

'Drums Along The Dearne'
Drum Corps United Kingdom

16th July 2006

Richard Haw

Having been at the British Youth Band Association contest the day before I retraced my steps down the M1 motorway to the Barnsley FC ground for the Drums Along the Dearne Drum Corps United Kingdom show.

The weather was hot and sunny but with a welcome breeze and I had a quick tour of the concession stands before taking my seat.

The Academy Stadium is a good venue for band and corps shows, although the stand itself is only about 10 rows of seats deep it is right up to the field providing a good view for judges and spectators alike.

This proximity helps you 'contact' with the corps performances, as opposed to the rather detached feel at venues with running track and long jump pits.

There were three corps in exhibition at the show and they must certainly be thanked for supporting this event and without whom the show would surely not have been viable?

Before I comment on the performances I will make the usual disclaimers. These comments are my own thoughts and should not be taken as gospel truth or statements of fact, merely the views and opinions of one person.

So onto the performances

First Corps on field in exhibition were **Revolution Show Corps** from Bradford, West Yorkshire. Revolution were marching 11 brass, 2 percussion, 4 frontline ensemble and 5 guard. Revolutions 2006 show consists of a selection of music from the American West.

A good solid opening with 'The Magnificent Seven' and block expansion at the start got the show off to a solid start with some effective backfield work from the corps and complimentary work from the young but confident guard.



I should just note at this point that a number of Corps suffered a little when playing backfield as there is no back stand at this venue which lead to some passages of music becoming inaudible.

Moving on 'Addio Cheyenne' saw a change of mood, although perhaps a little long at a pedestrian pace for my liking.

Aaron Copeland's - 'Hoe Down' from Rodeo picked up the tempo once again, with fast movement and some good guard work, I feel that although performed well there's still much scope to enhance this piece visually.

The ballad from 'Far and away' was well handled with a nice trumpet duet and the company front worked well at the end. The show was rounded off with 'Big Country'.

A well performed show from a young corps, special mention to the mallet players in the pit who handled some quite intricate passages with ease.

Next Corps up presenting their production 'Bushido - The Way of the Warrior' were **6th Hove Scouts** from Hove in Sussex. Hove were marching 17 brass 9 percussion, 5 front line ensemble and 5 guard. Their music included selections from 'The Last Samurai', 'Memoirs of a Geisha', "House of the Flying Daggers' and 'Kill Bill'.

The show starts with the Corps in a wide open block on side 2 field, this develops with the brass line playing backfield (again this suffered from the lack of a rear stand) with fast moving drill to a hit on the side 1 front line. A very effective opening that really grabbed the audience's attention. The opening ended with the Corps reprising the opening drill form to good effect.



To be honest after the effective opening, although well performed, noting else in the show really grabbed me as a 'wow' moment.

The Taiko style drumming in the percussion feature was effective with the corps keeping up a high pace visually too.

The ballad number was nice with expansive drill, but I found the mallets a bit overpowering at times and perhaps they need to look at the sticks they are using?

Also the little musical 'punctuation mark' at the end of the ballad was in my opinion not necessary and spoiled the moment.

The show wrapped up well with some fast moving music and drill featuring multiple pass-throughs.

I thought the percussion had a good day and certainly had a strong on field presence.

All in all an entertaining show with lots of potential, some nice moments let down by periods with not a lot happening, and I feel more could be made of the Japanese theme. I hear show changes are afoot though so I look forward to seeing Hove again second half.

The familiar drum beat of 'We Will Rock You' marked the impressive start to the exhibition performance by last seasons DCUK Champions **The Senators** from Eastleigh, Hampshire.

I'd seen Senators at the East of England show a couple of weeks earlier and was keen to see if progress had been made with the show.

'Don't stop me now' featured some great guard work on white silks and some scintillating punctuation from the strong trumpet line. Fast drill in 'The show must go on' leading to the 'Radio ga ga' ending was very nicely done.



A beautiful mellophone solo in 'Love of my Life' was backed by complimentary work from the corps and very effective double handed red silks on the hit.

What turned out to be Senators final number of the day was 'Bicycle Race', which although fast paced was littered with timing and individual errors, never the less an effective ending to a good performance, and an improvement over the East of England show.

This is a fast, GE loaded show that sees all sections working well together and the excellent guard fully integrated and used to maximum effect.

The rumours in the stands say there are many changes to come second half and if the rest of the show can be brought up to the level of the first few minutes then this show will really be going places.

At this point I would have expected a short break to allow me to grab a quick drink and burger and also allow the exhibition Corps to enter the stand to watch the main show.

Unfortunately this wasn't the case which I felt was perhaps a little unfair on the next Corps as the stand seemed a little empty as they took the field.

First Corps in 'A' Class were the local corps of the day, **Concord D&BC** from Sheffield, South Yorkshire, with a show entitled 'In the Key of Cool'.

Concord were marching 14 brass, 8 marching Percussion, 8 frontline ensemble and 8 guard.

Intriguingly the show starts with the colourguard joining the brass line on horns, for the big 'My Way' opening, pumping out some serious decibels.



The guard safely back on silks the Corps gave us the Blue Devils classic 'You've gotta try' some intricate trumpet passages were well handled by the young trumpet line but I had to question the tuning of the lower brass as this point.

The guard was effective on the gold flags, however the front line ensemble were far too heavy on the cymbals.

'Sing Sing Sing' was next up with the marching percussion joining the front line ensemble in the pit area and to be honest at times I was virtually unable to make out the melody as the percussion were very overpowering.

I should point out that it was not only Concord who had balance issues frontline to field and I suspect that some of the problems were caused by the pit area being almost under the canopy of the stand trapping the sound in with the audience.

There were a few timing issues in this number and it was clear that the young mallet players were not looking at the DM (who was doing an excellent job) for long periods of time. On field there was some good rifle work from the talented guard.

The guard changed to very effective silks in appropriate autumnal gold and brown colours for the 'Autumn Leaves' number, which saw some good expansive drill from the Corps.

'The lady is a tramp' was the final number of the show which featured the base end brass more and saw the strong marching percussion section staged further backfield, making for a far better balance and sound quality for this great final number.

I like this show and choice of music and on an individual basis the execution is of a good standard, with a little more control and use of the full dynamic range this show should improve rapidly.

Second and final Corps in A class were **Phoenix D&BC**, from Coventry in the Midlands. Phoenix's show was a selection of Beatles numbers.

Marching 10 brass, 7 marching Percussion, 1 frontline, and 7 guard Phoenix opening set was a large square form on the 50-yard line.

The opening took us straight to 'Magical Mystery Tour' for an effective opening statement, this ran quickly into 'Hard days Night', I liked the swing section, but thought it needed to swing a little more to be fully effective, as was also the case with 'Penny Lane' which followed.

The guard dressed in black and white 60's style outfits looked effective and stood out well from the deep purple of the corps uniforms. 'Hard day's night' again saw a good trumpet solo into the percussion feature and 'Help'.

Credit to the musical arranger as the music flowed effortlessly from one piece to the next, and I apologise if I have missed any of the numbers used in the show!

'Hey Jude' featured a nice mellophone solo with accompanying solo guard work, the use of brushes by the field percussion and the removal of the corps shakos added to the soft feel of the number although a few timing issues from the frontline spoilt this a little.



The show was wrapped up by the classic 'Let it Be' which featured a baritone duet, which although well performed needed to be played a little less forcefully, the guard on white flags created an effective climax.

This was perhaps my favourite performance of the day from any of the competing Corps, and shows what can be done with a small horn line with good arrangements.

After a short break and my long awaited visit to the burger van we moved straight into open class with **Kidsgrove Scouts D&BC** from Staffordshire, performing their 2006 production 'El Arte De La Danza' (the art of dance).

The opening sees the corps in a large block form on the 50-yard line which advances rapidly front field to a well performed solo trumpet introduction into the Scouts 'Mis Abelious' opener.

Fast paced drill and use of cut time marching was a feature of this number with use of contra-motion in the block form to finish.



A complete change of pace and feel in the second piece 'The Bolero - from El Cid', again starting with a trumpet solo this time developing into a duet.

Nice work at various levels by the guard on blue and white flags on blue poles that were very effective, and added to the feel of the piece.

I liked the inversion of the triangular form to finish with the guard now on red flags.

'Armando's Rumba' was Kidsgroves 3rd piece and was marked again by great work from the colourguard on sabres with some good underlying dance work with the male

guard member outstanding and nice work from the mellophone and soprano sections.

The Madison Scout 95 Classic Pasa Doble 'El Toro Caliente' was to be Kidsgroves closer and started with silent drill into company front. There were a few small timing issues from the pit but generally this was their most effective number with some great work, especially from the mellophone line.

A company front and 'gates' manoeuvre ended a show greatly improved from when I last saw the performance at Peterborough.

Fielding 22 Brass, 10 marching Percussion, 8 Frontline ensemble and 10 guard the second Open Class of the day were another Staffordshire Corps, the **Stafford Lancers**.

Lancers 2006 show is one of my all time favourite pieces of music based around 'Jeff Wayne's - 'War of the Worlds' and I was hopeful of a good show.

The Corps opened their performance in an intriguing drill form of three large circles with two brass soloists surrounded by colourguard dressed in eye catching luminous green jump suits to form two further circles.

The opening hit of War of the Worlds main theme was in my opinion staged a little too far left and backfield to be fully effective.

The show moved swiftly into Holst's - 'Mars' from the Planets suite, which was to be a recurrent theme throughout the show used to bind the individual musical selections together.

Unfortunately I found for long periods of the show I was unable to discern the melody line due to balance issues between the sections.



'Forever Autumn' had a better balance but more use of highs and lows needs to be made.

'Thunderchild', my favourite piece from War of the Worlds was next, but again I was unable to make out the tune for the majority of the piece

'Brave New World' followed, but again balance issues seriously effected my enjoyment of the piece along with some pretty major tunings issues.

Credit to the front line ensemble who I felt were much improved from last season.

I really wanted to enjoy this show, Stafford have the members and staff to do far better than what I saw performed at this show.

Hopefully Lancers can resolve some of these issues and push hard in the second half of the season.

Final Corps of the day were **Poynton Commodores** from Poynton in Cheshire.

Poynton were marching 11 brass, 5 marching percussion, 4 front line ensemble and 6 guard. Commodores 2006 show is entitled Images: Life, Conflict, Futility, Peace.

The show opens in a triangular form with the guard members hidden behind Corps members, this condenses and the guard become visible in their effective black costumes with white stripe down the sides and arms. Plenty of movement in the opener and the 7/8 time signature caused no serious issues.

'Conflict' next and really this piece didn't work for me, visually it didn't go far and musically it was very repetitive, some good rifle work and role play from the guard developing the war theme though.



The third piece was Steven Spielberg's evocative music from 'Schindlers List', which saw the Corps sat, crouched and stood to create various visual levels. Musically the use of the pit snare added to the militaristic theme, although I didn't really understand the use of the shakers.

The performance closed with the classic anti-war song John Lennon's - 'Imagine', this was well performed but not for the first time today I lost the melody during the backfield section.

I like the creative ideas behind this show but at the moment its just not delivering emotionally, also on the day the horn line seem a little weak and lacking in air.

So onto the retreat and results - or not, as the retreat was cancelled due to the heat. As a paying spectator I found this frustrating, as though very warm it was not extremely so, and seemed to cause the British Youth Band Association units no issues in very similar conditions the day before!

The results were announced and I agreed with the judges' placements of the Corps. With no retreat the event just petered out and the audience dispersed to the car park.

I wandered out with the audience and bumped into a friend and asked him what he'd thought of the show?

He shrugged his shoulders and said that nothing had caught his imagination, it seemed as though the corps were going through the motions and that nobody was trying anything different, just simply repeating the formula's that they have been using for years. To some extent I tend to agree and thought it worth a mention here.

The other thing that was starkly obvious was the lack of competing units and supporters, this is quite disheartening and I hope this decline can be counteracted.

Its seems strange that at this venue we had two contests on two consecutive days one with 17 units and lots of supporters, the other with 5 units, 3 exhibition units and not many supporters.

Ignoring for a moment the politics of the situation surely it would have made sense to combine the two shows and have 23 units performing to a full stand, perhaps even with the top units performing in the evening under floodlights and out of the heat of the midday sun!

Well done to Paul Cartwright and his team on a successful weekend.

Richard Haw