**Saturday Night Lights**

**The origin and development of the Marching Band Field Show**

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Abstract

It is not clear when the first marching band competition in the United States took place but it may have been first annual “Cavalcade of bands at Boyertown High School in 1959. Two thousand spectators braved “bone chilling weather” on Tuesday evening October 27 1959 and joined the MC from local radio station WRAW Mr. David Bause to watch 750 participants from Owen J. Roberts, Daniel Boone, Governor Mifflin, Upper Darby, Chichester, Northhampton and Boyertown High Schools perform their field shows. Today, competitions are present in communities across the country and utilize a variety of formats involving secondary-level students. The activity is a popular component of music education and often involves significant funding it seems important to study this phenomenon.

The Boyertown competition was important not only because it was the first such event in Southeast Pennsylvania that exclusively featured marching band football halftime shows. It started new trends in secondary school music education. In 1958, Arlen Saylor, the director of the Boyertown Area School District Band program, formed a support group of parents entitled the “Boyertown Music League”. During meetings of this new group, parents of students in the marching program and friends of the music program were concerned that not enough credit was given to the hundreds of young men and women who were presenting their field show performances at area high school football games. The Boyertown Music League wanted to form an event that could shift public attention to the bands and provide students with an opportunity to see one another’s efforts and encourage excellence.

I conducted first person interviews as well as accumulated artifacts from the first such competitions. Adjudication sheets were collected from the various years to show the development of the assessment methods we are familiar with today. Records of minutes from meetings held by band directors were accumulated to gain data on the growth and development of this activity.

Drum and Bugle corps influence is evident in this initial competition. We see the first use of the terms “General Effect”, Music, and “Visual” Marching and Maneuvering as individual captions. Weighting of these captions is also evident. Sub captions also existed in the captions as they do today along with rubrics. Growth in participation especially in the band front portion of the band was a direct result of these contests. Routines, drills and music got more complex. The competition increased the demand for more teacher education. Summer workshops and courses started in order to meet this demand.

Boyertown Cavalcade of Bands

* Arlen Saylor along with the newly formed Boyertown Music League wanted to establish a format by which students who work hard to perfect their football halftime performances would have a venue at which to showcase their talents
* Saylor had to come up with a way to adjudicate the bands. He adapted marching, maneuvering and military inspection from the Drum and Bugle corps activity while tapping college band directors expertise for the music adjudication
* The Cavalcade of bands grew form this first one in 1959 to several in the area and eventually started the Cavalcade of Bands organization which today boasts more that 200 participating schools.
* Other marching band pageantry organizations such as Bands of America, Tournament of Bands and US Bands started involving marching band programs from around the country
* An upswing in participation in the band front aspect started. What used to be a few majorettes in front of the band increased to majorettes, flags rifles sabers etc. involving more and more of the student body.
* Adjudication sub captions such as music performance, marching performance, and general effect were used in the original sheets to delineate between the different aspects of the program. These terms are basically still used today