



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**

CONTENT



THE HISTORY

A Sense of National Identity

Page 4



THE BEGINNING

The Underlying Magic

Page 9



THE GROWTH

Our Culture, Philosophy and Education

Page 14



THE FUTURE

Bands of the World Unite!

Page 25

“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**

National Day Parade 1969 Third Rehearsal at the Padang - Combined School Bands of Catholic High School and Raffles Institution, led by Drum Major Lee Hsien Loong on 27 July, 1969.

PHOTO: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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.

National Day Parade 1969 Third Rehearsal at the Padang - Combined schools band of Catholic High School and Raffles Institution, led by Drum Major Lee Hsien Loong, son of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew
PHOTO: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Lee, Hsien Loong, (2016, August 9). 50 years of NDP. Each parade memorable in a different way: PM Lee. The Straits Times. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/each-parade-memorable-in-a-different-way>



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.



Current PM Lee in the 1968 Parade, as a member of the Catholic High School Band.

In PM Lee's 2005 National Day Rally Speech, he recalled what happened: "Those of you who were there will never forget it. It was a downpour, we froze, we were drenched. Our instruments had to be turned upside down to pour the water out. We watched to see if we stood or if we ran for cover. Nobody ran for cover. We shivered but we stood there and we marched with pride."

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

[^] Official MOE SYF website. Retrieved from <https://www.singaporeyouthfestival.sg/index.php/syf-2016-celebrations>

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.



Bukit Panjang Government High and Teck Whye Combined Military Band, rejoicing and embracing each other in tears upon clinching the Gold medal in the Singapore Youth Festival (SYF) Central Judging of Display Bands in 2000, held at the Singapore National Stadium in Kallang. PHOTO: ZAO BAO © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction.



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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**THE SPORT
OF THE ARTS**

**... towards the American Drum Corps
International (DCI) standard
Marching Display Bands**
Early 2000 and beyond.

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

THE UNDERLYING MAGIC

What makes us different?

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



THE UNDERLYING MAGIC

What makes us different?

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

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.

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.

(2 July, 2016) SYF-SHINE Festival: Parade of Bands @ Orchard Road–
West Spring Secondary School Display Band.

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THE YOUNGEST DISPLAY BAND IN SINGAPORE

WEST SPRING DISPLAY BAND

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.



THE YOUNGEST DISPLAY BAND IN SINGAPORE

WEST SPRING DISPLAY BAND

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.



WHY CHOOSE TO BE A DISPLAY BAND? OUR CULTURE

To educate the Youths of Singapore

- 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.



HOW DOES THE BAND WORK?

OUR PHILOSOPHY

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.



HOW DOES THE BAND WORK?

OUR PHILOSOPHY

The Power 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).



WHAT DOES WEST SPRING BAND DO? OUR EDUCATION

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.



THOUGHTS ABOUT DISPLAY BAND MEMBERS AND ALUMNI

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.”



THOUGHTS ABOUT DISPLAY BAND PARENT OF MEMBERS AND ALUMNI

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

(17 Dec, 2013) Marching Band Convention with 12 Malaysian School Bands @ SMJK Keat Hwa Secondary School

West Spring Secondary School Display Band representing Singapore.

PHOTO: SMJK KEAT HWA SECONDARY SCHOOL



WHAT DOES WEST SPRING ENVISION? Preservation, Exposure, and Growth



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



PRESERVATION & EXPOSURE THROUGH SYF



SuperSports 360 – Feature on SYF Arts Presentation of Display Bands 2014

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 SYF Opening Ceremony 2014

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.

Click on videos to access link



PRESERVATION & EXPOSURE THROUGH SYF



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.

THE STRAITS TIMES

B10 | EDUCATION

MONDAY, JULY 4, 2016

Singapore Youth Festival: Celebrating 50 years



West Spring Display Band from West Spring Secondary School performing on Saturday in Parade of Bands in Orchard Road. Their route stretched from Ion Orchard to Paragon. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Baked and bonded as part of the band

It may be tough work being in a display band and practising for the Singapore Youth Festival (SYF) under the hot sun, but for the members, it is simply part of the job.

"Being in a display band and part of SYF is something that not everyone gets to experience. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I would never give up," said 16-year-old Lau Jia Ye.

The Secondary 4 student is among the 95 members in West Spring's Display Band.

In the SYF Arts Presentation earlier this year, the band attained the Certificate of Distinction.

It was also chosen to be part of last Saturday's Parade of Bands, with the route stretching from Ion Orchard to Paragon.

They performed their march piece – The Avenger – and a short segment from their SYF presentation.

The display band spent a year planning and almost another year – from June last year to April this year – rehearsing for the SYF.

"None of the kids have prior experience in a band, but they never gave up. For SYF, they would practise at least four times a week," said Ms Annie Lee, teacher-in-charge of the display band.

During rehearsals, the band

would march up and down the field at fast tempo for at least 10 minutes a time, coordinating their music-playing with their footwork.

Amirah Nur Diyanah, 15, the current band major, said: "Display band combines traits from sports and uniform groups from our marching and discipline. We're basically the sports-of-the-arts."

When asked about the hard work she and her teammates put in, she said: "Rehearsals were extremely tiring, plus we got baked by the sun, but what made them worthwhile was the camaraderie we shared doing them together."

Click on video and news article to access link

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WHAT DOES WEST SPRING ENVISION? Preservation, Exposure and Growth



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

- Keat Hwa School Band (Kedah, Malaysia) in 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015
 - 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

- Bukit Panjang Government High School (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010)
- Coral Secondary School, Westwood Secondary School (2010)
- Queenstown Secondary School (2012, 2014, 2016)



GROWTH THROUGH INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE



**SMJK Keat Hwa Secondary School
Spain (2012)**



**SMK Sultanah Asma Girls' School
Africa (2013)**



**SMJK Chung Hwa Wei Sin Secondary School
Princess Mononoke (2015)**



**SMJK Keat Hwa Secondary School
The Dragon: Bruce Lee (2016)**

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.



Afterword

‘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

The compilation of this eBook could not have been possible without the valuable resources that have been archived over the years, and the participation and assistance of many people whose names may not be all listed. Their contributions are sincerely appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.

Nonetheless, our deepest appreciation goes to all West Spring Display Band members, alumni and parents who have shared their knowledge and support.

Special thanks go to the band directors of numerous marching bands, both local and abroad. Of note are Mr Jack Lim, who has faithfully developed West Spring Display Band over the years, to the various instructors who have taught me colour-guarding skills, and to Mr Gooi Boon Huat, who was my first band director in my secondary days, the person who nurtured my love for marching bands. The days that I spent with the members of Bukit Panjang Government High School and Teck Whye Secondary School combined band will never be forgotten.

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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