

PIPE BAND DRUM MAJOR

A BASIC GUIDE

**BY
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PIPE BAND DRUM MAJOR A BASIC GUIDE

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I. INTRODUCTION

As the title suggests, this is indeed intended as a guide and should be treated as such. This is based on my experience as a trained Scottish Division Drum Major and includes advice and information on the following subjects:

- a) Personal/Band Drill.
- b) Words of Command.
- c) Mace Drill (for single and massed bands.)
- d) Dress Code (useful for all band members.)
- e) Tips on Band Formations (single and massed bands.)

Although this may seem a little harsh, it is never the less a fact of life that, in the majority of civilian pipe bands, the Drum Major is someone who is pushed into becoming or becomes the Drum Major because he/she does not play an instrument. It should go without saying that the majority of Drum Majors will be full of enthusiasm for the job.

So throughout this document, please do not forget that it is only a guide and meant to give friendly advice.

In my opinion, even if the above is the case, the Pipe Band Drum Major should take time to ensure that he/she shows the following basic qualities:

- 1.1** A working knowledge of the music being played, including the drum beatings, giving particular attention to breaks from one tempo to another (i.e.: slow to quick march to strathspey to reel, etc.) Recording sets during band practices is a good way of getting the music in your head prior to the next practice/engagement.
 - 1.2** The ability to control bands under his/her jurisdiction with all on parade believing in that ability. Above all, it is paramount that the Drum Major has the confidence of the Pipe Major.
 - 1.3** The Pipe Band Drum Major must always be well turned out, regardless of whether in full Highland dress or day dress. Attention to detail regarding appearance and personal drill must be a primary part of the Pipe Band Drum Major's character.
 - 1.4** The newly appointed Drum Major should seek proper training, preferably using a recognized, experienced source of instruction.
- NB:** Even if the band is practicing a competition set, the Drum Major should acquaint him/herself with the tunes being played as in the future they may be included for playing at other times, and it would look just that little bit more professional if the correct signals were given at the appropriate juncture.

II. PERSONAL DRILL

You should remember that as Drum Major you are normally the first person the audience sees when the Pipes & Drums march on to parade. It is also worth bearing in mind that, in the main, the audience has paid to be there (carnivals etc., apart). Therefore, the posture and perceived attitude of the Drum Major is one of prime importance, regardless of shape, size, or age.

Personal drill should be performed with authority showing that you are confident in what you are doing and in control of the situation.

2.1 ATTENTION:

Stand straight with the heels together and the toes at an angle of approximately 30 degrees, the left arm kept into the side, keeping the head up and looking slightly above eye level. The ferrule of the mace should be by the toe cap of the right shoe with the right hand gripping the mace between the top of the chain and the head of the mace. The right elbow kept into the side and the mace vertical and not at an angle.

2.2 STAND AT EASE:

The only movement required here is to carry the LEFT foot away from the RIGHT foot to a distance of approximately 12 inches. Try not to slide the foot away, but lift it at least three/four inches, and place it down firmly on the ground/floor. The left arm remaining by the side.

2.3 STAND EASY:

Move the mace into the centre of the body with the tip between the feet. At the same time move the left hand to cover the right hand and relax. To come to attention, simply reverse movements (2.2 and 2.1.)

2.4 STEPPING OFF:

Before stepping off, pick a point to march onto. This will prevent you from straying off line. Always lead with the left foot, at the same time bringing the mace across the body to the left hand, meeting in the centre of the body, at about stomach height, keeping the mace at an angle of approximately 40 degrees. On the next left foot bring the right hand smartly back to the side and continue marching in the normal manner. This is the "carry."

The free arm should not be swung too high as it will appear that you are trying to take off, just above waist belt height is sufficient.

III. WORDS OF COMMAND

Words of command must be delivered with authority and conviction, and above all must be **UNDERSTOOD!** If time permits try and talk the band through what they are about to do, even if they have rehearsed the sequence/programme at the last practice.

- 3.1** The executive word of command should always be preceded by a cautionary command (i.e.: “Quick/Forward March” is preceded by “By the Right/Left/Centre” - This tells the band which file is the guiding flank.

The guiding flank is normally the flank on which the (Senior) Pipe Major is marching. If the band frontage is five or more then it is more prudent to keep dressing by the centre file.

- 3.2** Where possible try and deliver the executive words of command, “Slow/Quick March,” at the same tempo the tune(s) are to be played. The Pipe Major will have given an indication of this at band practices.

- 3.3** Attention or “shun” should always be preceded by “Pipes & Drums.”

- 3.4** When playing static pieces (i.e.: on stage, etc.) the following examples are acceptable words of command: “At the Halt; Rolls Slow/Quick March” or; “Rolls 1, 2”

Variations of these are also acceptable, as long as the band knows what each command is for.

These are just some examples but the general principle is the same for all words of command, remember the voice must come from the diaphragm and not the throat. Try and develop your voice gradually; otherwise, you may end up “speechless”, which will not do you or the band any good at all.

IV. MACE SIGNALS

Again all mace signals should be given in a manner which shows confidence and authority. This gives the audience the impression that you are in control of the situation, even if this is not actually the case!

All movements should be sharp and to the point. Do not drag them out.

While executing signals, it is important that the Drum Major's deportment is always kept to a high standard.

4.1 CUTTING OFF (At the Halt):

Firstly, make sure you know where you have to cut the band off, particularly if the band has rehearsed a special routine or there is a time factor involved.

In good time (i.e.: just before the beginning of the part where you want to cut off) move the mace to the centre of the body, keeping the mace vertical. At the same time move the left hand, with the palm facing outwards, to grasp the mace half way down the cane.

Spin the mace (to your right) through 360 degrees with the ferrule finishing in the right hand.

Next, on the first beat of the part, with the right hand move the mace up and out to the right, just above the right shoulder with the head of the mace at an angle towards you.

On the last beat of the part, draw the mace into the centre of the body, hand just in front of the chin, steady yourself and let the mace drop through your hand, and return to the position of attention.

You will have a tendency to look up. Try not to make it too obvious.

4.2 CUTTING OFF (On the March):

Again make sure that you know when and where you want the band to stop playing. The mace should be at the "carry" before starting this movement.

On the left foot bring the right hand across the body to grasp the mace just between the head and the top of the chain (just above the left hand.)

On the next left foot, bring the mace to the centre of the body. At the same time, move the left hand down to the full extent of the arm and turn the palm outwards and grasp the mace. Continue the movement as for 4.1.

Either return to the "carry" or to the "trail" (i.e.: keep the mace horizontal with the head forward and continue marching in the normal manner.)

4.3 Restarting (On the march):

Firstly, it is essential that there is some control over the tempo/pace while the band is not playing. A tap on a side drum usually suffices.

To restart the pipes & drums, simply give the command "Rolls, Quick March" in the following manner: "Rolls" over two paces (left & right), miss two paces, then "Quick" on the left foot and "March" on the right foot, with the drum section coming in with the rolls on the next left foot.

4.4 CHANGING TUNES/TEMPO:

Used when playing sets/ensembles (i.e.: March, Strathspey, Reel, Slow Air, etc.)

The movements for this are the same as for 4.1 above, except that on the third movement, the mace is brought up in front of the face, the right hand in line with the chin, and the mace is dropped on the first beat of the new tune.

The change from slow to quick time is the same as the normal cut off (4.1), dropping the mace on the first beat of the quick march (This is where the Drum Majors knowledge of the tunes played comes into being.)

Changing from quick to slow; I feel it is best to go for the same signal as for slow to quick, thus giving the band something solid to work for the first beat.

4.5 THE MARK TIME:

The mace should be at the "carry".

All these movements are on the left foot, except the last movement which is on the right foot:

Bring the right hand over to grasp the mace between the head and the chain.

Move the head of the mace to right and downwards to the full extent of both arms (the head of the mace should be to the right).

Raise the mace as high as is comfortable, keeping it horizontal.

On the last beat, bring the mace down and halt.

Return to the position of attention and stand still.

4.6 STEPPING OFF WHILE PLAYING:

Time this movement so that you step off on the first beat of the part.

From the position of attention, drop the mace to the horizontal, the head forward. Miss a beat and raise the mace so that the ferrule is pointing up and the head (of the mace) is near the shoulder.

Miss another beat and spin the mace in a forward motion.

Stop spinning on the last beat and step off, with the left foot, on the first beat of the next part.

4.7 FORMING CIRCLE:

Before entering the arena/playing area, decide where you want to form the circle having discussed it with the PM and warning the band, if time permits.

At a suitable distance from the spot where you intend the circle to be formed, move the right hand across and grasp the mace as previously shown, move the to the right, so that it is horizontal and level with the chest.

Spin the mace across the body for six to eight paces, move the mace back to "carry" and mark time until the circle is complete.

When the circle is formed, give the mark time signal, the halt signal, and complete the set/ensemble.

(The system for forming circles etc and reforming band is a matter for individual bands).

4.8 COUNTER-MARCH:

This movement is started from the “carry”.

The right hand comes across the body to grasp the mace.

Turn the head of the mace to the right so that the mace is horizontal. The second movement may be changed as follows: from the 1st movement drop the mace to a horizontal position at the side with the head of the mace facing forward.

On the next left foot swing the mace so that the mace is vertical, with the head of the mace level with the right shoulder.

4.9 RIGHT AND LEFT WHEELS:

There are two common methods used to indicate the wheel as follows (Both movements executed from the “carry”):

a) Signaling with the hand:

(i.e.: pushing the right hand to the side for a right wheel.)

For the left wheel; transfer the mace to the right hand and push the left hand out to indicate a left wheel.

b) Using the mace:

To signal a right wheel:

Move the right hand across to grasp the mace.

Turn the head of the mace to the right with the mace horizontal across the chest and the ferrule pointing out to the left.

For the left wheel:

Reach down and grasp the mace with the right hand.

Bring the mace up to the chest with the ferrule pointing to the right.

Once the wheel has been completed bring the mace back to the “carry” reversing the movements for each wheel signal.

4.10 THE “WALK”:

This movement can be started from either the “carry,” or the “trail”, and the mace is carried in the right hand.

The tip of the mace touches the ground/floor at the same time as the heel of the RIGHT foot, then the head of the mace is taken out to the right, and back in across the body in a circular motion, then out to the right again (over three paces; R < L > R). Complete the movement by bringing the mace forward in time for the movement to start again.

4.11 MASSED BAND SIGNALS:

All the foregoing signals can be used for massed bands with ALL Drum Majors giving the signals, provided the Senior DM gives the others an idea of what is required and there is time to rehearse before the event. The SDM would normally start the signals off by putting his/her hand out, so that all DMs can see it and dropping the hand on the left. The other DMs start the combined signals on the next left foot.

From a morale point of view, I think that all Drum Majors on parade should be given something to do, otherwise they just end up going "up & down" getting bored!

If you have practiced a series of signals with your band do not change them unless you really have to.

Remember that the Drum Major is not only there to "look good", but also to provide a service to the band by giving clear, concise, timely, words of command and signals. Thus helping the Pipes & Drums add that little extra to their performance and of course increasing the level of professionalism within the band.

V. GENERAL BAND DRILL

When “drilling” the Pipes & Drums, the Drum Major should look out for the following points.

5.2 STEPPING OFF:

On the, word of command “Slow/Quick March” all on parade should step off with the LEFT foot leading. This applies whether playing or just marching to a drum tap and there should be no exception to this rule. Those in the front rank and the Drum Major should take care not to step out too fast or too long, this can create a gap, particularly if you have members on parade who are not quite as long in the leg as those in the front.

5.2 MARCHING:

While marching without playing, it is sometimes advisable for the pipers to be in the “pipes down” position. This gives them a break. If the side and tenor drummers are using the drum “sling” then the drums can be turned and sticks carried in the right hand. The new drum “carrier” does not allow for this, but the left hand can be rested on the drum and the right arm “swung” in the natural fashion. The bass drum can also be “taken down” to the side. He/she has the option of carrying the drum on the left or right side.

5.3 PREPARING TO PLAY:

If the band is to play immediately from the assembly point then it would be unnecessary to create extra drill by starting from the “pipes down” position. Get them to “fall in” ready to play. If you have got it right, you will have time to quickly reiterate what should happen once “out there.”

If the requirement is to march to the start point in the “pipes down” position, then a drill should be worked out to get to the playing position. Suggested drill (normally on drum taps), as follows:

Tap 1: Pipers move pipes from under left arm forward of the body, at the same time bring the right hand across to take hold of the drones, the left hand keeping hold of the chanter. The side and tenor drummers turn their drums to the playing position. The bass drummer moves the drum to the lower chest.

Tap 2: Pipers take their pipes up to the shoulder, settling the pipes and finishing with both hands on the chanter. Side and tenor drummers sticks in both hands in front of the chest. The bass drummer hooks up the drum and keeps both hands on the rim of the drum.

Tap 3: Pipers, side and tenor drummers bring their right hands to the side, drummers with a stick in each hand. The bass drummer brings both hands down (if windy use hands to steady drum.)

5.4 HALTING NOT PLAYING:

This is normally done by word of command as follows: Give the cautionary word of command “Pipes & Drums”, leave for 6 to 8 paces and give the order HALT, as the right foot passes the left. Step “short” with the right and left then bring the right foot in beside the left.

5.5 WHEELING:

A simple description of wheeling is the band changes direction, but not formation. Dressing during a wheel is by the inner flank, the front rank wheeling on the spot indicated by the DM(s).

NB: Remember that exaggerated movements, legs and arms kept stiff while marching is not natural, and very noticeable. A relaxed but “upright” posture is much easier to maintain and of course is more pleasing to the eye.

VI. DRESS CODE

Some of the points that follow may seem rather particular, but again please remember that you are probably the first member of the band the general public will see, and, if you are to enter competitions remember, “points mean prizes.”

In addition, although the following points are mainly aimed at Drum Majors, in general they will apply to all band members.

If the Drum Major is properly turned out then he/she has the authority/confidence to help other band members to achieve the same high standard.

6.1 FOOTWEAR:

- a) When wearing Full dress, shoes should be of the brogue type, but a sensible black shoe will suffice.
- b) For Day Dress the Ghillie brogue is the ideal footwear, but again a sensible black shoe is acceptable, but not for Drum Majors competitions.

Note: Regardless whether in Full or Day Dress, footwear should clean and polished. “High heels” are not a good or practical idea.

6.2 SPATS:

These should be of a reasonable fit (i.e.: not loose and flapping about or looking unsightly. Neither should they be too tight, cutting into the leg and interfering with the circulation.)

Shifting the buttons is a time consuming business, but worth it. In this age of “Velcro” it is still a good move to sew the, top, middle and bottom buttons on to the “Velcro,” and utilise those button holes to help ensure that the spats sit properly.

Spats come in different sizes. Advice should be sought from a reputable source before purchasing.

Before applying whitening to new spats, it is advisable to scrub them first and leave them to dry. They can now be “pressed,” creating a crease up and down the front seam. This should also help the spat sit properly.

To clean spats, I find it is better to dilute the whitening slightly with a little water and apply with an old shaving brush, ensuring the whitening is applied evenly. If the whitening is applied too thickly it will cake and crack and become unsightly.

When cleaning used/old spats make sure that any loose dirt etc is removed from the spats.

6.3 HOSE (Long and Diced):

When wearing these, try to ensure that that the top of the hose are level all the way round and both are at the same height.

- a) In Full Dress, the number of dice shown will depend on the shape of the leg and the size of the spat. The seam of the hose should be in line with the back bone of the spat.
- b) In Day Dress, the seam of the hose should be straight and in the centre of the back of the leg.

In general the hose should be well fitted, particularly within the shoe so as not to cause blisters; in addition, ill fitting hose look ugly.

6.4 GARTER FLASHES:

The design and fine positioning of the garter flashes is the choice of the wearer or the band concerned, but it is preferred to keep them up using elastic instead of string or thread, etc., so that when the leg starts to swell at least the elastic will give way a little, have less effect on the circulation, and be easier to remove.

6.5 KILT:

The recognised way to wear the kilt is to have it cutting the centre of the knee cap. Personally, I prefer to have it just at the top of the knee cap.

The kilt should hang level all the way round.

The centre of the pattern should run down the middle of the body.

The kilt should be tight enough around the waist to keep it up, but if too tight will not sit properly and not shown to its best advantage. The same applies if too slack.

6.6 SPORRAN:

Whether hair or day, the sporran should be worn with the cantle/top roughly two hands below the waist belt buckle, depending on the size of the individual, and in the centre of the pattern.

Care should be taken not to over fill the pouch of the sporran with bits and pieces. This will push it out of shape and the sporran will not look its best.

If the sporran is looked after properly it will last a long time.

6.7 JACKET:

Whether Full or Day Dress, the jacket should be of a good fit without being too tight. If possible the sleeves should be a little longer than normal (Drum Majors only.) This helps alleviate those unsightly gaps between sleeve and the top of the gloves when performing mace drill and on the march.

6.8 GLOVES:

The gloves are normally white in colour. If possible look for gloves with the following features:

- a) "Bubbles" on the palms stops the mace slipping through the hand, particularly when wet.
- b) Slightly longer in the wrist area, again to help eliminate the gap between the sleeve and glove.

6.9 WAIST BELT:

Try to ensure that the belt fits comfortably, not too tight or hanging loose.

The belt buckle should be in the centre front of the body.

- a) In Full Dress the belt is worn over the jacket.
- b) In Day Dress the belt is worn under the jacket unless wearing a military style jacket.

6.10 PLAID:

If worn properly, the pattern of the plaid will be in line with pattern of the kilt, and the frayed end of the plaid should be the same height as the top of the spats.

Care should be taken that the front edge of the plaid is not worn too far forward, thus interfering with any mace drill. Ideally the front edge should be in line with the front part of the arm when standing to attention.

It may be worth marking the plaid in some way so that each time it is worn it can be put on with as few adjustments as possible, thus saving valuable time.

6.11 CROSS BELT:

If using a piper's cross belt then there is only one way to put it on, but it can be adjusted to fit properly. Keeping the cross belt under the waist belt helps keep it in place while marching, etc.

If wearing a specially made Drum Major cross belt, depending on the type, advice should be sought from a reliable source.

6.12 RED SASH:

a) In Full Dress, the sash is worn over the jacket, over the belt, and under the plaid and cross belt.

b) In Day Dress, the sash is worn under the jacket.

The Pipe Major and Pipe Sergeant wear the sash from left shoulder to right hip.

6.13 FEATHERED BONNET AND HACKLE/PLUME:

The bonnet should be worn square on the head. This distributes the weight of the bonnet evenly and can be worn for fairly lengthy periods.

On most bonnets there is a hook on the top of the bonnet to which the hackle/plume can be attached to thus holding it in place. The shank of the hackle/plume should be placed behind the bonnet badge.

6.14 THE GLENGARRY:

The Glengarry should be placed firmly on the head and maybe tilted slightly to the right. Walk under the Glengarry, not behind or in front of it.

6.15 THE BALMORAL:

Again the hat should be placed firmly and squarely on the head. The main part of the headwear is pulled forward and, maybe, a little to the right. Once more, walk under the hat etc.

6.16 THE TIE:

Properly knotted with the knot in the centre of the gap in the collar, pulled tight enough to fill that gap, but loose enough to be comfortable and not interfere with the circulation.

6.17 CLAYMORE:

More civilian Drum Majors are now carrying claymores.

When carrying/wearing these, great care should be taken to ensure that they are properly secured to the waist belt and positioned so that it does not interfere with any movements to be carried out.

In these days of increased security it is essential that the blade is not easily removed from the scabbard.

I hope that the foregoing is of some use, if you are unsure about the wearing of any item then find someone who knows and "ASK".

JSM: Amended: 17/10/2004

VII. TIPS ON PIPE BAND FORMATIONS

INTRODUCTION

What follows is only a guide and should be treated as such!

Most band formations are of a similar nature and can be adapted to fit the situation in hand!

This guide deals with the following subjects:

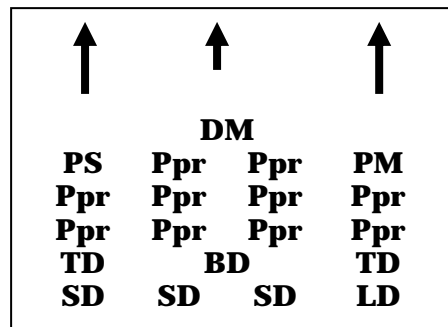
- a) Forming Up (single and massed bands).
- b) Seniority (Pipe/Drum Majors and Leading Drummers).
- c) Uniformity (bands in different forms of dress).
- d) Dressing (keeping in line).

7.1 SINGLE BAND:

Most Pipe Bands will have their own forming up tradition normally under the guidance of the Pipe Major, who will put the pipers into positions which will best serve to enhance the overall performance of the band.

The leading Drummer will normally be on the same flank as the Pipe Major (this should also be the guiding flank.)

The Bass Drummer should be in the centre rear of the pipe section with a Tenor Drummer on either side.



Example 7.1: Single Band

The above is an ideal situation with the PM on the right and the Pipe Sergeant (PS) on the left.

7.2 MASSED BANDS:

When forming massed pipe bands it is always useful to keep the following considerations in mind:

- a) Personalities on parade (i.e.: Senior Pipe/Drum Major, any distinguished playing guests, etc.)
- b) Uniforms/tartans worn by the bands on parade for uniformity (i.e.: full dress or day dress, or indeed variations in between.)
- c) What is the layout of the venue? Will the band(s) have to be formed up the “wrong way round” (i.e.: the SPM on the left so that when finished the march on, the SPM ends up on the right. (Example 7.3.c))

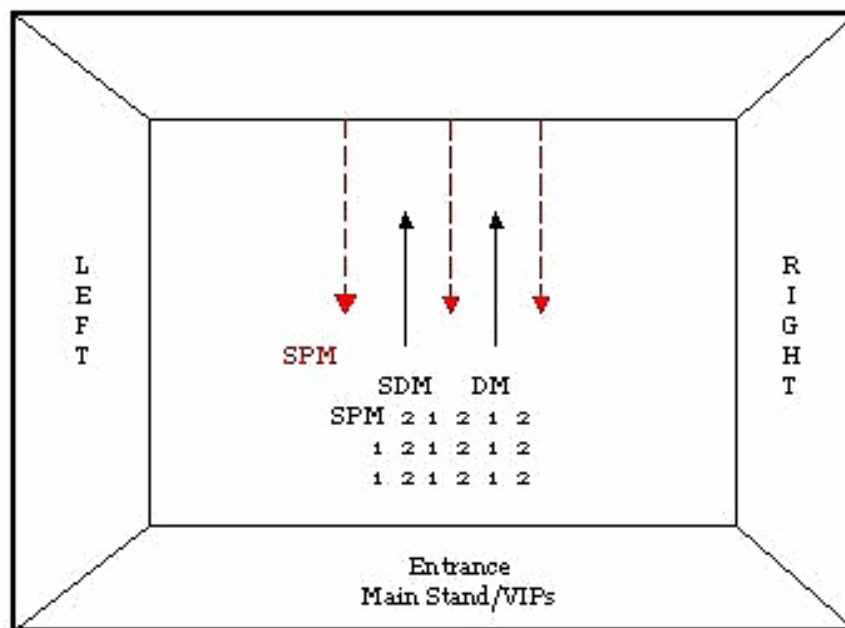
b) Three Bands:

In this set up bands 1 and 3 are dressed virtually the same and band 2 is dressed somewhat different.

Here if the SPM comes from band 2 then he /she should still be on the right flank, unless by agreement he/she wants to stay with their own band. In normal circumstances the SPM & SDM would come from the same band, although this is certainly not always the case. Experience and knowledge has to be a leading factor when deciding who takes the senior spots. In the UK, if an Army Pipe Band is on parade the SDM would come from that band.

Bearing the foregoing in mind, a bit of forward planning always comes in handy, even if it is just a telephone call to the other bands involved to gather information (i.e.: numbers on parade broken down by pipers, sides, tenors, bass, and DMs, band dress, etc.) This will give you something to work on and discuss with the SPM.

Something else worth getting hold of is a copy of the instruction/programme for the event plus a plan of the arena. When you arrive at the venue and rehearsal time is short, you at least have an idea what you are going to ask the band to do. If you live close enough, it is obviously advantageous if you can visit the venue with the SPM and the event organiser. Again, this will give you a better idea of what lies ahead and can minimise time wasted on the day.



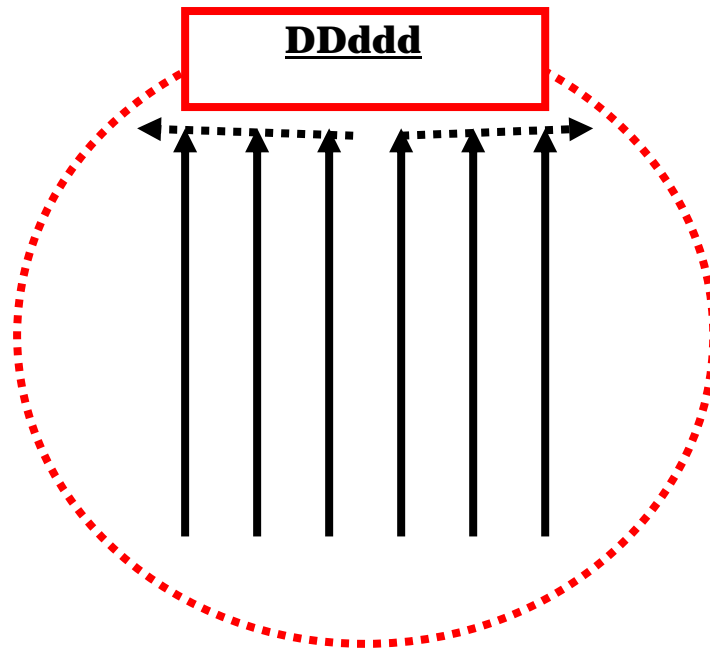
Example 7.3.c: "Wrong Way Round"

c) Wrong Way Round:

This shows two bands marching on from under the main stand and who are required to come to a halt facing the VIPs before continuing with the performance.

The same reasoning would apply if the band(s) were coming out from the left or right hand side of the arena. Wheel away from the main stand, counter-march, and halt facing the VIPs. Apart from getting the band the "right way round", it also gives the band(s) a chance to settle down before going into the prearranged display.

During any further manoeuvres, it should be a consideration that, at the end of the display/march off, the band(s) should be the "right way" round.



Example 7.4: Forming a Circle

7.4 FORMING A CIRCLE:

This example shows a frontage of six forming a circle as follows:

On the prearranged signal from the DM(s), the front rank turns outwards, the second rank comes to the same point, turns out and follows the front rank round. The remainder of the pipe section does the same, with the PM(s) meeting in the middle.

The drum section has two options here: they can either counter-march with the DM(s) and stay in block or they follow the pipers out and form one big circle.

I think that the senior bass drummer should come forward, close to the centre of the circle. There is more chance of everybody hearing him/her and the SPM can keep an eye on the bass drummer if the tempo goes a little haywire.

The same effect can be achieved by counter-marching, marking time, turning outwards, and the pipers going forward. Once the rear rank pipers are clear, the drum section just edges forward until they connect with the end pipers.

It is always worth remembering that the visual effect is almost as important as the musical effect.

Note: A file is from front to rear. A rank is from right to left.

JSM Amended: 17/10/2004