as a unified unison as a whole musical entity?

Special consideration needs to be given to the unison in the last few bars of each tune, the transitions and the first few bars of any new tune. This is where most distractions and variation can occur.

Examples of some appropriate comments:

- Pipers playing up-beats ahead of appropriate musical rhythm in third part of the march.
- Strathspey played without proper consideration to S-W-M-W expression by pipe corps causing a lack of unison between corps.
- Pipers not playing in unison in last part of reel losing cohesion.
- Pipe corps rose in tempo in last part of reel causing a separation between pipe corps and drum corps.

FINISH

There are always many variations that need to be taken into account when a tune or selection finishes. Is there a separation in unison and what caused it? As an ensemble, did the band hold tempo to the end of the tune? If not, did it slow or rise in tempo? Did the pipe corps hold pitch? If not, did it rise in pitch, drop in pitch, or lose unison of sound? Did the band as a whole or each individual corps maintain expression right up to the last note of the tune? Did the pipe corps cut the pipes cleanly or was there a trailing chanter or drones?

Examples of some appropriate comments:

- Pipe corps rose in tempo toward end of reel creating a loss of unison with the drum corps.
- Pipe corps did not hold pitch to end of tune.
- Pipers did not cut out in unison.
- Drone trailed after cut out.

Considering the Drumming Component

Greg Bassani National Principal of Drumming

THE START OF THE PERFORMANCE

As stated earlier, the first aspect of any performance by a pipe band is the introduction. Generally, this consists of two x three-pace rolls leading to the note E. From an ensemble perspective, consideration should be given as to the balance between the words of command, the two rolls and the tune starting and maintaining the set tempo. It has already been stated that the togetherness of the drones striking in at the appropriate time, the togetherness and timing of the introduction E, and the intonation of the note must be considered. The influence of the drum corps in the introduction is very high because they are the first instruments to sound, and essentially, pave the way for the pipe corps. Coordination and timing problems with the drum corps may cause a lack of clarity in the position of the beat and hence mistiming with the entry of the pipe corps. It follows that there is potential for the pipe corps to enter the first tune at a different tempo to the drum corps and so cause loss of technical integration.

Examples of some appropriate (critical) comments would be:

- Drummers not together at start/end of rolls
- Mid-section inaccurate with intro beats (*a common error is to cut the 3rd beat in early*)
- Mid-section 'spreading' their intro beats (*generally through mistiming*)
- Drummers increasing in tempo
- Poorly defined intro beats from drummers (*usually only with low standard bands*)
- First bars of tune dropped in tempo.

INTERPRETATION

The drum corps makes its contribution to musical interpretation (*musicality*) through the composition of the drum scores for snare and mid-section and the use of dynamics (volume changes) to emphasise rhythm, syncopation and mood. As mention previously, the appropriateness of tempo is a consideration for the entire ensemble, and even though the band's tempo may be appropriate for a March, for example, the drum score may be so busy and crammed through 'over-composing' that it detracts from the musical performance. Remember that once tunes are selected by bands in the developmental stages of a musical performance, the drum scores start off as a blank piece of paper. What happens from this point can enhance or detract from the ensemble effect.

The evolution of drumming in pipe bands has come from the days of old where a traditional 'piano' and 'fortissimo' (or 'double forte') was played by the snare drummers. This gave rise to the lead drummer (only) playing the first time through a part of music and then all snare drummers playing during the repeat of the part. Nowadays, we have shifted to an approach where all snare drummers contribute at certain points throughout the first-time through the part (called 'unisons' or 'chips'), followed by all snare drummers playing during the repeat of the part. This gives the potential for considerable variety in the dynamics of the drum corps' accompaniment.

With the construction of a musical selection, the ensemble adjudicator should give consideration to the interest generation of the performance and the quality of the arrangement in total, incorporating the drum corps settings. The ensemble adjudicator should be assessing the value of the drumming accompaniment in contributing to the overall ensemble effect. For example, are the scores enhancing and developing the musical theme, and are the transitions or bridges between tunes setting the scene for what is to come next? As stated in the first part of this paper, the ensemble adjudicator should comment on the quality of the musical presentation, not just unison and tuning.

Drumming mistakes throughout a performance that are a distraction must also be considered. Technical detail, minor mistakes and the like will be considered by the drumming adjudicator and you should be wary of being drawn into 'micro-assessing' of drumming at the expense of the bigger ensemble picture. However, anything that distracts the attention of the ensemble adjudicator must be commented upon and given consideration.

Examples of some appropriate (critical) comments:

- Drummers dropped March tempo in third part.
- Strathspey played too slowly.
- Appropriate strathspey idiom not supported by drum corps.
- Reel lacked complementary phrasing by drummers.
- Numerous sticking errors in the Jigs created a distraction.
- Drum corps has limited use of dynamics.
- Drum corps ahead in the hornpipe and pulling pipers off the beat.
- Drum corps generally too loud/too soft for pipe corps.
- Mid-section lacks clarity of beat.
- Mid-section lacks rhythmic drive in strathspeys.

SOUND QUALITY and TUNING

Snare drums produce an *accepted and evolved* acoustic sound effect for pipe band performances. The sound we produce today is vastly different to that which was produced in the 1980's, and even further from that produced in the 1960's. The snare drum has undergone several dramatic reconstructions over the past 50 years to get us to the current-day instrument.

The contemporary pipe band snare drum is an *untuned* instrument, in the most basic sense of the term. Snare drummers use the word 'tuning' in the context of producing a particular sound effect. The snare drum does not produce a note on the music scale but is more akin to a burst of noise. The pitch range of the sound burst, however, is taken as being complementary to the sound of the bagpipe. Reference to the snare drum being 'tuned to A' is nonsense. What we expect from the snare drums is a bright, crisp sound that lifts the overall ensemble effect, and when the sound pushes through the band at the top of the dynamic range, it still sounds pleasant and supportive of the pipes. This gives scope for a range of supportive snare drum sounds that will fit well with the overall ensemble.

Examples of some appropriate (critical) comments:

- Snare drums lack clarity of sound.
- Snare drums too sharp and thin in sound.
- Snare drums are boxy and dull in sound.
- Snare drums sound choked and dull.

The number of snare drummers and their degree of togetherness in playing will influence the overall quality of sound from the snare drums to a large degree. At the same time, the volume balance with the pipe corps must be considered.

Mid-sections (previously called 'bass sections') have a fairly elementary requirement when it comes to sound. They must be tuned to the pipes! Such harmonious tuning can be achieved in a variety of different configurations, depending in-part on the number and size of drums being used. Nevertheless, whether a band plays one bass and one tenor, or one bass and eight tenors, the pitch ladder produced must fit the pipe corps. Bangs, pops and discordant bleeps while perhaps being interesting in rhythm, are of little tonal value unless they are sympathetic to the sound of the pipes. Listening to the mid-section "through" the pipes provides a good perspective when it comes to assessing the sound of these drums.

Examples of some appropriate (critical) comments:

- Mid-section discordant with the pipes.
- Bass drum is not tuned (too low in pitch)
- Tenor line is not pitched to pipes.
- Mid-section lacks tonal clarity
- Tenor drum overtones are dominant and discordant.

MUSICAL UNITY

As stated in the first part of this article, the drum corps is obviously the accompaniment to the pipe corps, and while breaks in the musical unity (*Technical Integration*) of the two corps may be caused by the pipers, it is often the drum corps at fault. Any break in unison should be commented upon and the ensemble judge should try to identify the reason for this.

The drum corps may be locked in tempo with the pipers but could be continuously phrasing ahead of the tunes. Perhaps the complexity of the drumming arrangements is such that the drum corps tends to lag the pipers at certain times, or even slowing the overall tempo. Leading up to tune transitions, playing through them and entering into a new tune are key areas for your attention.

When it comes to the Intra-Corps unison of the drum corps, it is possible for a tug-of-war to break out between the snare drummers and the mid-section at times throughout the performance. This will inevitably overflow to the pipe corps and impact on the whole ensemble effect. Most likely areas for this problem are just following the introduction as well as in the area of transitions, as mentioned above.

Examples of some appropriate (critical) comments:

- Snare and mid-section separating during introduction and into circle.
- Drum corps labouring during reel and dragging tempo.
- Snare drummers phrasing ahead of pipers in the strathspey.
- Mid-section scores too complex and affecting phrasing.
- Technical separation caused by drummers too fast into hornpipe.

FINISH (similar to first part of article)

There are always many variations that need to be taken into account when a tune or selection finishes. Is there a separation in unison and what caused it? As an ensemble did the band hold tempo to the end of the tune? If not, did it slow or rise in tempo? Did the band as a whole or each individual corps maintain expression right up to the last note of the tune? Did the drum corps finish together and with the pipe corps? The closing passage of music can be a high risk area for separation.

Examples of some appropriate (critical) comments:

- Drum corps increased tempo toward end of reel creating a loss of unison with the pipe corps.
- Drum corps loss of integration in closing part.
- Drum corps finished after pipers.
- Drum corps finished before pipers.

CONCLUSION

Obviously there are many considerations to be taken into account when evaluating a musical performance. Too many to mention in this type of article. However it is hoped that this may give ensemble adjudicators a little better appreciation of the consideration that they need to give to the individual corps role in the presentation of the musical performance that is being evaluated and the appropriateness of some of the terminology that needs to be used.
