

An interview with Kevin Pickard, director of Go-World Brass Band

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In the Washington Monument campaign, the job of the Go-World Brass Band is to make the campaign visible, to stir up commotion, energy, interest. A band has inspirational power because of its diversity, its penetrating element, its color, its connotations, and its mobility. We also support the rally speaker. We've played in the park across from the White House, at the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, Iwo Jima Monument and all the parks around the city.

At a lot of rallies there's a real intimacy with the people. I broke down crying in front of one group the other day. We touched hearts, just burned into each other. Many nights we just start singing and dancing around and get everyone involved, marching around with us, clapping, putting the kids up on our shoulders.

We started out last spring with 14 of us doing blitz rallies around New York City during the Yankee Stadium campaign. We'd just stop our van, hop out, perform, hop back in, drive to the next stop. Then we added more people (now we're 70) and were able to play more complex pieces, more concert band arrangements. Some of our members are highly skilled musicians. We have a pretty large repertoire now since we sight-read new music. The bulk of the music we play is marches or popular tunes, ragtime.

Martial music has a long history of inspiration, of straightening people's spines. Its rhythm has a certain emotional appeal. It gives a feeling of nobility because it taps essential rhythmic simplicity plus it has a penetrating, pervading quality. Before amplifiers, large brass bands were used to make a big sound out in the open. So a band is, first of all, an outdoor oriented thing. While an orchestra is composed mostly of strings, which don't have such diverse timbres, a wind orchestra has many different colorations, instrument-wise. The main element, though, is punctuation.