

Marching Band

In the news

- [Marching band gets a bidder](#)
Austin American-Statesman (subscription), TX -
It appears that the Bowie High School marching band's \$5,000 gamble is about to pay off. Someone has put up the \$4,999 minimum bid ...
- [Texas high school marching band puts itself up for bid on eBay](#)
WHO-TV, IA -
A Texas high school band is offering its services on eBay to raise money for a trip to Arizona. So far no one's placed the starting ...
- [Marching band puts itself on eBay to raise money](#)
Houston Chronicle, TX -
AUSTIN - If you've been on the Internet looking to rent a 250-member marching band, you'd better hurry. Bidding on eBay ends today ...
- [Bowie marching band on eBay](#)
Dallas Morning News (subscription), TX -
AUSTIN – If you've been on the Internet looking to rent a 250-member marching band, you'd better hurry. Bidding on eBay ends Saturday ...
- [Texas marching band auctions itself on eBay](#)
KTRK, TX -
By The Associated Press. (9/24/04 - AUSTIN) — If you've been on the Internet looking to rent a 250-member marching band, you'd better hurry. ...



A marching band performs in an Independence Day



parade

A **marching band** is a group of [musicians](#) that march in time with the [music](#) being played. Traditionally, marching bands were [military](#) in nature. Today, however, marching is a [sport](#)/art form engaged in primarily by [high school](#) and [college](#) students, as well as by adults and [middle school](#) students.

The traditional music played by a marching band is, of course, the march. However, most bands today branch out into other forms of music, including classical and popular pieces. In both cases, however, the music must be re-arranged specifically for the unique instrumentation of the band. In non-military marching, the two primary forms are *street* and *field*. Street marching, as in a [parade](#), is the more traditional of the two.

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Field Marching

Field marching evolved (in the [United States](#)) from high school and college marching bands that were called upon to perform at [football](#) games. Instead of marching on a street, the band would [choreograph](#) a pre-game or halftime field show, designed to be both musically and visually enjoyable to audience members in the stands. The visual aspects of field shows have evolved significantly over the years. There are now several specific styles of field marching, and many marching bands have eschewed street marching entirely in favor of field performance.

The single most popular style of field marching today is [drum corps](#) style. In addition to a large number of schools and colleges that perform only in drum corps style (still usually for a football game), private (and often highly selective) groups perform as well. Notable here is [Drum Corps International](#) (DCI). Drum corps is distinguished from other marching styles in these main ways:

- Step - An extremely smooth step called 'roll step' is used exclusively. To roll step, a marcher places the heel of the foot down first. Then, the rest of the foot is rolled forward until the toe touches down. Continuing the roll, the heel lifts up. Finally, the toe lifts up. Roll step has the property that, when properly executed, the

amount of bounce in the torso is reduced to almost zero. This improves sound quality dramatically, especially for brass instruments.

- Instrumentation - In a true drum corps, no [woodwind](#) instruments are used. Several sizes of valved brass instrument are used to cover the different parts in the arrangement. These typically include [trumpet/cornet](#), [mellophone](#), [baritone horn](#), and [tuba/sousaphone](#). Today, many high school and college corps-style bands retain their woodwind sections, but emulate drum corps in all other aspects. [Percussion](#) is divided between a marching section (snare drums, multi-toms, [tonal bass drumss](#), [cymbals](#)) and a 'pit' (pitched percussion such as marimbas, xylophones, glockenspiels, and [timpani](#), and percussion effects of all shapes and sizes), which stays motionless directly in front of the field.
- Formations - Formations are almost all follow-the-leader. Certain key marchers guide a series of smooth lines and curves, which shift position and shape over time.
- Presentation - Because the corps is composed entirely of brass instruments, and since brass instruments are highly directional, corps always choose a particular sideline and all marchers will face it continuously throughout the entire show. Audience members faced by the band are treated to a loud, clear performance. Audience members on any other side hear almost nothing. As a consequence, DCI shows always have the entire audience sitting on one side of the field.
- Frequency of new shows - Most corps learn and perform only one or two shows per year. Each show takes an enormous amount of work before it is ready to be performed. This is primarily due to the type of formations used.

An older and fading style of field marching is high step. This form is more loosely-defined than drum corps, and probably no two high-stepping bands are exactly the same. However, this style can be generally contrasted with corps as follows:

- Step - Steps are extremely jerky. Marchers much more literally *march* than in corps style. As a result, more bouncing occurs and sound quality tends to diminish somewhat. However, most high-stepping bands develop techniques for keeping the sound quality high despite bouncing.
- Instrumentation - Traditional marching band instrumentation is used. This typically includes all the instruments found in drum corps with the addition of alto

and tenor [saxophone](#), [flute](#) and/or [piccolo](#), [clarinet](#), and [slide trombone](#).

Sousaphones are almost always used in place of tubas, though many consider the concert tuba to look better marching. There is no percussion 'pit'. Thus, extremely large and/or heavy percussion instruments found in drum corps are not used in high step marching. One exception is the [glockenspiel](#), since a smaller marching variant of this instrument is widely available. Tonal bass drums may be used.

- Formations - Formations are rarely follow-the-leader. Instead, each marcher learns his/her own choreography and performs it appropriately. Curves are still used, but straight lines and boxes are more common.
- Presentation - The band will typically change directions several times during the course of the show, with marchers changing directions several times during the course of a song. Marchers typically face whatever direction they happen to be marching in at the time. Because the band is composed of mixed brass and woodwinds, these direction changes greatly distort the sound of the band as a whole.
- Frequency of new shows - This varies greatly, with some bands learning new shows infrequently and others learning new shows as often as once a week. The individualized marching style allows marchers to memorize their choreography ahead of time, minimizing required practice time.

Another common form of marching is scatter, or scramble. This style is practiced mainly by a number of college marching bands, primarily in more academically elite schools such as the Ivy League, Stanford and the University of Virginia. In scatter, the members of the band form a series of 'pictures' on the field, like a flower or a car. Then, when one picture is done, the band scatters to the next picture in the series. Scattering is rarely done in step, usually between songs. In fact, some scatter marching bands do not ever actually march.

Scramble bands emerged in the 1970's as a reaction to the perceived militaristic, non-individualist nature of marching bands, fueled by an anti-government sentiment from the Vietnam War. These groups are generally student-run, and use humor, as well as music, to entertain. Scatter bands are notorious for their stunts, from Columbia's altar-boy joke (tuition going down faster than...) while playing a Catholic school, to UVA's Inbred Family Feud gag against West Virginia. Perhaps the most famous caper happened by accident at a Stanford game, as the band rushed the field before the game ended. Pay attention to college football history highlight reels and you may see a clip of this

priceless football moment, as a trombone player is run over by the ball-carrier.

In recent years, scramble bands have come under pressure to calm their ways, as today's athletic departments have less patience for students' sometimes embarrassing attempts at humor. As long as this trend continues, student-run bands will be under threat.

Some bands combine elements of these different styles within the same show. A band may use drum corps-style formations and the roll step, facing one direction continuously, but may be composed of the more traditional mixture of both brass and woodwind instruments, and may also have a percussion pit at the sideline. They may also march in step to most formations, but at a particular break in the music, they may scatter to a new formation for visual effect.

Street Marching

Regardless of the style of field marching practiced by a given band, almost all marching bands use a modified form of drum corps marching when performing street, or parade, marching. The band lines up in a marching block composed of ranks and files. Ranks are the lines that run across the width of the road; files are the lines that run along the length of the road. Guiding is generally performed by each marcher trying to stay within his/her given rank and file. For each file, the marcher in the front rank is the guide; all other marchers in that file follow the guide. For each rank, one of the marchers in the rank (typically either the center, leftmost, or rightmost) is the guide; all other marchers in the rank follow the guide. Lastly, guidance is fine-tuned by following the diagonals: lines that extend forward-left and forward-right from each marcher. These too should be straight.

A drum [cadence](#) is played whenever the band is marching, but not actively playing a song. This is how the band keeps time. At the very least, a drum click (rim-shot) is given on the odd beats to keep the band in step. Usually (but not always), the left foot is put down on the odd-numbered beats; the right foot on evens. Phasing is the problem of different marchers being on-step (correct foot on the correct beat), but not all hitting the ground at exactly the same moment. Some marchers may be just slightly before the beat; others slightly behind.

Color Guard

Many marching bands also have a [color guard](#) - a holdover from military days. Sometimes, this section is referred to as a winterguard only when performed during the

indoor winter season. The color guard may contain rifles, batons, [flags](#), horizontal banners, vertical banners, streamers, or pom-poms. In most cases (though certainly not all), the color guard is composed primarily of female marchers, but it is becoming more and more common for males to join the ranks. Rifles, batons, flags, and streamers are all twirled, spun, or generally moved about. Horizontal and vertical banners usually identify the band, and are thus simply carried. Poms-poms are jiggled.

Marching bands, because of their military roots, usually wear military-style uniforms. Color guard uniforms are more likely to resemble gymnastics or cheer leader garb. There are many cases, however, in which bands wear entirely non-traditional uniforms.