

SDCA STAFF REVIEW: THE MARCH SHOWS

Arena Drum Corps First Step:

On March 21 in Menominee Michigan, the Northernaires hosted the very first SDCA show in front of over 500 drum corps fans. The afternoon began with the posting of the American flag and Canadian flags followed by the singing of the “Star Spangled Banner” and a lone bugler playing “Oh, Canada.”

The enthusiasm was overwhelming as the Blue Saints from Sudbury, Ontario, Canada was the first corps to ever step onto the arena in SDCA’s people’s choice competition; a fitting gesture to a corps that has had 56 years of continual operation. The Blue Saints’ manager, Mark Ripley was a proponent of SDCA from the very start and, although distance kept him from the first organizational meetings in Madison, Wisconsin’s Airport Hotel, Mark had a representative there from the Midwest. Although the Blue Saints were missing many of their members do to their spring break, the 20 in attendance were excited to participate in this historic event playing their show theme:”Dancing in a Circular Sun”. where they presented a full visual show to their music. The young adults looked a bit nervous going onto the arena, but they came off with giant smiles of satisfaction.

The Royal Airs were the second corps to perform having 28 members playing off the line their popular fanfare, “Chicago My kind of Town” followed by “Chicago that Toddlin’ Town.” They performed an abbreviated visual opener, and played their style of music for the rest of their show in concert formation. RA caught the crowd in the first standing ovation of the afternoon. The 500 plus in attendance made quite a thunderous applause.

After a brief intermission, the 1999 and 2005 DCA mini corps champions, “Minne Brass” performed a “comic book hero” theme with 17 horns and drum set. They performed standing still but had effective visual punches throughout their show. The horn line was professional in sound with exciting high notes tastefully placed through out the music. After their performance they remarked that this venue is exactly what is needed and they will continue to support SDCA.

The final corps was our host for the afternoon, the Northernaires, wearing their new green, black and white uniforms. Chris Wellner, their manager, was a driving and enthusiastic force behind the success of this show. Chris also reorganization his corps to put them onto the arena. Additionally, SDCA knows that without his excitement, efforts and assistance, SDCA would never have gotten off the ground. The Northernaires set a great example of just how an Arena corps should perform. Their 16 horns, 5 drums and 4 color guard members put on a full visual show including a flag presentation. The audience approved with a thunderous applause. It was exciting to see and hear just what could be done in an arena. After their performance, this corps was so “pumped” that they decided to extend their season and perform in other arena show weekends, June 13 and 14 in Sparta Wisc and Verona Wisc. as well as July 18-19 in McHenry Illinois

The show ended with a massed finale in Olympic style with the host corps, the Northernaires, in a block in the center of the arena playing on the remaining corps as they came in from all of the doors forming files two steps apart filling the arena with multi-colored uniforms. It was a grand spectacle.

Then the placements were announced. The judging in arena shows is unique to SDCA. At the conclusion of the performances, it is announced to the audience to turn on their cell phones. A number is given to the audience and then they are told to text in their favorite corps. On an SDCA computer the percentage of votes is registered immediately. The announcer then announces the silver medal winner and then the gold medal winner. On this afternoon the Royal air took the Silver with 44% of the people’s choice vote while the Minne Brass took the gold with 46%. The following day show in Fond du Lac Wisc would give the silver medal to the Minne Brass with 40% of the people’s vote and the Gold to the Northernaires with 50% of the vote.

Additionally, each corps is “evaluated” by a professional in percussion, brass and visual who talks into a tape recorder giving constructive criticism for performance improvement. This tape is then presented to the corps at the end of the show.

At the conclusion of the afternoon, the Northernaires drum major, Mike Kushman, and the gold medal winner Minne Brass’ drum major, Brent Turner, directed all of the corps in “Climb Every Mountain” arranged by hall-of -famer Ken Norman. The music filled the arena in chilling sound as I felt the hair on my arms and neck stand straight up. It must have affected the audience too as young and old leaped to their feet in a thunder of sustained applause. The announcer then dismissed the corps into the arena to greet each other.

We feel this venture has met and even exceeded our expectations and we know that this venue will continue and it will grow. SDCA wants to thank all of the performers and the drum corps fans for embracing this new idea of Arena Drum Corps.