

Creating the Blue Print

The Composing Process

I'm constantly amazed at how many folks either don't understand the "composition" sub-caption in EA or else carry their own interpretation of what they **THINK** it is or should be. Some find it helpful if you compare this process to having an architect create a blue print for your house. You know how many rooms you want, where you want them placed and what function they'll serve. Now consider transferring this to your program. You know the EVENTS you want to showcase, you have an idea of where on the stage you'd like them to be, and you know their function within the program. This is a starting point for conceptualizing the show through time.

Before you start, please review the components of design – line, shape, texture, dimension, negative/positive space, balance, motion, unity, etc. **THIS CANNOT BE SKIPPED.** The elements of design are like our alphabet of 26 letters. From those 26 letters you can create every word in the language. **From the elements of design, you can create a program that is artistically stimulating, diverse and efficient.**

OPTIONS:

- *Geometric design* (drill – pictures & patterns)
- *Freeform Staging* (texture & motion to set up a feature; be sure it is well-planned & orchestrated)
- *Presentational features* (staged events dominated by body and equipment but lacking the motion and design variety that elevates the design.) This is mostly "functional" and the easiest option. However, it lacks the depth brought to the design through motion and shape or geometry.
- *Which comes first?* Some folks will stage first then layer with body and equipment. Some folks will compose the body and equipment first then create the staging and design the connections (transitions) from set to set. **The most successful designers conceptualize all of the components (form/staging, body and equipment) and then build the composition with all thoughts in mind.**

WHAT GETS POINTS – THE ASSETS

- *Variety of design* options in both staging and in body and equipment
- **MUSICALITY, MUSICALITY, MUSICALITY!!!!** Follow the musical structure of phrase length, meter, tempo, DYNAMICS, depth of music (multiple lines.)
- *Clarity of your intent.* The design must be clear on the floor and not exist **ONLY** in your mind's eye.
- *Well designed transitions.* Smart use of motion, avoiding the simple functional choice in lieu of quality design and evolution of the ideas.
- *Characteristics.* If your show has a clear cut personality or character, make sure the performers have the suitable characteristics written into their show. If not, let the musical style suggest the characteristics that would enhance the depth of your design.
- **Always and forever EXCELLENCE.**

WHAT IS PROBLEMATIC – THE LIABILITIES

- *Limiting your options* – Repetition runs the risk of boredom.
- *Random acts of color guard* without purpose or connection
- *Lack of relevance to the music*
- *Over-writing*. Don't set the kids up for failure
- *Excess abstraction* – we need to "get it"
- *Wandering around the stage without reason or intent*

REMEMBER

- Features must work together (unity)
- Good combination of drill, texture & some presentational moments is a wise choice
- Impact points are usually strongest when set on a good geometric form.
- Motion -- vary your methods of travel from set to set. Create not only a rhythm in travel modes, but offer the students an opportunity to show varied skills.
- Space – vary your spatial relationships to bring life to the staging. Work in pairs or trios or clusters, work in close space occasionally (it will force you to write the body/equipment differently)
- **You can be creative and successful at every level of development. Write for your students' success.**

This is only a thumbnail overview of the most salient points. Please don't hesitate to initiate dialog on any areas you want expanded on. Much of the success with even the least mature guards lies in the smart choices of the designer. If you are fully prepared and have a good understanding of the composing process, your students will be able to handle what you give them.

Best regards,
Shirlee Whitcomb