

British Drum Corps Championships 2006
The Pirelli Stadium, Burton upon Trent
Saturday 30th September 2006
Show Report by Ian Scaife



My first impression upon arriving at the Pirelli Stadium for the 27th British Drum Corps Finals was the quality of the stadium and how its compact design would be ideally suited for a Drum Corps show. My central position at the back of the stand offering an ideal viewpoint to absorb the day's entertainment and intense competition.

Open Class Prelims

As is traditional, the Open Class preliminaries opened the proceedings and it was Stafford Lancers honour to kick things off in hugely entertaining fashion. This year saw a smaller Open Class with only 5 corps in competition. This however did not compromise the quality of entertainment.

Stafford Lancers were 5th in prelims with a score of 72.0, Poynton Commodores were 4th (78.6), 37th Kingswood in 3rd place (80.2), Kidgsrove Scout in 2nd place (85.6), and the high-flying Black Knights in 1st place after prelims by a margin of only 0.9 with a score of 86.5.

All 5 Corps would advance to the evening finals, along with the Junior Class champions and A Class winners and runners up.

Cadet Class Finals

The Cadet Class finals followed, and in 2nd place with a score of 66.0 were the Black Knights Cadets, who were certainly extremely young and will hopefully represent the main Corps in the future.

This was a fun show, with the brass players putting their instruments aside in favour of rifles at the start to give us a nice military march with the music provided by the pit and a solo snare.

The brass soon joined in the fun carrying the melodies through to the end of the show.

In 1st place within the Cadet Class were 37th Kingswood Cadets with a score of 85.00 with a show called 'Our Favourite Things', which is based upon the views of the members and what they enjoy, thus ensuring the members have a show they can truly enjoy, which was quite evident.

'My Favourite Things' moved smoothly into 'The Simpsons', with the Corps displaying a level of professionalism beyond their years. The guard projecting their enjoyment of performing in front of an appreciative crowd.

The ballad slowed things down for a while but the excellent percussion line were soon driving the corps through 'Mission Impossible'.

'Favourite Things' returned, then back into 'Mission Impossible' for a rousing conclusion to a show that was extremely well performed by all sections. Very impressive! The 37th Kingswood organisation looks like they have a strong future ahead of them.

Junior Class Finals

Squires opened the Junior Class Finals and were in 3rd place with a score of 39.6. It is good to see Squires still on the field as they have been a mainstay of the British Drum Corps scene for many years.

The show consisted of the theme from 'Rocky' and 'Eye of the Tiger' also from Rocky. The small ensemble of musicians allowed the guard to take centre stage and hold the focus, giving us some fun boxing moves to add some authenticity. The brass joined in the fun as they were literally knocked out at the end of the 'Rocky' opener.

'Eye of the Tiger' continued the boxing theme, with the lead soprano player carrying the melody, with stars and stripes flags and more boxing role play from the members adding to the concept.

In 2nd place with a score of 62.8 were Stateside with a show entitled 'Thank God We Made It'. Nice mellophone tones opened the show, soon supported by the other brass voices.

The corps soon leapt into jazz territory with 'Baroque Samba' with an authentic samba feel. An effective mood change followed with 'What Kind of Fool Am I'. During this slower passage, good marching technique was apparent along with pleasingly uncomplicated, yet clean and effective drill forms.

A big powerful into heralded the introduction of 'If I Were a Rich Man', then moving effortlessly into 'Favourite Things' with a great swing feel, which was enjoyed immensely by the audience.

Stateside quite deservedly took the brass caption for their efforts.

Staffordshire Knights with their 'Arabian Knights' show took 1st place within the Junior Class with a score of 68.5, taking all captions other than brass, and advanced to this evenings finals event. Refer to Open Class finals for more information.

A Class Finals

A Class finals saw Phoenix Coventry in 2nd place with a score of 64.7, and Concord in 1st place with a score of 71.0, both of whom also advanced to this evening finals event. Refer to Open Class finals for more information regarding these two Corps.

After the Cadet, Junior, and A Class finals events we enjoyed the spectacle of the retreat, followed by an exhibition from the reigning British Drum Corps Champions, The Senators, who were not competing this year as they had competed within Drum Corps Europe this season, achieving 3rd place at DCE finals only 0.35 behind the 1st place corps.

Congratulations to all UK corps competing within DCE this season for representing the country in such fine fashion.

The Senators treated us to an excellent repertoire of classics by the rock band Queen. The musical selections included 'Don't Stop Me Know', 'Who Wants to Live Forever', 'Bohemian Rhapsody', and 'We Will Rock You'.

The show cleverly combined traditional drum corps values along with the trademark design and technical excellence we have come to expect from the Senators. The show was exciting, passionate, moving, thrilling...everything a drum corps show should be! Hope to see them competing back within DCUK in the near future.

Open Class Finals

The evening finals event kicked off in fine fashion with the excellent Staffordshire Knights, 2006 Junior Class champions, performing their 'Arabian Knights' program featuring music from 'Aladdin'.

Mysterious pit effects into an Arabic style melody sets the scene, followed by good control from the brass on the opening hit, enhanced by the large black guard flags adding to the effect.

The Knights then move into jazzy territory with Aladdin character images being added to the show to add to the concept.

The brass line display throughout their ability to handle a variety of dynamics, with the drum line providing an effective rhythm section. Well programmed mood changes within the show saw the guard positioned centre stage at the right moments to show off their talents also.

I was particularly impressed with the level of variety and execution from this very young Corps who were clearly not intimidated by the task of opening the Open Class finals, achieving 8th place with a score of 52.0.

Next up were the A-Class runners up, Phoenix Coventry, who achieved a finals placement of 7th with a score of 67.00. Phoenix blazed into finals, laying down their intentions with a 'Magical Mystery Tour' fanfare, moving effortlessly into a swing-feel 'A Hard Day's Night' with effective and clean drill present throughout.

'Penny Lane' evolved nicely with the drill forms continuing to captivate. I am sure George Martin himself (Beatles producer/orchestrator) would have enjoyed the soprano solo!

The ballad was a delightful variation on 'Help', with the slow tempo giving a completely original slant to the tune. As the piece evolved, the volume and intensity increased to a stirring climax. Very inventive, establishing the mood nicely for 'Hey Jude', followed by the sombre 'Let it Be', which took us into a stirring finale with the return of 'Magical Mystery Tour'. Great job Phoenix, very entertaining.

On next were A-Class Champions, Concord, who achieved a highly respectable finals score of 73.6, placing 6th.

The 2006 edition of Concord sees them back in familiar territory with another swing show. Their 'Old Black Magic' opener was immediately impressive with their full and balanced sound and their attention grabbing guard.

The drum line in particular demanded scrutiny with clean licks a plenty!

'Sing, Sing, Sing' takes the swing-o-meter up a notch with the drum line continuing to drive the whole rip-roaringly powerful affair! As theatrical as swing can be! Someone has put the fun back into drum corps!

Fortunately 'Autumn Leaves' allows the performers to calm down and catch their breath, but you can bet your life on it that they are soon back swinging through to an extremely exciting and rousing conclusion.

Concord may not be the best out there (yet!), but if there was a spirit of drum corps award, they would have been my champions. Great entertainment! Great stuff!

In 5th place were Stafford Lancers with a score of 76.5. 2006 was the Lancers first season long foray into open class territory and they have good reason to be very proud of their efforts with a very accessible and entertaining 'War of the Worlds' production.

Wide field coverage provides the opening image with the green (martian?) guard centre stage. Musically we are soon greeted with the familiar main theme from 'War of the Worlds' which moves smoothly, and surprisingly, into 'Mars' from the Planet Suite, with the themes being combined and alternated to provide contrasting musical colour and mood.

A haunting tolling bell marks the introduction of the sombre yet essential 'Forever Autumn'. The mellophones seemed to be the foundation around which this tune was arranged with their particular tone. With all voices providing a full contribution through the crescendo. The limited use of battery percussion was particularly effective, proving less sometimes is more!

Normal exciting business soon resumes with further recurring themes through to another dramatic conclusion. Well done Lancers on your first of hopefully many seasons in the open class.

In 5th place were Poynton Commodores with a score of 84.1. The Commodores, looking typically resplendent in their particularly smart uniforms, presented us with 'Images – Life, Conflict, Futility, Peace' which is all about images connected to the past and taking us through a variety of emotions.

'Life' sets the scene beautifully in terms of the narrative with a guard member centre stage reflecting on images within a photo album. Musically, this movement appropriately felt like a celebration of life.

In contrast, 'Conflict' provided a stark contradiction taking us into darker territory with anti-war images, with the guard adding a sense of heartbreak throughout. Musically building to an extremely emotional climax.

'Futility' was an entirely appropriate sequel to 'Conflict'. Somewhat lighter musically but maintaining images regarding the futility of war. Shame our politicians weren't present!

'Peace' saw the show through to its conclusion. Could there have been a more appropriate closer than Lennon's 'Imagine'? I don't think so. The show ends in extremely emotional fashion with a genuine aura of reflection surrounding it. Congratulations on a well thought out narrative that was easy to follow throughout.

In third place were 37th Kingswood with a score of 84.3, also deservedly taking the percussion caption. Their 2006 production is entitled 'A Distorted Mind', which sees them experimenting with music that tells of a journey focusing on the slippage from normality to totally insane.

A lullaby from the pit marks the introduction of 'Act 1 – The Beginning of a New Day' which sees the corps going to sleep and demanding silence. The music throughout the piece slips between dark and light, setting the mood for the show.

'Act II – Happiness' provided an effective contrast to Act 1 with a lighter tone but with a few darker chords thrown in as reminders.

The subsequent percussion feature was extraordinarily well executed and was evidence of why they took the percussion caption.

'Act III – Close Every Door to Me' continued the sombre tone with the corps providing a visual and musical backdrop for the guard, the fragile nature of the music reflecting the frailty of human nature.

'Act IV – Red Dragon/Psycho' took the show to an even darker and more intense level allowing us to witness the brass and drums working very well together, with the cleanliness of the drums cutting through like a knife.

The company front provided some temporary relief from the proceedings with normal business resuming through to the conclusion. Once again today, another well communicated narrative integrated into an exciting drum corps performance.

Latin jazz legends Kidsgrove Scouts took second place (90.9) with a full Latin jazz show entitled 'El Art de la Dance (The Art of Dance)'. Kidsgrove does exactly what it says on the tin and I love them for it!!! Resulting in the most distinctive sound and identity on display on the day, taking the brass caption along the way.

The drum major in classic Spanish bullfighter attire told us what to expect. He was joined by a Senorita. The forms expand, a brief soprano solo, then the whole corps attack us with Latin fire with the opening hit.

Classic horn and percussion licks were flying around everywhere. Real diversity was on show throughout the opener with the variety of tempos never compromising the intensity of the piece.

The gorgeous ballad followed which I believe was from the movie 'El Cid', with the piece incorporating dark tones but with the Latin fire never quite extinguished. The crescendo within the piece through to the climax was a wonderfully intense goosebump moment.

Kidsgrove continue to develop the Latin theme with more familiar pieces. The percussion and brass working together as one with an authentic Latin spirit, this is classic Kidsgrove territory both musically and visually. Territory they have made their own.

This show was a genuine title contender, but what does that matter at the end of the day? It was a hugely entertaining performance and that is enough for me!

The 2006 British Drum Corps Champions are the Black Knights with a score of 92.7, also taking the visual, colour guard, and general effect captions.

The show is entitled 'Infinite Nightmares' consisting of a selection of dark music by composer Danny Elfman.

Once again today, we hear a lullaby from the pit percussion, allowing the corps to take their positions.

We soon hear rapid triplets from the mallets with the brass backfield. The guard feature heavily centre stage with the brass building the visual intensity with rapidly evolving drill. We soon witness the power of the brass line with their appropriate dark tone, which is maintained throughout the opener. The lullaby soon returns to provide some brief relief!

The 'Knightmarish' feel soon returns but with a slightly light-hearted edge to it. The pit feature certainly allowing the mallets to show off their extensive talent.

The ballad showcased the control of the brass line supported by great subtlety from the pit, building to a beautiful crescendo which was nicely sustained. Powerful and emotional, followed by the return of the lullaby to link together the acts within the show.

The Knights then take us into even darker territory but this time with an intentionally discordant feel. Intense volume levels prevail but without compromising the musicality of the performers. The piece unwinds musically and visual but showing an ability to display a gentler side when necessary.

The 2006 Knights displayed a level of maturity and performance ability not seen from them for a number of years, and deserving of their 1st British Drum Championship title. Congratulations to the Black Knights members, staff and supporters.

Well done to DCUK for putting on such a fine event, and good luck to all involved within the activity regarding plans for 2007. A season with which I am sure we will see the activity commence a period of evolution.

Ian Scaife