The Sport Of the Arts
Marching Display Bands of Singapore

Featuring West Spring Secondary School Display Band
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Dedicated to the People who are:

Passionate about Display Bands in Singapore
Supportive of building up and sustaining marching display bands
Interested in how this art form will benefit youths
“There was a heavy downpour that August 9, 1968. The then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had to decide whether to proceed with the parade or to postpone it. He decided to proceed, for to do otherwise would have implied that Singaporeans were not resilient. My mother, my brother Hsien Yang and I watched with pride from the windows of my father’s office in City Hall as Hsien Loong marched past.”

THE MARCH OF A CONFIDENT NATION

BY LEE WEI LING
THE STRAITS TIMES 2 AUG 2009

THE HISTORY
OF THE SINGAPORE BAND MOVEMENT
BRIEF HISTORY OF BANDS IN SINGAPORE

A Sense of National Identity

Between 1963 and 1965, when Singapore was still part of Malaysia, Singapore faced problems in engaging the bands to lead the State Parades. Our previous Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew felt very strongly that Singapore needed military music to keep up the national spirit and to present an elaborate display during national events.

In 1965, under the suggestion of PM Lee, the formation of school bands was designated a High Priority. Hence, the Ministry of Education (MOE) mandated the participation of bands in schools as an extra-curricular activity (ECA) for school children.

BRIEF HISTORY OF BANDS IN SINGAPORE

The Singapore School Band Movement

PM Lee also recognised the relevant social values such as group discipline, *esprit de corps* and most importantly, a sense of national identity that bands inculcated.

The government placed more emphasis on this activity, thus leading to the beginning of the Singapore School Band Movement.

Between 1965 and 1966, 20 brass bands were formed. These bands combined to form a 500-strong student band contingent to perform for the first National Day Parade in August 1966. The performance was spectacular and it motivated more schools to jump on the bandwagon. This led to a growth spurt in the school band movement.

As of 2016, there are 147 secondary school concert bands, 19 junior college symphonic bands, 31 primary school brass bands, 16 primary school concert bands, 12 music ensembles and 6 secondary school display marching bands.

*feelings of loyalty, enthusiasm, and devotion to a group among people who are members of the group


PHOTO: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore
BRIEF HISTORY OF BANDS IN SINGAPORE

Singapore Youth Festival (SYF)

The Singapore Youth Festival (SYF) is an annual event in Singapore, organised by MOE to celebrate the achievements of youths in co-curricular activities (CCAs).

Starting in April, the SYF is a month-long celebration in Singapore involving more than 30,000 students across three disciplines: the uniformed groups, the sports and the performing arts. Many students are able to showcase their talents and passion for music and the arts in this event.

In 1994, due to the large scale involvement of students and schools, the SYF was elevated to an official national-level event.
BRIEF HISTORY OF BANDS IN SINGAPORE

Singapore Youth Festival (SYF)

The last Central Judging of Display Bands at the Singapore National Stadium in Kallang was held in 2008. From 2010 onwards, the competition venue was relocated to the Singapore Indoor Stadium. Following revamps to the SYF’s judging format, the event title was changed to the SYF Arts Presentation of Display Bands in 2014.

At the SYF Arts Presentation of Display Bands in 2016, there were only six marching display bands which participated in this biannual event.

Participating schools:
Bukit Panjang Government High School
Bowen Secondary School
Deyi Secondary School
Ping Yi Secondary School
Tanjong Katong Secondary School
West Spring Secondary School
The Evolution of British Military Bands
From the 1960s to the late 1990s …

THE BEGINNING

(5 July, 1969) National Cadet Corps Parade at Queenstown – Hua Yi Primary School’s 60-strong band, with average age of 9.
PHOTO: STRAITS TIMES © SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS LIMITED
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… towards the American Drum Corps International (DCI) standard Marching Display Bands Early 2000 and beyond.

THE SPORT OF THE ARTS

(2 April, 2016) Singapore Youth Festival Arts Presentation of Display Bands – West Spring Secondary School Display Band. PHOTO: SUKI SINGH
What is a Display Band?

*It is the fusion of…*

**Performing Arts**
It conveys artistic expressions such as music and choreography through marching, dance and drama on a large performing arena, intended to be performed in front of a live audience.

**Sports**
As body strength and flexibility are vital in the successful execution of choreography and playing of instruments, physical conditioning in strength, endurance, flexibility, balance and coordination are important. This is trained through physical training such as rhythmic breathing exercises and jogging with steps in-sync with tempo of music.

**Uniformed Group**
Foot drills and team-building exercises are conducted. The display band instills discipline as members are required to be punctual and maintain costumes, props and instruments responsibly. There is a large emphasis placed on teamwork for display bands. All players must work together harmoniously and commit to learning music and attending rehearsals and practices in order to produce excellent performances.
The Sport of the Arts
How did the evolution come about?

Late 1960s to early 1970s
Brass bands, bugle and fife bands were dominant with average memberships of 20-30 students.

Late 1970s
Bands evolved into larger groups to form military bands equipped with more diverse instruments such as woodwinds. The newer and larger bands began to hold indoor band concerts and participate in overseas performances. There were approximately 90 semi-military bands and 180 bugle and fife bands with an average of 100 members per band.

This was the best of the marching band era, with over 20 bands participating at the SYF outdoor display band competitions.

1980 to 1989
With an increase in the number of school bands making concert and competition tours, brass bands turned military bands began to convert to full-fledged symphonic bands in order to heighten their skills in music and expand and diversify their repertoire.

* A bugle and fife is a musical ensemble that consists of flutes or fifes and brass instruments. A fife is a small, high-pitched, transverse flute, that is similar to the piccolo, but louder and shriller due to its narrower bore
THE UNDERLYING MAGIC
What makes us different?

How did the evolution come about?

1990 to 1999
There was a shift in preference for indoor performance to outdoor marching. It became clear that improving musicality was of greater importance than spending time on foot drills and formations. This resulted in the formation of concert bands, thus reducing the number of marching display bands from more than 20 bands in the 1980s to 8 bands in the late 1990s.

2000 to 2009
The remaining bands that still see the value in having marching bands continue to preserve this performing art by introducing auxiliary teams such as dancers and actors into the show choreography to increase its entertainment value.

2010 to present
The marching display bands evolved from traditional British military bands to American DCI-style bands which include colour guards in show choreography, formally established when professionals were flown in from countries such as the United States, Japan, Thailand and Malaysia to conduct music workshops and specialist classes to secondary schools. Musicality for such marching bands also started to improve.

* Drum Corp International (also known as DCI), founded in 1972, is the non-profit governing body for junior drum and bugle corps in the U.S. and Canada. It is responsible for developing and enforcing the rules of competition and is the sanctioning body for junior corps competitions. DCI is headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana.
THE GROWTH

WEST SPRING DISPLAY BAND

Mission
To strive towards excellence in musicality and strength of character.

Vision
To establish a band of quality and prestige,
To develop the potential of individuals in the field of music,
To produce creative, disciplined and harmonious members,
To nurture ladies and gentlemen with distinction in strength of character and passion for learning.

Motto
‘With Pride We Strike’
In West Spring Band, pride refers to a fulfilled sense of attachment towards one's choices and actions, or towards a whole group of people.
West Spring Display Band, formed in 2001, started participating in the Singapore Youth Festivals (SYF) Central Judging as a display band in 2004.

As a young band, it was a period of uncertainty as the band was looking for the right band system to adopt. Despite the initial struggles, joining the SYF was extremely important as it afforded us with rich experiences and exposure as we grew as a unit. It was not until 2009 that the band came in touch with Drum Corps International (DCI) standard of music and band show.
Through international and cultural exchanges with the best bands in Southeast Asia, West Spring remodelled the band systems, adapted the best practices and developed the band culture that suited Singapore’s context and youths.

West Spring Display Band has participated in several SYF competitions and arts presentations, made steady and improved performances over the years and progressed from four silvers award to one gold award, and finally establishing the band with two certificates of distinctions with an outstanding visual performance award.
WHY CHOOSE TO BE A DISPLAY BAND?
OUR CULTURE

Uniquely 3-in-1: The Sport of the Arts

• It is a CCA that is considered a performing art and a uniformed group. Due to the rigour of its training, it can be regarded as a sport.
• Marching bands function with large number of students and typically work to accommodate every student.

Character Development

• Discipline and respect are emphasised in the band. Members who have good discipline will have mutual respect for one another. They are more observant, develop good time management skill, practise their music skills regularly and are systematic in planning their school band practices.
• Being in the band is similar to integrating into a small community where they can learn how to get along with people, build team spirit and learn how to prevail in the face of adversity. With guidance, they will be able to overcome greater challenges when they step into society in future.
West Spring wishes to continue the vision of our country’s Prime Minister, the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, in educating the youths of our next generation on character and values by focusing on group discipline, respect and esprit de corps.

During the nation-building era, military music was used to keep the spirits of Singapore high. Today, besides having military music, West Spring hopes to move forward with the global development of this unique performing art, by bringing vibrancy to our global arts scene and be the pride of Singapore at international music festivals and cultural exchanges.

West Spring aims to educate young marching band members to form friendship through bands and work together to develop and sustain this rare performing art.
The Power of RESPECT

- The RESPECT Model: a philosophy of practical value supported by more than a century of research on motivation and performance.

- It is not a programme. Rather, it is an approach to leadership and corporate governance that appeals to and affects members’ beliefs, values and sense of worth.

- Student leadership is the key to developing the Respect model within the band. Whenever student leaders face challenges, they will consult the teachers and instructors who will guide them. With guidance, the student leaders learn from the challenges and turn adversities into opportunities of learning.

- The model is rooted in the premise that human relationships – both personal and professional – only “work” within the context of respect.
Member engagement depends on the extent to which individuals:

- **Respect the organisation** – Band members are proud to say, “I am from West Spring Display Band!”

- **Respect the band’s leaders** – Believing they are competent, ethical, able to make good decisions and can treat people fairly.

- **Respect their team members** – Believing that they are competent, cooperative, honest, supportive and willing to pull their own weight.

- **Respect their work** – Finding it interesting, challenging and rewarding.

- **Feel respected** – By the organisation, leaders and fellow team members.

- Using the power of Respect, an established system is built not just based on strong musical and marching foundations for their students, but also an operational system for the entire organisation to follow and adhere to.
WHAT DOES WEST SPRING BAND DO?

OUR EDUCATION

1. Annual Camps and Music Workshops
Strong bonds are formed when members gather for the annual 3-day-2-night band camp that includes barbecue sessions and educational movie nights with the band alumni. Music and marching workshops are sometimes conducted by our school, the music industry, and also by MOE.

2. Local Band Exchanges
Band exchanges serve to enhance musicality by letting members learn from other local bands and developing long-lasting friendship between like-minded youths. Student leaders get exposed to events management as well.

3. Overseas Cultural Exposure
Since 2009, West Spring Display Band has been visiting the top bands in Malaysia biannually in a bid to establish strong cultural learning with the best bands in Southeast Asia. They are SMJK Keat Hwa Secondary School and SMK Sultanah Asma Girls’ School, both of which have won international accolades in World Championships of Marching Show Bands, events sanctioned by the World Association of Marching Show Bands (WAMSB).
4. Indoor Band Concert Performances
As a display band, West Spring Display Band focuses on enhancing musicality, building self-expression and moulding self-esteem from yearly concert performances during school events and anniversaries.

5. Outdoor Marching Display Presentation
To build resilience, discipline and character, West Spring Display Band participates in the biannual SYF Display Band Arts Presentation. West Spring Display Band also strives to educate Singaporeans to appreciate band music better as display bands are able to cater to a diverse of audience with greater visual impact.

6. Engaging the Community
To preserve this rare performing art, West Spring Display Band engages in events with the community and neighbouring primary and secondary schools through school performances to educate youths about display marching bands.
Joylyn Leow Jia Ling (Band Major 2016-17)

“During intensive training periods, there was indeed a whole lot of hardship to endure. Nonetheless, it was the camaraderie that we formed that made me appreciate and love everything about band. We worked and played hard together as a big family and overcame difficulties together. I have definitely made the best choice to be in a display band.”

Muhammad Nizam Bin Abdul Rahim (Band Alumni, current NUS undergrad)

“The band has instilled great discipline in me. I learnt about time management, respecting peers’ differences and always striving to perform my best at the things I do. It has definitely developed me holistically as a person who wants to be successful in life.”
Mr Seah Siow Chye (Parent of current band member)  
“The band training sessions have helped to shape good character in my daughter during her growing years and nurtured her into a confident young lady. The strict but caring band team, including all teachers and instructors, have provided the essential environment to drive my daughter to pursue excellence in her CCA as well as her studies.”

Mdm Rosita Lea Sharif (Parent of Band Alumni)  
“I have witnessed the positive changes in my daughter Nuraina since she joined the band. She mentioned that, ‘Dedication and discipline in the band have directed me in ways I never imagined. The camaraderie, commitment and perseverance that were fostered deeply amongst us instilled values that are close to my heart. Being in the band was the pivotal experience in shaping my character and my life.’”
THE FUTURE FRIENDSHIP OF BANDS

Promoting local and global communication and interaction between marching display bands

Local or international performances and cultural exchanges of youth groups

Educational development of youths involved in marching bands and professional development of the leaders of youth groups

To promote the Sport of the Arts

• The demands of a display marching band require all band students to develop resilience and strength of character. This is aligned to what our founding Prime Minister and late Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew envisioned, and West Spring, together with all other display marching bands in Singapore, has been striving to uphold this vision.

• With greater awareness and knowledge via media exposure, we hope for more youths to be encouraged and parents to encourage their children to participate in this art.

To encourage support for DCI training

• It is to show support for the development and growth of display bands, for education leaders to understand and highlight the importance of having proper training, and for band members and educators to increase knowledge in Drum Corp International (DCI) show concepts.
WEST SPRING @
SYF ARTS PRESENTATIONS

SYF Arts Presentation of Display Bands (2014)
7 Colours

SYF Arts Presentation of Display Bands (2016)
Liang Zhu (梁祝)

Click on videos to access link
A total of seven bands from Singapore Secondary Schools entertained a crowd of 6000 strong at the Singapore Indoor Stadium.

Channel SuperSports360 explored the similarities and differences between sports and the arts at this visual spectacle.

West Spring Display Band impressed the crowd with their energetic performance in the 2014 edition of the Singapore Youth Festival (SYF), which was held at Gardens by the Bay for the first time.
SYF-SHINE: Parade of Bands (2016)

After two decades, the Parade of Bands is back in Singapore and it was featured during the SYF Celebrations in July 2016!

With more than 20 bands featured, participants shared not only on how to play and march, but also the values that they have acquired.

Click on video and news article to access link
To develop the alumni band

- Our first aim is to allow ex-band members to continue their interest in band after completing secondary school. An alumni band forms a strong support group, strengthening loyalty and sense of social cohesion within the band community.

- Our second aim is also to educate the next generation of band members on the importance of supporting one another in times of need, especially during band training sessions and in academics.

To engage and establish strong ties with overseas bands

- In order to sustain the growth of marching display bands in Singapore, we have to expand our horizon and learn from more established bands overseas.

- To encourage interaction and communication with overseas counterparts, to leverage and learn from the best so as to establish a good culture and system for the bands in Singapore to practise and develop with.
WHAT DOES WEST SPRING ENVISION?

Efforts to make international connections and learn from the best in Asia

Paid overseas visit to
- Sultanah Asma School (Kedah, Malaysia) in 2011, 2013, 2015
  [ Both are top marching display bands in South East Asia. ]

Hosted international visits from
- Stella Matutina Girls' High School (Taipei, Taiwan) in July 2015
- Janokrong Marching School Band (Phitsanulok, Thailand) in July 2016

Participated in local exchanges with
GROWTH THROUGH INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE

Click on videos to access link
GROWTH THROUGH CULTURAL EXCHANGES

Cultural Exchanges from 2009 – 2015 and ongoing

Band Convention 2013 with 12 Malaysian Bands

Overseas Cultural Exchanges

- As the marching bands in Southeast Asia gradually evolved into DCI marching display bands, we turn to them to gain knowledge and support.
- Hence, overseas cultural exchanges are conducted biannually to maintain strong ties so as to cultivate interest, both for current band members and our young alumni.
‘Champions do not become champions when they win the event, but in the hours, weeks, months and years they spend preparing for it. The victorious performance itself is merely the demonstration of their championship character.’

~ Alan Armstrong

Experts say that the keys to success in secondary school education are rigour, character development and building relationships.

A display band satisfies all of these criteria. The rigour of learning to play music and marching in complex formations, character building through discipline and team skills benefit youths long after pre-tertiary education. Relationships built within the band will develop and deepen over the four to five years of secondary school.

With emphasis on providing holistic education to our youths, West Spring Display Band will strive and continue their dedication towards sustaining and promoting the Sport of the Arts in Singapore.
Acknowledgement

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Last but not least, our thanks goes to the West Spring Display Band teachers and school leaders, Mrs Betty Chow and Mr Seet Tiat Hee, for always believing in the value of marching bands and whose guidance, encouragement, suggestions and constructive criticisms have contributed immensely to the evolution of ideas on this project.

Ms Annie Lee
Teacher-in-charge
West Spring Secondary School Display Band
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