



Between the Door and the Music

By Chris Casteel

Do you rehearse the process of what occurs once your guard steps through the doorway of a gymnasium and into the competitive arena? I'm talking about getting *everything* through the door and setting it. Sometimes it appears that we spend hours upon hours rehearsing what happens once the music starts, but pay little attention to that brief amount of time between the door and the performance. Realize that there are psychological, logistical and safety matters that play into the importance of planned gym entrances and exits.

Unfortunately, we have all witnessed the performer that accidentally sets his/her equipment backwards. Invariably their mistake has a negative impact on both the logistics and performance of the show. And what about the floors that are meticulously unfolded only to realize that the entire floor is facing the wrong direction? As interesting as it is to watch that floor spin to the right position, imagine the damage to focus and confidence that occurs in the process of correcting these mistakes in front of an audience. Rehearsed preparation will prevent these events from occurring to your guard.

Here's the breakdown of how to best prepare yourself and your guard to experience success between the door and the music.

Psychological Preparation:

The reality is that it is so important for your guard to not only know how to enter and exit the gymnasium, but to feel confident and comfortable doing it. There is no better person to go to for advice on this topic than Shirley Dorritie. Thankfully, she was willing to share some thoughts that can be used as tools to prepare your performers. The following was taken straight out of an email from Ms. Dorritie:

GOALS FOR ENTERING THE ARENA:

- **To let your nervous system adjust to the next level of excitement.**
- **To get used to the environment and audience.**
- **To stay flexible and focused so you can enjoy your performance and adapt to the unexpected.**

HOW TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS:

1. Make friends with the audience as soon as you enter the room so that you have as much time as possible to adjust to the excitement. Look at them and smile, enjoy

them and let yourself believe that they and the judges WANT YOU TO SUCCEED!
(It's true!)

2. Feel the excitement. BREATHE and let it run through you, don't try to stop it or block it! Get used to what it feels like, and let yourself enjoy it. This is why you come to contests instead of just staying at rehearsal!
3. Don't get caught by surprise when the announcer says you may take the floor in competition! Check out environment and get used to it:
 - ✓ Where is the AUDIENCE, how big is it?
 - ✓ Where are the JUDGES? (How far away, how high up will you need to communicate?)
 - ✓ Where are the LIGHTS? How BRIGHT is it?
 - ✓ What is the SURFACE like?
 - ✓ What can you HEAR? How loud is the gym, the audience, the sound system?
 - ✓ What and who can you SEE?

Shirley Dorritie, *Deliver the Goods! Practical Strategies for Performing at the Top of Your Game When the Pressure is On!*

Logistical Preparation:

As hard as this may be, instructors need to spend time rehearsing a gym entrance - from the equipment placement responsibilities of performers to the pulling of the floor. Depending on the amount of show trappings that your guard has, this can take some time. You may want to devote an entire rehearsal to this process. However, it would be best if this rehearsal occurred in a gym to best connect the rehearsal with the performance arena. Get your performers as comfortable as possible with this aspect of their show. Leave nothing for chance.

Let's face it, after time spent preparing the artistic element of a show, no one wants to get zapped with a penalty from the T&P judge. To avoid this, make sure to check out the WGASC 2009 Policy Manual for specific guidelines and penalty information regarding entrances and exits.

Safety:

The safety and wellbeing of your performers is top priority. Floors are extremely bulky and heavy. It is important that everyone involved with the pulling of floors is on the same page. The following information is an excerpt from a larger article entitled, *So You Volunteered for Floor Crew....Now What?* by Color Guard Educator founder/editor Catina Anderson. The entire article can be found at www.colorguardeducator.com.

- SAFETY FIRST: It is important that we place our crew members' safety above any worries about time limits or penalties. Before pulling the floor, look around to make sure everyone is positioned and ready. Then move the floor only as quickly as your slowest member can move. Every year you see people get tripped up by the floor and fall in an effort to move as quickly as possible. Many times this can be avoided if the entire crew simply looks around to make sure everyone is ready to move before stepping off. Listen to the directions of the floor crew lead and coach.

- When pulling out the floor you need to bend over and keep the tarp as close to the floor as possible to avoid getting a lot of air caught under the tarp. The air creates large pillowing bubbles that can trip the performers...and once they're there they are hard to get rid of without starting over! So please keep the floor LOW.
- When refolding the floor at the end of the show make sure that there are people at each corner before you start to pull or the floor gets really messy and hard to deal with.
- NO BALLOONING: When you are folding the floor at the end you also need to STAY LOW. If too much air gets under the floor as you fold it, the floor can get hard to handle and this can be dangerous. Extreme instances of this are called "ballooning" and can get us completely disqualified because it is dangerous. Even a little air makes the floor difficult to fold and carry out of the gym though...so work hard to stay low!
- Keep an eye out for stray equipment, bags, shoes, etc. that might get left on the wrong side of the timing line...the judges won't stop our time until EVERYTHING (including an abandoned hairpiece) is over that line...so we need to be vigilant.
- Finally, just make sure you know where the coach is and where the boundary lines are so that things move quickly. Listen for the coach and the floor crew lead to yell out instructions and things will go very smoothly.

Last, but not least: Thanks again to both Shirley Dorritie and Catina Anderson for lending their knowledge to this article.