

# The George Mason Show: A Satirical Farce, a Creative Splendor, a Cartoonish Spectacle

By Dan Schack

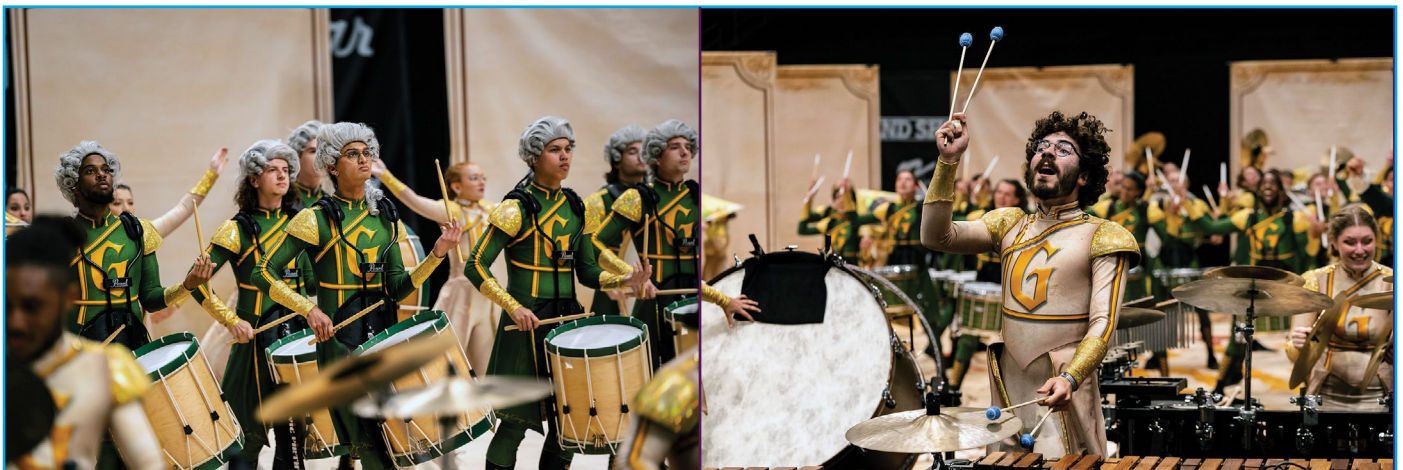
**W**hat if someone from Colonial-era America was dropped into the audience of a Winter Guard International Independent World Class percussion competition? This hypothetical figure would likely undergo a sweeping cornucopia of emotions and realizations, one of which being that the performance arts of today are infatuated with bleakness and sorrow. If art reflects the context in which it's created, then society outside must be downtrodden or full-on apocalyptic.

The other realization this forefather might have is that there is a lot to learn from indoor marching percussion. Many performances attempt to explain some vastly complex concept, like the human condition or death. These shows tell, succinctly and unwaveringly, exactly what one should think about these

sprawling ideas. The nuance of these concepts are communicated through the medium of inner mallet runs, pliés, and disembodied voiceovers.

What if that colonial figure was none other than George Mason, signer of the Declaration of Independence and namesake of the largest public university in Virginia? And what if George Mason was not an overserious statesman perceiving a drumline show, but instead a whimsical fool stumbling uncontrollably through his own indoor drumline creation?

In 2025, the George Mason University Indoor Drumline (GMUID) set forth on a bold exploration (much like our Colonial forebears) in an attempt to define what we are as an activity. Committing ourselves to an absurd framework, we placed a live action George Mason at the focal point of our production, a tool



George Mason University Indoor Drumline

that could function simultaneously as our literal mouthpiece as well as the buffoon who purports to be at the helm of his own show, only to be whiplashed around by conventions of the indoor percussion activity that are too powerful for him to suppress or control. We created a boisterous character with a big personality to do our bidding: the founding father who's also a university and a drumline. And thus, *The George Mason Show* was spawned.

Our satirical and self-referential positioning allowed us to creatively extrapolate from the character of George Mason. George could ask questions or posit thoughts, and in doing so he was asking and positing as the George Mason drumline, the two concepts inseparable. This enabled us a distinct method through which we could ask questions about the activity no one really wants to ask out loud:

- When does artistic emulation become straight up copying?
- Should we as designers in a competitive field aim to “check the boxes” of our judges sheets or allow our natural creative output to determine where we land competitively?
- What role does technology (screens, lights, etc.) play in a live performance art that is centered around member education and experience?
- Does drumline have to be serious to be taken seriously?

George serves as a character you could potentially laugh off. He is emotional, narcissistic, impulsive, and downright silly. But at the root of his ethos is a nagging urge to figure out exactly how to fit into the centerless genre we call Percussion Independent World class. Can George answer this question for us? Probably not.

So what is *The George Mason Show* about, really? I'm not sure I, or anyone, can tell you. It's a satirical farce, certainly — a semi-sardonic love letter to an activity that might take itself too seriously. It's an attempt to get credit for making fun of the things that are credited. It's a chance to communicate something about how we as a design team and an organization feel, and who we want to be, or don't want to be. It's not about anything.

What you'll experience in our PASIC session, however, is something I can tell you. The core design team will explain how we constructed the show in four parts:

- The strategic use of comedy, absurdity, and satire.
- Integrating rope tension drums into modern marching design.
- Ways of thinking outside the visual box.
- Orchestration techniques for indoor drumline.

We are fortunate to have nearly the complete cast of *The George Mason Show* joining us for our session, to provide musical and visual examples through live performance. While we won't be marching the entire show, we will be ending the session with a full run-through in a standstill setting.

*The George Mason Show* opens with a six-person rope-tension snare line and a four-person rope-tension bass line, immediately immersing the audience in the world of this person we call

George Mason. The 60x90-foot floor tarp is folded in half on side two (stage left), appearing like the front of a Colonial manuscript that contains George Mason's hand-written scribbings. Eight ten-foot-tall parchment-style panels loom upon the borders of the folded floor, creating a theatrical setting that reinforces the interiority of the world we've entered. All George Everything.

Following a traditional roll-off, the rope drummers strut across the floor in a marching style that lacks the contemporary flair you expect from a 2025 drumline intro. George parades across the stage like a delirious pageant queen, welcoming us all to his personal spectacle that will lack any sense of clear messaging or lesson to be gleaned. It's just *The George Mason Show*.

The melodies of “Yankee Doodle” spring forth from dueling xylophones, punctuated by the authentic sound of the rope-drum troupe that provide at once a realism and a comedic filter; it's totally absurd to think such a basic song, a nursery rhyme, could be impactful in a world class percussion performance environment. Once “Yankee Doodle” is fulfilled to the degree that competitive credit can be received, George verbally welcomes all to his illustrious indoor drumline show, which is filled with “drums, pit, cymbals, and sh...tuff!”

To avoid getting fileted by the judges for moving our gigantic backdrop props with no motivation, George simply tells us “we have melody, and groove...and big props that move!” This simple but powerful line enables us to reset our stage, at which point our visual ensemble pulls out the entire floor and George narrowly escapes getting bulldozed by a ten-foot-tall piece of parchment. While many indoor drumlines attempt to reconfigure their setting while distracting you with a flashy snare feature, we instead draw attention directly to the clunky nature of the set-change mechanism, creating an effect out of what is usually a haphazard dud in the middle of otherwise well-crafted programs.

With the reveal of our full-sized stage, George's show resumes with the whimsical momentum provided by the plucky baroque stylings of Jerskin Fendrix's “I Just Hope She's Alright.” This postmodern synthwave aesthetic continues to take shape throughout the program, somehow fitting nicely within the goofy Colonial milieu we've established so far. The battery and front ensemble proceed to deliver what one would consider the meat-and-potatoes of a drumline show, including important facets like vertical alignment, dynamic contouring, rhythmic interplay, contemporary rudimental language, university-standard mallet techniques, overarching musical direction, and audio-visual alignment.

As George reemerges into the scene, it becomes time for a schoolhouse lesson in bass drumming. Two of the massive panels flip around magically to reveal oversized bass drum notation, which include ubiquitous bass drum rudiments like “1's, 2's, 3's...4's” and hand-to-hands, to less-known bass drum rudiments like Moonsmashers (which we made up for this show). As George offers a smattering of bass drum rudiments to the audience via

a sing-songy *sprechgesang*, the bass line plays the exact notes we see written on the parchment, helping enable a better comprehension of what is usually completely incomprehensible (and unjudgeable). As many perceivers of marching bass drumlines do, George becomes overwhelmed with the sheer density and complexity of their playing, leading him to the classic exclamation known by any who have frequented parking lot warm ups: “YEAH BASS!”

The velocity of the music ramps up, driving the battery into a visual frenzy of countermotion and suspense. High-octane drill and music propel the viewer into the energetic psyche of a creative mind attempting to express the inexpressible. As the energy peaks, George wisely knows that it’s time to provide the audience and judges relief after all that sonic and visual hullabaloo. He tears out from behind a panel, yelling “STOP!” Relieving the pressure of the moment, he follows up with the echoic delivery of the term “SPACE,” a word colloquially known to percussionists as that substance-less substance that resides between the notes, coordinated with the appearance of the word on one of the panel props. The visual members float throughout the floor like astronauts in a gravity free environment, invoking the image of actual outer space.

“TEXTURE” soon appears on the next panel to flip, accompanied by George’s ASMR delivery. The snare line taps ambiguous rhythms on every surface they can find, including the scraping of the snare guts. “MOTIF” is George’s next enunciation, triggering the use of some well-known West Coast visual motions and musical sextuplet rhythms that are frequently imitated but never duplicated.

In his attempt to ensure that all the right components make it into his drumline show, George essentially crashes out, screaming “MOTIF” and running wildly across the stage. A Gregorian choir singing “George Mason” can be heard interwoven with the snare line playing a *ghost roll*, which is a triplet roll with specific partials taken out while the player’s hands continue to move through the auditory space. Such an effect creates rhythmic and visual surprise: the combination of “SPACE,” “TEXTURE,” and “MOTIF.” George falls on his face, defeated and overwhelmed.

George lays sprawled upon the floor, destroyed by his own creative machinations. From seemingly nowhere, a large anthropomorphic TV named Televisiana rolls out into the focal point, questioning dramatically (with a feminine voice) if George “would [ever] do an indoor show without me?” Energized by his love for using TVs in indoor drumline shows, George peers longingly at his betrothed, responding gently, “Never, my love.” George goes to her, fawning over the beauty of her glass face.

George arrives at Televisiana and clears his throat, kicking off the verse to Celine Dion’s “My Heart Will Go On.” George lip syncs the lyrics as he caresses and gallivants around his love object. “My Heart Will Go On” serves as an appropriate musical centerpiece to reinforce the satirical heart that resides at the core of George’s show: a meme within a meme within a meme. The mo-

ment climaxes as George rides Televisiana across the floor, the new King of the Ocean, while the battery and front ensemble deliver a drum corps-style full bore ensemble hit, including unison swing flag choreography with the letters GE (General Effect) printed across the flags. The entire moment is campy but also highly emotional and impactful. Celine Dion still hits in 2025.

How does one end such an off-the-wall journey? As with most drumline shows, it is imperative George Mason avoids penalization. As the clock strikes two minutes upon the face of Televisiana, George screams “GET OFF THE FLOOR,” sending the performers into a wild frenzy that includes the cymbal line folding the floor past the 50-yard line boundary and a sung disembodied voiceover urging the performers: “Do not get a penalty!”

Rather than attempting to end his production with some kind of meaningful takeaway, George’s final act is the ushering of the entire ensemble over the penalty line so that he can avoid incurring damage to our score. The frenetic nature of an indoor drumline leaving the floor after the competition is the creative fodder that drives the end of this show. Again, George Mason draws attention to the thing many others attempt to obscure, the effect of the moment driven by the breaking of the fourth wall into the reality of an indoor drumline competition and the common feeling we all have of trying to finish a performance and avoid a penalty, all while “making sense” of the end of the production itself. Why even try to make sense of it at all? The end.

**Dan Schack** is the Creative Director of the George Mason University Indoor Drumline. He is an active designer, educator, adjudicator, and consultant in the marching arts. Dan serves as a battery instructor for the Bluecoats Drum and Bugle Corps and the Program Coordinator/Battery Arranger for the Connecticut Hurricanes Drum and Bugle Corps. [PN](#)

## DRUMSET

Isac Jamba

### Drumset Clinic

Isac Jamba is a self-taught drummer and musician with over 30 years of experience in music. Since childhood, drums and Brazilian rhythms have been his passion. He has worked with renowned artists, recorded over 100 albums, and performed at international festivals. But what truly drives him is a passion for teaching and sharing the knowledge he’s gained along the way. Isac lives in the U.S., where he teaches Brazilian rhythms to musicians worldwide through his online platform. He travels to deliver workshops and masterclasses, always with the goal of inspiring and helping other musicians improve their skills. What moves him the most is teaching and witnessing the growth and transformation of his students. around the world.