A Guide: Style of the March
Making the March Musical, Vibrant and Alive
Presented by
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March Tempos:

- **American Marches** (Military Marches/Parade Marches): quarter note ca. 116-120
  
  The tempo was dictated by function; marching and playing
  The Thunderer by Sousa U.S. Marine Band ca.112 [ disbuted by](https://youtu.be/YRmRrKB6yXE)
  El Capitan by Sousa (The Great American Street Band) ca. 116
  [https://youtu.be/P1vPmC_CQQY](https://youtu.be/P1vPmC_CQQY)

  Our Director by Bigelow (Goldman Band) [https://youtu.be/liay7mn7OuQ](https://youtu.be/liay7mn7OuQ) [Quick Step]
  Noble Men March by Fillmore (U.S. Air force Reserve Band) ca. 138
  [https://youtu.be/WKDBZrWTiss](https://youtu.be/WKDBZrWTiss) [Quick Step]

- **Marches in 6/8** generally work well at a quarter note ca. 120:
  American We by Fillmore (U of Illinois) ca. 120 [https://youtu.be/xuhasmGgsvY](https://youtu.be/xuhasmGgsvY)

- **Circus Marches** tempos are somewhat faster than military and 6/8 marches with the quarter note ca. 144. Conductors that play these marches faster than this are generally displaying the technical virtuosity the ensemble. At times when these marches are played at virtuosic tempos the march can lose its stylistic sense and musical beauty.
  Barnum and Bailey’s Favorite by King (U.S. Army Field Band) ca. 138

**European Marches** generally are played at a slower tempo than American marches. Although British regimental marches are more closely performed at tempos that are close to the American military march. It is the distinct difference in the style of the European and American march that calls for the slower tempo.

  European marches employ a more lyrical style with lengthy counter-melodies, a pomposo like second strain with song-like tunes in the trio.

  Inglesina by Delle Cese (U of Illinois) ca. 108 [https://youtu.be/0XI3xzw1gps](https://youtu.be/0XI3xzw1gps)
  Valdres by Hassen (His Majesty’s Royal Guard Band) ca. 96 [https://youtu.be/cu2eQ-Y0Q9o](https://youtu.be/cu2eQ-Y0Q9o)
  Petita Greus by Chovi (U.S. Marine Band) ca. 112 [https://youtu.be/Ile4hRaqmgg](https://youtu.be/Ile4hRaqmgg)
  Petita Greus by Chovi (English Chamber Orchestra) ca. 112 [https://youtu.be/ILG3WUiffmU](https://youtu.be/ILG3WUiffmU)
• **German Marches** range in tempos from ca. 104 – 112. German marches will generally have lyrical melodies that are contrasted by rhythmically precise and marcato sections with that are enhanced by dynamic changes and accentuations.
  
  - Radetzky by Strauss U.S. Marines Band ca. 104 [https://youtu.be/8JfWBe2hTBI](https://youtu.be/8JfWBe2hTBI)
  - Radetzky by Strauss Vienna Philharmonic ca. 104 [https://youtu.be/2ORHVo7mWHk](https://youtu.be/2ORHVo7mWHk)
  - (Who Needs a Conductor?)
  - Florentiner by Fucik (Tokyo Kosei WE) ca. 104 [https://youtu.be/XD4R5x4DfBw](https://youtu.be/XD4R5x4DfBw)
  - Florentiner by Fucik (Berlin Philharmonic) ca. 112 [https://youtu.be/QtTJ1X0AvQ8](https://youtu.be/QtTJ1X0AvQ8)

• **Spanish Marches** or paso doble (two step) features long lyrical lines that features a guitar like accompaniment. Tempos of ca. 108 work well for Spanish marches. The tendency of many conductors is to play the popular “Amparita Roca” March at a very fast tempo detract from capturing the essence of the stylistic beauty of the music. Keep in mind these marches (two-steps) are elegant dances or songs for singing and Spanish guitar.
  
  - El Relicario by Padilla University of Illinois ca 126 [https://youtu.be/g4RCzB3qQCU](https://youtu.be/g4RCzB3qQCU) (in ¾ sounds good at this tempo)
  - Amparita Roca by Texidor China Dunshan Symphonic Wind Orchestra ca. 126
  - Amparita Roca by Texidor University of Illinois ca. 108 [https://youtu.be/7OWt4ovCES8](https://youtu.be/7OWt4ovCES8)
  - Amparita Roca by Texidor St Olaf College ca. 152 [https://youtu.be/2tynaQxoCzA](https://youtu.be/2tynaQxoCzA)

• **Italian Marches** employ tuneful lyrical lines, much like the Spanish march. Italian march writers fond of writing tunes with finely crafted counter-melodies displaying many dynamic changes and subtle, delicate accents in the manner of a concert-march. A good tempo for these marches is ca, 116 as in the Spanish tempos faster than this detract from the integrity of the music.
  
  - Symphonic March by Bonelli University of Michigan ca. 80 (In cut time) [https://youtu.be/WEuRJlfBYKY](https://youtu.be/WEuRJlfBYKY)
  - Symphonic March by Bonelli Banda dell Esercito ca 9126 In 4/4) [https://youtu.be/ksM2QoN8Nus](https://youtu.be/ksM2QoN8Nus)

• The **French Marches** that I have done tend to sound best at ca.126. French writers tend to favor fanfare-like openings and often use fanfare like interludes in the break-strain. Trio-tunes tend to be simple singable songs and are often accompanied by a repetitive ostinato-rhythm in the snare drum
  
  - Marche Lorraine by Ganne HM Dragoon Guard Band ca. 120 [https://youtu.be/_tYczOGmx0U](https://youtu.be/_tYczOGmx0U)

Conductors should exercise thoughtful care in selecting march tempos based on musical and stylistic effectiveness, function and technical demands.

**NOT DOING THIS CAN MAKE OR BREAK THE PERFORMANCE OF A MARCH!**
**Style & Interpretation**

There is no “one way” to play a march:
Conductors should be diligent in the study of a march to secure the best interpretation:
   - Knowing the origins of the march
   - When it was written, what was its function (parade, celebration, newspaper, school/Univ. etc)
   - Was it written for a specific occasion
   - What medium it was written for (military band, guitar, organ, bag pipes etc)

Conductors should refrain from and be very judicious in changing melody, harmony or rhythmic concepts of a march

Conductors may change:
   - Dynamics
   - Octave registration
   - Accents (adding or deleting)

Conductors, too often play marches as someone else has played it.
Take the time to listen to a wide variety of interpretations of a march multiple times.
Sing the various lines (all lines) of the march and find the music through one’s voice
Look for opportunities to play legato (especially in the trio and second strain)
Melodic lines should never be covered
Maintain precise rhythms and avoid rushing
Provide as much dynamic contrast as possible, particularly in legato passages
Avoid dull performances by changing dynamics on repeats
Highlight all counter-melodies, obbligatos, and variations so they match the melody in volume
Develop a good concept of marcato and detached styles (“tah” or “tut”)
Keep the tempo steady when changing dynamics
Keep the tempo steady when playing a crescendo or diminuendo
The cymbals should match the volume of the bass drum (generally) Until 1940 the cymbal was mounted on the bass drum
Put a strong player/musician on bass drum
Grandioso means: *to play in a grand style*, it does not mean “slowdown”
All percussion parts should relate to the music played by the band in dynamics and accentuation/percussion solo being the exception
The lead trumpet or cornet part should never sound above the entire band
Long notes should be louder/The bigger the note, the more sound
All accents are not equal
“Detach” does not mean short, although short notes are incorporated in the march style
   - (Bands tend to play too short too often)
Tenuto markings can indicate to play notes long or to be played with weight (end of Vaughan Wms 49th Parallel)
Something to watch:
Joy of the March (clip) with Frederick Fennell on Youtube https://youtu.be/90hEFj8rTxU

Some of my Favorite March Albums:
Sousa Original U.S. Marine Band
https://youtu.be/UhT8tM7JuQs

Hail Sousa! University of Michigan (Revelli, conductor)
https://youtu.be/gYxj8ueXWAU

Great Marches of the World: American Marches University of Illinois (Begian, conductor) https://youtu.be/oOr2aSftViE

Marches I’ve Missed Dallas Winds (Fennell, conductor)
https://youtu.be/24z_iLoJoll

Conduct with enthusiasm