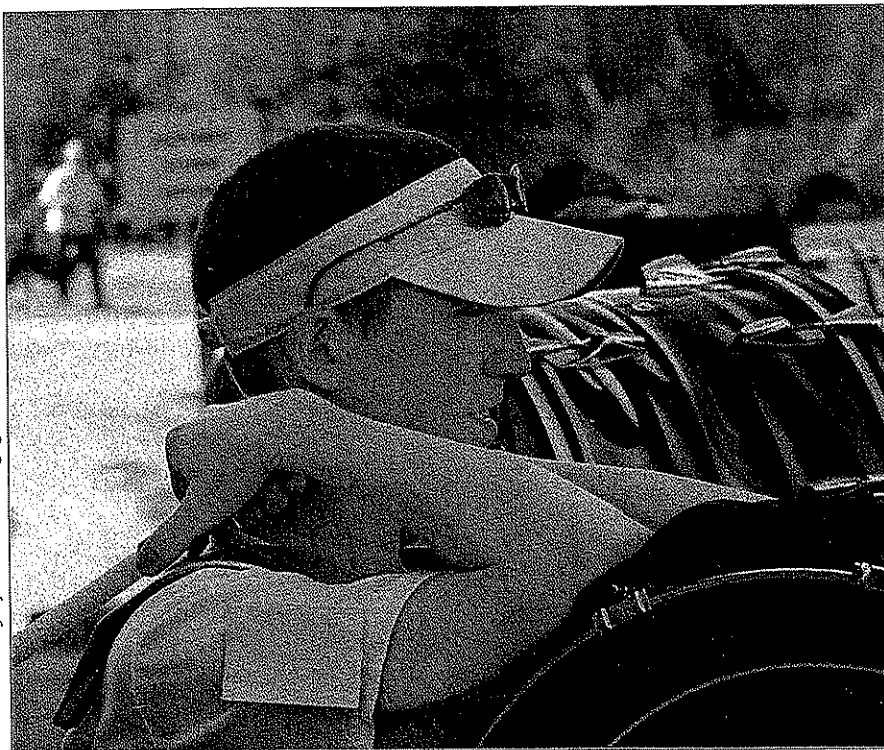


# Adjusting the Balance Of Marching Bass Drums

By Gene Fambrough



photos courtesy of Smith-Walbridge Clinics

Most contemporary arrangements of marching music are scored for four or five bass drums, but numbers can vary from two to nine tonal basses. However, students sometimes get sick or quit right before a performance. Several options are available when the bass drum part calls for a different number of players than the band has.

If the bass part is written for one more drum than is available, such as four players for a five-drum part, the immediate solution is to assign the person playing the smallest drum, which is usually referred to as bass 1, to play the parts of both basses 1 and 2 on his drum, leaving the remaining three players to cover the other three parts. Additionally any player can cover the part for an adjacent drum without detracting from the written music. This is a good way to cover all parts when one bass drummer is absent from school.

ed to one player, especially if there are too few players or drums to cover all the parts as written.

Music for multiple bass drums should follow the basic flow of the tuba part. If there is doubt about when to change pitches, smaller intervals in the tuba part should remain on the same drum.

Five-part bass drum reduction of tuba part for "Sing, Sing, Sing"

If music is going to be played for several months it is better to rewrite the part so that doublings are not restrict-

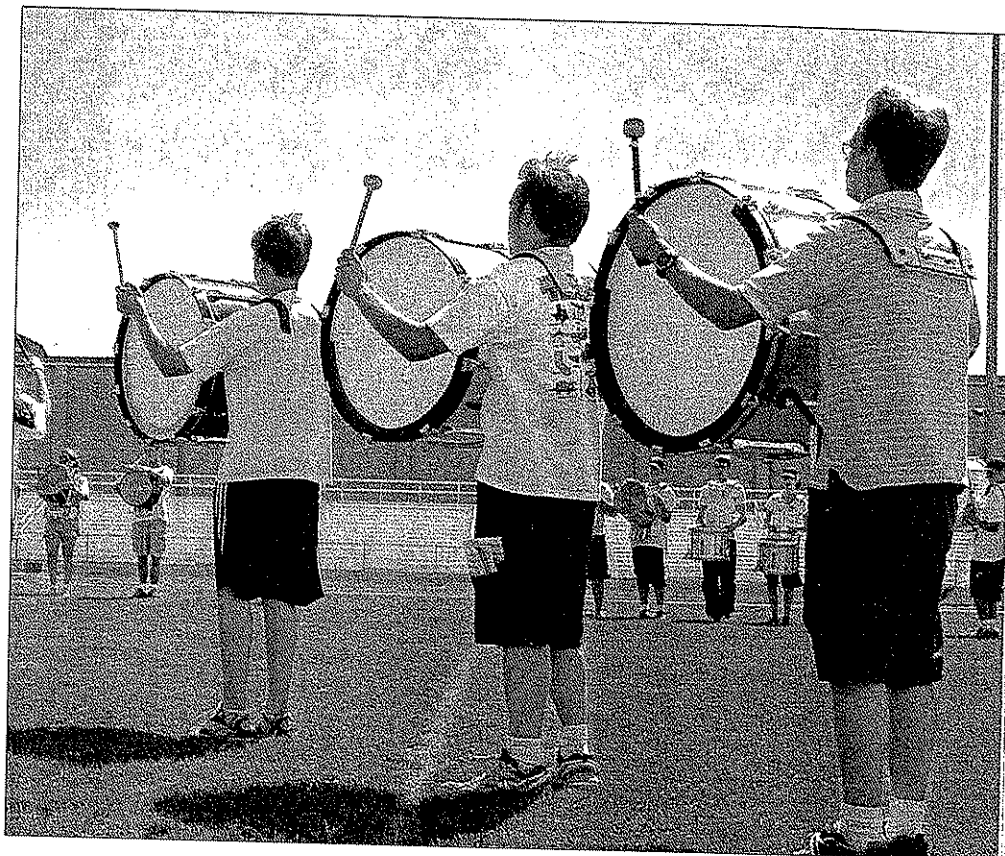
## Reductions and Expansions of Sample Bass Drum Parts

When the band has one more bass player than called for in the score, the quick solution is to have the top drums play the parts as written and add the largest drum on unison notes. This approach gives the music extra punch at critical points in the arrangement but makes for an uninteresting lowest drum part.

Parts scored for too few bass players should be rewritten based on the tuba part if the music is part of an upcoming performance. This is especially valuable for bands with five bass players; a set of five drums can mimic a walking bass line in the tuba part better than four players can.

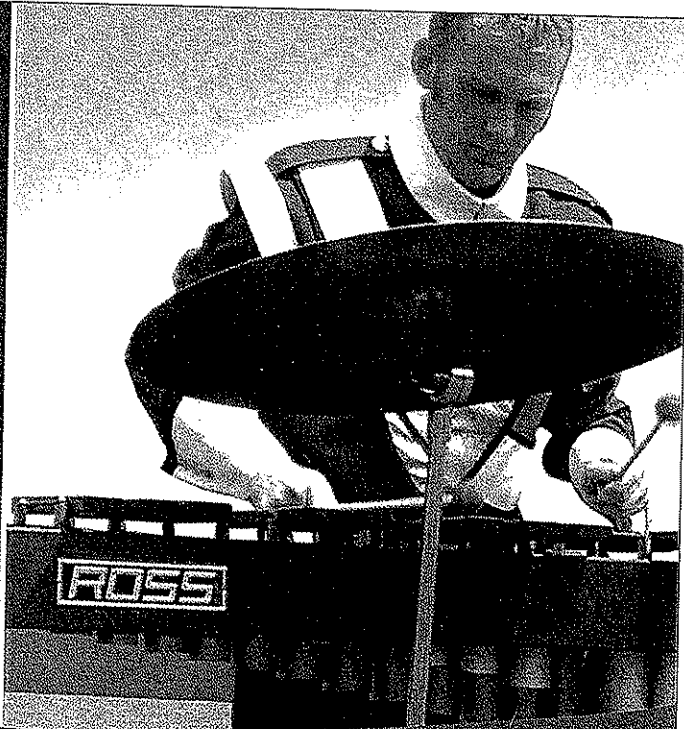
In rare cases there may be a difference of two or more drums between the part and the players available. If this happens it is better to rewrite the bass drum part to fit the ensemble than to have multiple players cover two parts each. Another practical choice is to move someone from another section to bass drum, although snare or tenor players may be less willing to do this than cymbal or pit players.

In general, any number of bass drums above five is considered icing and will probably need a custom-writ-



ten part. The director or percussion assistant, if there is one, should gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the

section and write a part that takes these into consideration. The strongest players should be placed on drums



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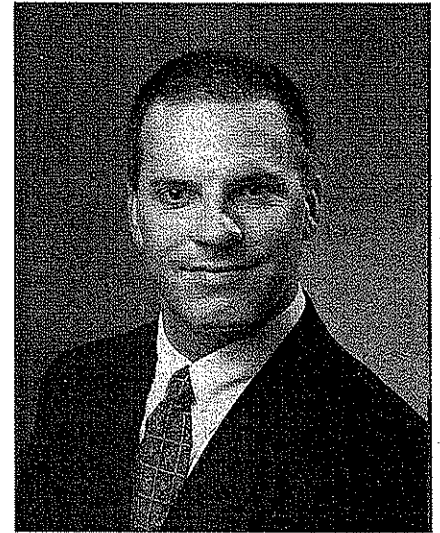
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2 and 3 in a four-drum line and on drums 2 and 4 in a five-drum line; these are the players who can best shoulder a more difficult part. □



Gene Fambrough is assistant director of bands and percussion instructor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He received degrees from the University of Georgia, East Carolina University, and the University of Alabama. He directs the University of Alabama percussion ensemble, steel band, electro-acoustic percussion group, and is a percussion arranger and instructor for the Marching Blazers. A published composer, he has written works for solo marimba, percussion ensemble, and rudimental percussion.

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