



THE DRUM MAJOR

A FEW POINTERS

In a drum and bugle corps, the role of the drum major is of paramount importance. It is a position that should not be allocated lightly as they will carry a great deal of responsibility for the image and presentation of the Corps – both on and off the field. They will need to have a full understanding and acceptance of the policies, ethos and aims of the corps and be able to work with both staff and marching members equally well in helping to achieve those aims.

FUNCTIONS

There are three basic divisions within the role of drum major :

1. Conductor
2. Leader of the Corps
3. Role Model and Representative

CONDUCTOR

A good level of musical ability is required in order that the dm can quickly become familiar with all aspects of the musical repertoire to be played by the corps. They should be able to sight read to an acceptable standard and to interpret the various instrumental parts (including battery and pit contributions). An above-average sense of rhythm is required – dm's should be able to hold specific time signatures and tempos in their heads and to convey them clearly to the members. The accurate use of a suitable metronome should be an early-acquired skill and such an instrument should always be available to the drum major for their personal use.

A good drum major will develop their own conducting style and it is important that they become thoroughly comfortable with that style. As far as the members of the corps are concerned, style is relatively unimportant. It is the reliability, consistency and clarity of the visual cues and commands that are the most important factors.

Their own particular playing background is relatively unimportant. Whether a brass or percussion player, it is the level of their musicality that is important. In certain circumstances, colour guard members have also proved to be very competent drum majors (DCI's Madison Scouts tend to appoint quite a few ex-guard members to the dm podium).

The drum major should work closely with composers / arrangers of the corps music programme to achieve a full understanding of the needs and requirements of each piece and the manner in which they should be interpreted. The dm should be the first corps member to see the musical arrangements and the first to commit them to memory.

LEADER

When the corps is “on parade” – be it at a contest venue, public parade or other performance opportunity, it is the task of the drum major to position and manoeuvre the corps to a suitable position to perform in safety and to full advantage. A full pre-briefing should be given to the dm by an appropriate member of staff to ensure that all requirements are understood.

The drum major is responsible for ensuring that members are aware of the report times and places when assembling after breaks, etc. They should guide and hasten the members as necessary. The dm should always be the first ready in uniform and in position.

The drum major should be familiar with the normal protocols and pageantry associated with drum and bugle corps performances. This will include a knowledge of protocol regarding military and other standards and colours and the playing of the National Anthem.

Olympic Retreat ceremonies at drum corps contests are specific examples of control required by the drum major and a short protocol for these occasions is included below. Should circumstances dictate that a “drum major only” retreat is announced, the drum major will represent the corps, in uniform, and will follow the directions of the show organiser.

ROLE MODEL

As the “senior” member of the corps, the drum major has the responsibility for setting the standards of behaviour, turnout and attendance for the remainder of the membership. They should be carefully briefed (by the Corps Director or other responsible staff member) on their appointment on the details of what is required of them during their term of office. It should be obvious that regular, reliable attendance at all rehearsals is necessary. The dm needs to be fully familiar with the progress of the musical repertoire by all sections and should be available (via the Corps Director or Co-ordinator) to all musical section heads to assist in conducting during rehearsals.

At all times they should display confidence, a calm manner and a level of behaviour that can always be held up as an example to the remainder of the membership. Their task is to act as a link between instructional staff and marching members – conveying instructions; reinforcing musical requirements and in positioning the corps on the rehearsal venue or performance arena as appropriate.

SELECTION

The recruitment and selection procedure for a new drum major should be accorded a suitable amount of consideration by the corps director and staff. The process should be timed to allow the new incumbent to have the maximum amount of time in preparation and training for the role in advance of the usual public performance season. At an appropriate time, invitations should be issued for interested corps members to apply for the position. Auditions and interviews should then be arranged at suitable intervals followed by the selection of the successful candidate by a panel of staff. The appointment of a new drum major should be announced formally with appropriate press releases.

TRAINING

A training programme for the corps drum major should be the responsibility of the corps director, programme co-ordinator and any other suitable members of staff. All staff should assume some degree of responsibility for assisting the training and development of this role – not just at the beginning of their career, but throughout their time in the post. This does not always need to be “formal” education but can take the form of a series of hints, tips and advice as appropriate. A good drum major will take advice and guidance from a wide range of sources – not least from others in the role within their own or other corps.

Should resources be available, it may be appropriate for the corps to appoint deputy or assistant drum majors. Such persons can be used to assist in all the above roles and can provide a continuity of appointments in the future.

Drum Corps United Kingdom operates Instructor Training Days which aim to give new instructors the background and basic principles and responsibilities of the post (including some Child Protection input). It might be considered appropriate for new drum majors to attend such a day.

OLYMPIC RETREAT CEREMONIES

The Olympic Retreat ceremony, which occurs at the conclusion of all DCUK contests, is designed to provide a spectacular finale to the day by presenting all the competitors in the show for the appreciation and congratulations of the audience. It also provides the vehicle for the presentation of awards, rankings and ratings. It is the role of the drum major to lead the corps through this ceremony, complying with all necessary respect, honours and courtesies to other participants.

The show organiser will provide a member of their staff to co-ordinate and organise the formation of the parade – this may take place either on or off the arena according to local circumstances. The drum major should prepare the corps for this assembly by arranging them in single file (in the order of colour guard, percussion and brass) and lead them into the allocated position as indicated by show organisers. Once the whole parade is assembled drum majors should take their signal to move off in conjunction with all other participants at a signal from the show organisers. For larger ceremonies with many corps taking part, the parade may be split into blocks – again the show organisers will indicate when this is to happen

The parade is then normally arranged to process around the perimeter of the arena passing in front of the main spectator stand. At this point all drum majors should salute the audience on behalf of their corps (colour guards should present arms).

The parade then normally passes to the rear of the arena where corps will be directed to “peel off” and form up facing the front of the arena on designated marks. At this point the corps will take up a pre-agreed formation with the drum major at the head.

Once all corps are in position and any further applause taken, the show announcer may then request that selected brass players from all corps should move to the front of the parade for the playing of the National Anthem. Drum majors should salute during the playing of the anthem. Should the drum major be selected to conduct the anthem they should take up a position where they are clearly visible to all the players. Normally the podium is left in position on the arena for this purpose.

The announcer should then call for drum majors to report front and centre for the presentation of awards. Drum majors should make their way into position smartly and promptly and stand at ease. As each corps result is announced, the drum major should come to attention, salute the audience and, where appropriate, move forward to receive any awards from the presenter (who should also be saluted before receiving the award). Throughout this section drum majors are required to behave in a manner which demonstrates dignity and control. Following the presentations drum majors will be requested to return to their corps.

Parade may be dismissed in various ways – the usual one being to ask the corps to leave the field formally in reverse order of placements – usually in the sequence of Cadets, Juniors, Class “A” and Open Class. As each corps is announced the drum major should bring the corps to attention and march off the field – with the corps playing if possible. Drum majors should, wherever possible, lead their corps across the face of the parade passing in front of all those corps who place higher than them and saluting each corps as they pass. If circumstances dictate that this route is not possible, the drum major should brief the leading rank of their corps regarding the route off the field and give the command to march off. The drum major should then visit each remaining drum major in turn, saluting and shaking hands – rejoining their corps at the most appropriate moment.

Should the corps be selected to lead the Olympic Retreat ceremony, the drum major should arrange the corps in a “block” formation (again led by colour guard) in a position as indicated by show organisers and lead off the parade at their signal.

It is usual at DCUK shows, if time permits, for the winning Open Class corps to perform a victory “concert” or performance. This may be a static performance or a full marching show depending upon local circumstances and the wishes of the corps director. Normally the winning corps will remain on the field after all the other competitors have left and the drum major (in conjunction with their corps director or other appropriate staff) will then prepare the corps for their celebratory performance. Under **NO** circumstances should corps play in the car park or other dispersal areas after leaving Retreat. At Championships events, the second-placed Open Class corps may be allowed to play a short congratulatory concert piece in salute to the winners. This will always be announced in the event instructions and corps directors should instruct drum majors as to how this should be presented.

RCS
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