



drum corps world

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E-mail blast**



Carolina Crown 'rach's crowd at Cadets' 'American Traditions' contest

by Bob Fields, Drum Corps World staff
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July 6, 2011 -- Jackson, NJ . . . Tonight's "An American Traditions Drum Corps Show" looked like it was going to get rained out. Jackson Liberty HS has a super stadium, a very active marching band parents group working the show and the sponsorship by YEA. The only thing missing was The Cadets, still touring out West.

Several times during the day lightning storms moved to the north or around to the south of stadium. And just prior to start you could hear a scary sound like a freight train or

perhaps a dozen 747s warming up waiting to take off. We kept watching for tornado activity. I don't think many were aware what was happening on the weather front. Then the rain started and lasted only about a half hour when suddenly the sun came out bright right on schedule.

First up was supposed to be a corps called Platinum from Raleigh, NC, but unfortunately they canceled their tour according to their Web site. We were looking forward to seeing this new group. The corps has been around since 2006 as a small ensemble. Their site says they are going to concentrate more on small ensembles for the 2011 season.

The Open Class **Raiders** were present this evening having relocated to a new home about an hour from the show site. Director Tom Maiello continues to bring his high school-aged group for another very enjoyable show. Because the 4th of July weekend had just passed, the kids did look a little worn out from the travel, of what I presume was multiple shows and parades.

The corps looks good and is growing nicely into their show. Brass was a little messy tonight and did not appear as strong as I had seen them previously. I am glad to see that this Open Class corps continues to put out a good product. Having worked with a small corps for 10 years (Illusion of Delaware County), congratulations to their staff and management for 14 years of engaging the youth through music in the state of New Jersey.

Jersey Surf has a show that is based on the colors of roses, called "Petal Tones." It must have been fun to sit in on that planning meeting when it was proposed that they would mix the music of Bizet, Astor Piazzolla, Seal and

Lady Gaga in one show.

Part one was "Purity: White Petals," with the music of *Flower Song* by Bizet and *Bad Romance* by Lady Gaga. Part two was the "Lavender: Love At First Sight," with *Flower Song* from "Carmen" by George Bizet; and again *Bad Romance*. Part three was red rose pedals for "Seduction" featuring *HabaFiera*, also from "Carmen," and *Libertango* by Astor Piazzolla. Part four was my favorite color, "Orange Petals" featuring *Kiss from a Rose* by Seal.

And finally the black rose petal at the end representing "Betrayal, Death and Rebirth" to the music of *Tango de Roxanne* by Sting and *Torreador Song* by Bizet.

It is wonderful how these fit all together to make such a super show. The kids are really starting to sell this. I find it truly amazing that the guard is able to spin and toss while balancing those beautiful showgirl head pieces on their heads. I only saw one guard member lose her headpiece, but it was easily retrievable near the sideline.

Surf has become much more confident and is selling the show much better in just a few weeks, plus their recent trip up to Boston. This may not be the corps that they had hoped to field membership-wise, but they have great potential. I had read that some of the fans were puzzled by the black flag at the end. Yes, it is part of the show.

All the way from 107-degree

temps in San Antonio, TX, the Crossmen were here to perform their 2011 jazz-oriented "Renewal" show for their appreciative fans. They are especially popular here in this area not far from where they were born in nearby Pennsylvania.

In my last article I listed their music incorrectly from a source other than from their Web site. The corrected repertoire for the 2011 program is: *Episode: Prelude* by Nando Lauria, *Spinning Wheel* by David Clayton Thomas, *Hallelujah* by Leonard Cohen, *Back Home* by Nando Lauria and *Ursa Major* by Chuck Naffier.

I learned that the decision to go back to the great jazz shows of the past was made by their program director, Jaime Alvarez-Calderon, who assembled a super group of former and new Crossmen staff members. Many fans, including myself, were hoping that they would return to jazz this year. I'm told Jaime was responsible for the show and staff decisions. A big thanks to him for bringing back the style the alumni and fans are eating up this year.

The show itself continues to solidify with their strong



(Above) Carolina Crown, Ft. Mill, SC, 2011; (right) Jersey Surf, Camden County, NJ, 2011. (Photos by Pat Chagnon)

percussion line, a much stronger brass line than in the past and a guard that at one point uses all rifles very effectively. If you have not seen the show there is a lot to look forward to. The marching members really seem to love performing as it shows in the smiles on their faces.

The ever-popular **Madison Scouts** can always be counted on for two things: they are play loud and play very well. Talking with several people who had not heard much about the show they were watching, it still seems to be tough selling the idea that this show is about the 9/11 terrorist attack. They are flying around the field from set to set and I wonder if this might have been new drill that they have not mastered yet. Scores show them shooting up the ladder from last year, but many fans still have a problem visualizing what the show is about.

Everyone loves Madison and I still remember seeing them in Philadelphia in 1985 when I popped up in the back stands to take a picture for *Drum Corps World*. They nearly blew me back down the upper tunnel. And I will never forget them coming to California with their "Shaft" show in 1976 which was unfortunately changed by the time I got back East with the Blue Devils.

As with last year the **Boston Crusaders** have become one of my favorite corps. I love their "1812/ Les Miz" combination because it tells a story that is easy to understand. And it is very well-designed drill-wise and visually, too. It is, however hard to come on the field after Madison who literally blows your socks off with their sheer volume at times.

I was puzzled by the sound of whistling at the start of the show. I had been turned toward the audience

and whipped around to find the corps dragging themselves on the field, much like they had been in a major battle -- even to the point that one of the bigger members was carrying a smaller member over their shoulder. Singing the opener seems to get the crowd generated for a great show ahead. Things that are unique always catch the eye of the fans.

I really enjoy the guard work and the split drill as if the drum line on one goal post was fighting the guard and horns on the opposite end. Great staging, but the corps needs a sample sound of a cannon at the end for a big finish. It kind of made me feel that something was missing and perhaps it was. Still, Boston, I really love the shows you have put out the last few years! And I can tell the fans in stands do as well. Good job!

The final show of the night was **Carolina Crown**. In their early days I criticized them for the amount of posing

they did on the field. Not enough movement, but plenty of stop time I remember saying. The past few years they have grown out of that phase and started to become a crowd favorite.

This really became evident with what most people remember as the "horse race" sShow. Visually excellent to watch, great music and they got the crowd involved in the show and the race itself. The slow motion photo finish was priceless and I believe it has since been a crowd favorite for a retro theater presentation.

This years show called "Rach Star" will undoubtedly be another one of those all-time Carolina Crown fan favorites. When I first saw the show earlier in the theater, I was surrounded by a number of old-timers who had not a single good word to say. They especially hated the female guard uniforms and the concept itself they called totally out of place.

Now, seeing it live, gives you a whole different perspective to the show. There is tons of visual excitement from all players on the field -- the unique way they bring on the keyboard played over their heads to deposit him on the stage at the start of the show, for example. The pit dancing throughout the show, the BIG, BIG sound the huge horn line puts out and, of course, music you can hum on the way home.

Note to other corps: people in the stands really want music that they have heard or can go home humming. Original pieces are fine, but that is not what the people bought tickets to hear. They like their favorites! *Symphonic Dances*, *Paint It Black*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Paganini* are all selections the fans love to hear.

I loved the use of the metal towers mid-field that the guard hangs from during the show, simple and very effective. This is a very, very creative show. The only other show that is as creative is the Blue Devils actually building the outline of a house on the field.

Congratulations, Carolina Crown, you have the show, you have the muscle, you have the music, NOW would be a good time to bring it home after all those years of coming so close.

I leave you with something that I noticed with several of the corps this evening. After talking to several others on the track, we all seemed to have the same problem with each show. I don't know if you have ever been to Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus in a big indoor venue. The last five minutes is all fireworks, dancing elephants, parade of performers and exciting music. Then suddenly the lights come up to reveal a smoky arena with the cast gone and the thing you remember the most is that arena and not that exciting ending.

What most of these groups seemed to miss this evening is that really BIG finish, to get fans on their feet at the end of their shows. From a judging point, they may be getting the scores, but from a fan viewpoint they may have left the stadium expecting more than you gave. In the weeks to come, fixing the exit is what it is going to take to bring home the gold ring for one of the groups! ■



Crown stays ahead of Bluecoats at annual 'Innovations in Brass' contest

by Kevin Gamin, Drum Corps World staff
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July 7, 2011 -- Akron, OH . . . Carolina Crown continued to "ranch the house" at the 2011 "Innovations in Brass" competition, winning all but two captions on the way to victory. Those two captions went to the Bluecoats, finishing a strong second.



The Madison Scouts came in third with their tribute to the events of 9/11, while the Boston Crusaders placed fourth. Spirit of Atlanta and Crossmen continued the fight for twelfth place at finals, with Spirit retaining the lead in the race.

Pioneer rounded out the World Class corps and Legends performed as the lone Open Class corps of the night.

Carolina Crown brings drum corps fans three things

they never thought they'd see or hear just a few years ago: crowd surfing, a virtuoso piano player and a show mixing Rachmaninov and AC/DC. Fans get all this and more with "Rach Star," a show title that only scratches the surface of what the South Carolina corps does on the field this year.

The pre-show features Queen's *We Will Rock You*, with snippets of other



Crossmen, San Antonio, TX, 2011. (Photo by Pat Chagnon)

rock anthems (*Purple Haze, Sweet Child of Mine, Iron*

Man) while the drum line throws down, continuing Crown's recent trend of non-traditional pre-show openers.

The horn line produces throughout the show, with great balance and blend from top to bottom. The drum line's moment comes during *Paint It Black*, as they show off their technique and control. The color guard is an integral part and excels with equipment work, dance and straight-up performing to the crowd.

One of the lines from Radiohead's *Creep* is the phrase "I don't belong here." While the **Bluecoats** open their 2011 show, "Brave New World," with this song, the phrase doesn't fit this corps as they definitely belong in the top tier of DCI World Class. The horn line puts on a clinic for how to play as an ensemble. The tubas, during their feature in the closer, put on a clinic for playing music that no tuba line has ever attempted before.

The drum line, which started strong this season, continued this trend, taking top honors tonight. One especially effective musical moment happens during Michael Daugherty's *Deus Ex Machina* as the corps splits into four smaller groups, each moving to a corner of the field -- mini-corps, if you will, then each comes in with their own chords, layering the sound on top of one another with great effect. This is a show where musical technique is on display at all times and is a treat for the ears of the fans.

You know a show is good when you have a hard time taking notes for the eventual show review you're to write. That's what almost happened tonight thanks to the **Madison Scouts** and their 2011 production of "New York Morning." This show is a straight-up tribute to 9/11, starting with the smartly dressed guard, decked out in suits and newspapers on their way to "work." The opener, *New York, New York*, celebrates the average New York morning and is very upbeat, but, after a baritone solo of *Oh, What a Beautiful Morning*, the show turns ominous as they moves into a Robert W. Smith original, *New York Mourning*.

The music gets more frantic through the drum solo, ending as the horns pull back their aussies and look up in the sky as if seeing the Twin Towers burning above them. Smith's *Requiem*, last played during another tribute show -- 1984 Suncoast Sound -- fits perfectly into Madison's design, presenting a somber, haunting and reflective moment before moving into the closer, Alicia Keyes' *Empire State of Mind*. Madison performs this piece as a celebration of hope and the triumph of the human spirit, with the guard removing their suit jackets and spinning white flags while the pit joins the drum line on the field, playing on hand percussion instruments.

Empire may be the best, most memorable closer of 2011 and definitely is one of the most memorable moments of the season.

Do you hear the people sing? If it's the **Boston Crusaders**, you do, as they sing this song from "Les Miserables" while coming onto the field for their 2011 program, "Revolution." Performing music primarily from

“Les Mis,” the “1812 Overture” is interspersed throughout the show, most notably combining *On My Own* with the opening 1812 chorale and One Day More with the familiar “1812” closing strains. It’s appropriate that the Crusaders perform “Les Mis” music as they first brought it to the field in 1988.

The colors of red and black also reference the song of the same name from the musical, although they do not perform this piece. The highlight of this show is the baritone soloist during *Bring Him Home*, performing with a beautiful tone evoking Jean Valjean praying to God from the original story. During this solo, a large white sheet is spread along the front of the field. The soloist stands on top of it, while a brass quartet is underneath it, as if they are souls lost during battle.

Boston presents a total package with this show as it is fun to both watch and listen to.

The 2011 season is turning out to be very competitive, especially in the 12th to 15th place slots. **Spirit of Atlanta**, as of this writing currently leads that pack performing a show paying tribute both to the film noir genre and their heritage with “ATL Confidential.”

The music is a strong mix of old-school Spirit Southern jazz and bluesy film music, a selection which the

judges appreciated as the corps passed Boston in Music General Effect tonight.

This is not to say that this show does not have visual moments, as exhibited by the opening film projector set, complete with spinning film reels made up of horns and percussion. The centerpiece of this show is *Harlem Nocturne*, a jazz and drum corps standard and an opportunity for the horns and drums to really show their stuff. The snares do so by playing on bar stools, while the brass does it with a face-peeling park and blow. This show is very engaging and, if Spirit can keep up their momentum, might lead off Saturday night in Indianapolis.

The **Crossmen’s** 2011 show title is “Renewal,” but they could have named it “How Bones Got the Groove Back.” While the corps doesn’t perform any standards from their past, all of the selections scream Crossmen, with plenty of toe-tapping and head-bobbing music throughout. The musical design team of Chuck Naffier and Lee Beddis reunite for the first time since 2003 and everybody

benefits, from the members on the field to the fans in the stands.

Each song has something special, whether it’s featured brass players, a down-and-dirty 6/8 arrangement of *Spinning Wheel*, or a bluesy performance of *Hallelujah*. The color guard really shines throughout, both individually and as a section. The closer pays tribute to the Crossmen’s past with the Maltese cross formation, a quote from the 1992 closer and a snare line rim shot lick used many times in previous years. The Crossmen are a dark horse contender for finals and just need to clean, clean, clean between now and the end of the season.

Pioneer has named their 2011 show “Celebrate” in reference to their 50th anniversary and the corps formally known as the Imperials of St. Patrick, the Thunderbolts, and The Thing lives up their show title. Despite having only 20 horns, they fill the stadium with sound from

beginning to end as every player contributes to the performance.

The drum line, with a 10-member snare line and no tenors, has a very unique sound as those snares are tuned almost down to a wet Mylar sound. The visual program is designed for the size of the corps, as many small backdrops dot the back of the field in an arc formation, making the performing stage near proportional to their size.

The guard earns the award for multi-tasking as, during the ballad, they pick up horns and join in the

music. The only thing missing from this year’s show is the playing of *Gary Owen* as the corps troops the stands.

Legends was the lone representatives of Open Class at tonight’s show and they represented their level well. The show, titled “Skyscapes,” opens with a pre-show performance of Eric Whitacre’s *Cloudburst* played backfield. The corps starts spread out on the field, collapsing into formation in the center before turning forward and making a strong statement.

While the corps is Open Class, the drum line is full-sized and performs very aggressively. Visually, they march very strongly, something that is becoming a trademark of this relatively young corps. The only strange thing about Legends is the three-member color guard, which may be an issue in the visual general effect caption once the corps begins facing other Open Class corps on a regular basis. The crowd was very appreciative of Legends and it will be interesting to see where this corps finishes in Michigan City.



Legends, Kalamazoo, MI, 2011. (Photo by Ron Walloch)

'DATR' a big win for The Cadets as they now head East

by Bruno Bergeron, Drum Corps World staff
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July 9, 2011 -- Denver, CO . . . Every year I enjoy live drum corps for a full weekend, my limited exposure to the activity as a resident of Colorado. This is the one time in the summer my wife knows she can't get me to do anything else.

It's like a pilgrimage to memory lane, so thanks, Mary, for your support of this craziness of mine.



And I had also the pleasure of having dinner with two of my best drum corps buddies of all time -- Tom Pratt (Bridgemen and Offensive Lions, my corps) and Todd Ryan (Offensive Lions, Madison Scouts,

Star of Indiana and now Blue Devils). What a treat!

My seat was perfect, smack on the 50 yard line, high enough to see everything and low enough to be hit full-blast by the fabulous horn lines that the instructors have developed.

The first corps on was **High Country Brass**, an all-age corps that made their first pilgrimage to DCA last year. Their original show had some very good ideas on the theme of peace and love with all the trimmings and winks at the era. *Lucretia McEvil* was by far the best piece of their show. It had spunk and fun, and the audience responded to it accordingly.

Gold was next, representing Southern California, with an effective and fairly simple show that's just what the doctor ordered; it should give enough challenge to the members without overwhelming them by its difficulty, and they should be able to clean it well enough to rank decently in the Open Class by the end of the season. Of notice was a really nice routine that went as a

conversation side-to-side between the flags and rifles, and a dialogue between the mellos and trumpets that was very well-built.

They were followed by **Revolution**, and their "Ride!" production that introduces an interesting concept, effectively blending sound effects and music interpreted



The Academy Tempe, AZ, 2011. (Photo by Scott Bates)

by the musical sections of the corps. Although a little behind in the cleaning at



Gold, San Diego, CA, 2011. (Photo by Francesca DeMello)

this stage, this show has the potential to go far once the members get comfortable with the execution.

Cascades came on the field, but had to stop mid-show because of weather. There was a 40-minute delay and they came back to re-do their show from the start. Using a large Pandora's box mid-field to create some very interesting

effects, like equipment appearing from the box into the guard members' hands and trumpets appearing through the box with only hands showing, it was original, well-staged and appreciated by the knowledgeable drum corps crowd as well as newcomers.

If I had a bet as to which corps could make it to the top

12 for the first time, **The Academy** would be my choice. They have a superb horn line and great uniforms for the corps and the guard. I especially love the floating effect of the horn's tailcoats. This was a very classy performance and a huge crowd-pleaser.

Santa Clara Vanguard is pushing the envelope once again. Their "Devil's Staircase" is strange, full of intricate drill moves and numerous twists and turns. It's definitely a production that needs numerous viewings to enable the spectator to fully appreciate all the material that the corps throws at you. Hopefully the members can sell it well, which should result in a better connection with audiences that attend the contests the balance of the season.

It looks like **Phantom Regiment** has another winner on their hands. Their "Juliet show" has the sophistication, power that we expect from Rockford, but it carries the magic and grandeur that made them a champion three years ago. I applaud the decision to not use rifles this year, as it does not pertain to the character of Juliet. The amazing guard is doing plenty of superb phrases with just sabers and flags. And what a horn sound!

I must admit I have not been on **The Cadets** bandwagon for the last few years, but this "Angels and Demons" show got me all in again. What a concept and what beautiful portrayal by the members! The show is chock full of original ideas and the mosaic of colors created by the separation and integration of the two different-colored uniforms is a thing of beauty. It must have been an absolute nightmare for the design team to keep track, but the result is sensational. A definite contender for the title this year.

Not to be outdone, the **Blue Devils** are exploiting



Revolution, San Antonio, TX, 2011. (Photo by Scott Bates)

props again as their show, "The Beat My Heart Skipped," showcases their perennial majestic horn line and a color guard that keeps topping themselves with intricacy, perfection and an energy that

is contagious.

Their final dance sequence is absolutely something to see, as it is genially designed and staged, and executed with gusto, sprinkled with a tad of craziness. I won't be surprised if they win another color guard title, as they are so clean and so early in the season.

This is, in my opinion, the best year for the **Blue Knights**. They have a compelling program that communicates very well to

the audience and a slew of subtleties that portray their identity better than any other year I have seen them. They are bringing back what made drum corps great when I was marching, but not in a boring, déjà vu, way. It's like a whole new recipe that tastes as good as the original, but uses exotic ingredients.

With the new system that is being piloted this year by DCI aimed at more audience-connection and entertaining shows, I think the Blue Knights' presentation is

demonstrating today what drum corps will evolve into in the next few years.

I was overall very impressed by the quality, originality and distinct personalities displayed by all the corps present this evening, which is proof that drum corps is doing extremely well and that the activity has many successful years ahead.



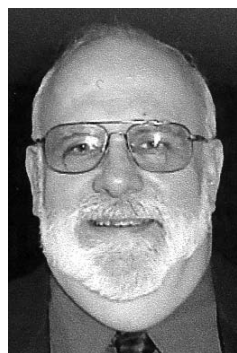
Blue Knights, Denver, CO, 2011. (Photo by Francesca DeMello)



'A Hurricane hits Rochester at annual 'Vince Bruni' DCA competition

by Tom Peashey, Drum Corps World staff
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July 16, 2011 -- Rochester, NY . . . Tonight saw the Empire Statesmen bring drum corps live to Wegman's Stadium at Aquinas Institute. Perfect (albeit hot) weather and a great facility saw show chairman Allen Buell dig into his bag of entertainment tricks and put together what was a most enjoyable evening of drum corps.



Noticeably absent was Mighty St. Joe's Alumni. This was a disappointment as I very much enjoyed their performance in May. I never

did find out why they weren't there, but do know they had two parades during the day.

As the people filed in, they were entertained by Dave "Boots" Martin's popular brass ensemble **Hitmen**. All talented drum corps vets, the group never fail to entertain with precise and exciting brass and the sounds of Martin -- arguably one of the best soloists in the history of drum corps. I particularly enjoyed their rendition of 1972 Rochester Crusader's *Ironsides*. He took a few liberties with the arrangement, but still must give kudos to the pen of our upstatemaster, Corky Fabrizio.

Next up was more entertainment, first from the premier edition of the Owego **Mellodears Alumni Corps**. You go, girls. Great to see you out there. Their snare line was especially noteworthy and since it's been 30 years since any Mellodear corps was on the field, I guess I better change the "you go, girls" to "you go, women, mom and grandma." Great to see you!

Always a favorite, **Preston Scout House** alumni band

high-stepped their way onto the field bringing most fond memories from the late 1950's and early 1960s to this old man's mind. Staying with their tradition, they presented "flavors" of their past. *March of the Wooden Soldiers, The Wayward Wind, Waltzing Matilda* and the like. All were topped off with a parade formation off the field to *Colonel Boogey March*. Always a pleasure. We look forward to their appearance at the DCA "Alumni Spectacular."

On to the competition, while I freely admit that the economy has taken its toll on drum corps far more this year than in recent memory, I must take the corps to task a bit. It is JULY 16. It's not June 16 or May 16. That said, the programs were far too incomplete. This ongoing problem seems to be exacerbated by fewer performances and directors willing to spread out camps and take advantage of the extra time available. Unfortunately, that only means less time to prepare for the championship and less entertainment for the audiences throughout the season.

First up was **Excelsior**. Let's get their five-point penalty out of the way first. I no longer have a direct line into the DCA office in Rhode Island to give you a complete rundown of what has transpired. This is not something I



Scout House, Cambridge, ONT, 2011. (Photo by Richard Wersinger)

have anything to do with. I can tell you that it was "in lieu of" disqualification for not having the mandatory 35 playing members. I did notice that they were trying to count the second drum major because she shook a tambourine for a few seconds in the beginning of the show.

They also had two children in the pit in uniform shaking some sort of toys throughout the show who were HIGHLY questionable, but I'm certain it was the second DM who caused the "warning shot" for having only 34 players.

Those who feel DCA's attempt to provide the sponsor with a minimum corps to try and ensure minimum entertainment is misguided. Line up your rotten tomatoes. I support DCA's attempt to get control of this and after watching the first two class A corps, I can only say I wish we had made the number 50 instead of 35.

That out of the way, Excelsior is doing a tribute to Rochester's great musicians with a show that it turns out is most appropriate. Allow me to digress and provide a bit of history. Chuck Mangione rose to fame out of Eastman School of Music. He had several people who were key to his success.

Two were Bat McGrath and Don Potter. Both contributed greatly to the premier album of "The Hill Where the Lord Hides." It's also noteworthy that former Rochester Crusader Stevie Gadd was on drum set for Mangione's band.

Don Potter, especially, was someone I followed and enjoyed greatly as a young college student. It turns out that Donel Potter-Mataruga, corps director and drum major, is Don Potter's daughter. I had no idea. Don is still active in Nashville and produces anything done by the Judd family. This show and his influence on it brought a distinct smile to my face.

Joey Pero's treatment of this wonderful Rochester music is creative and demanding. I have to wonder if only 11 horns can pull this off. The corps moved through the familiar strains of *Children of Sanchez*, *I'm Gonna Fly Now*, *Hill Where the Lord Hides*, *Bellavia* and more. You get the idea -- a great tribute to this wonderful period in Rochester history.

The problem they had was twofold. First, after two tunes of trying to make 11 horns sound like more, they tired decidedly. Second, guard was almost totally incomplete and toward the end of the program long park and blows probably meant the drill isn't complete yet either. I can only hope that they teach the players to be themselves and not try and make up for those who don't exist and then complete the program. The basic product is there.

Following each competing corps, Rochester's **Prime Time Brass** (complete with two sousaphones) played a tune or two. Led by



Connecticut Hurricanes, Seymour, CT, 2011. (Photo by Harry Heidelberg)

popular former Statesmen soloist Chris Castellone, PTB is now professional even though they are all drum corps guys. They have many paid performances behind them and rumors have them picking up some big gigs like Super Bowl parties in the very near future.

They are already a mainstay of the New Orleans Mardi Gras and this shows in their style of jazz. Well-known Erie soloist Jeff Gibbons has joined their ranks and they even have St. Joe's and Rochester Crusader soloist from the early 1960s, Mike DiMura. While Chris is musical director, well-known former Rochester Patriot and Garfield Cadet Lance Rightmyer is corps director. Believe me, this is like listening to an all-brass "Tonight Show" orchestra.

They are THAT good.

Dansville **White Sabers** were the next competitor. With just 12 horns, they presented their "Blue" program and also had some incompleteness, but the brass seemed to have a decent grasp of how to play small without "blowing it." Ben Chaffee does a good job there, just a few moments where they got a bit raucous and lost control.

Rhapsody In Blue was well-received and gave the audience a glimpse of what may be possible come September. Solid percussion contribution -- go bass drums. Once the guard supports by completing their program, I think this could be a strong Class A contender.

Prime Time Brass filled the gap -- *Fly Me to the Moon*. Gotta love the old standards.

After having topped Empire Statesmen in Bridgeport, CT, a week ago, the **Connecticut Hurricanes** winning this show should have been no surprise -- BUT? Well, this IS drum corps. You never know.

Let's get the guard kudos out of the way. This old

Prime Time Brass, Rochester, NY, 2011. (Photo by Richard Wersinger)



judge was on the panel evaluating color guard when the Rhode Island Matadors' guard set the standard of excellence in DCA that has survived three decades. That "best guard of all time" rap is

in serious jeopardy. Colorful in their two-toned blue and silver costumes. This large and talented guard is CLEAN in July. Only imagining further success through the



Empire Statesmen, Rochester, NY, 2011. (Photo by Richard Wersinger)

summer, I will say memories of Matador's guard will be challenged.

Hurcs' position in the top five at DCA is further guaranteed by a very talented percussion line. Which of those five positions they will grab will be determined by the growth of their brass. Still shorthanded at 35, they need to fill both the visual holes and give the already-solid sound a boost to grab the highest possible position. Difficulty reading the meat of the drill caused me to spend even more time watching their wonderful guard. This sometimes caused a negative as some brass breaks became exaggerated by the precision of the guard.

Special additional kudos to the pit that doubles the Gershwin piano parts in an "Oscar Lavant" way, taking a lot of pressure off the brass. Here's my startling prediction of the year. Hurcs guard #1 at DCA. Hurcs percussion 1, 2 or 3 at DCA. How high will they finish? Fill 10 holes and up the ante soundwise to make the Jamie Thompson drill work? Who knows? Anything is possible. This is that great a corps and program.

Prime Time Brass takes over with *St. James' Infirmary* . . . just wow!

Host and every crowd favorite **Empire Statesmen** bring their tribute to Michael Jackson to the field. Led by a very svelte version of Dave Bruni, the 2011 corps remains DCA's entertainers. It just seems that every year they not only follow dad Vince's orders and entertain, but they do so in a way that will compete for all the roses every year. They're solid in brass, percussion and guard.

Unlike Hurcs' brass, they have no weakness other than the fact that the staging of their program is incomplete. Large black stages with closed curtains are moved around the field making you wonder what they will be used for. Unfortunately, that meant that tonight they became a distraction and even hid much of the quality guard work.

The Jerry Kelsey-led brass was tight and quite solid. There were WOW moments created that, except for Hurcs guard, were missing from the program in Connecticut. There are many factors that go into a drum corps program and score. I could have accepted the results either way.

Here is a little insight into the make up of a panel. This group was the "perfect storm" for Empire (or if you prefer, Hurcs' dream come true). I have already said, either corps could have won. There were a heck of a lot of apples and oranges. The color guard judge (who happens to be the chief color guard judge of New York state) had the easiest job. Go Hurcs. Visual went slightly to Hurcs -- no surprise and again thank you, guard. Percussion was a major part of the top score for Hurcs.

Now, why was it predictable that, even though Empire could have won -- they didn't? The GE Visual Judge is very experienced and a tremendous color guard person. With the staging questions and incomplete thematic presentation, he went slightly with Hurcs in GE Visual and gave the nod in the new communications category to Empire. The GE Music judge, a rock solid professional, wonderful brass man and band director and an EVEN BETTER color guard designer . . . you can see where I'm going? He could not have helped watching Hurcs' guard and he gave the nod to Hurcs in the new communications category even though you might have thought that a brass man would certainly have given the nod to Empire, the clear winner of high brass and seemed to wow the crowd.

So there you go. Five out of seven judges this night, as far as I'm concerned, are capable of judging WGI World Class finals. This should have made Kevin Hassan's Connecticut staff VERY happy -- playing to their ultimate strength. Judging 101 -- nobody was wrong and both great corps could change this score with some very easy fixes, especially Empire, who I believe may have one of their finer corps and just need to finish their theme presentation and work the visual thoughts a bit to make the program work. Don't miss DCA 2011 in Rochester!

The entertainment continued with PTB and two tunes, *When the Saints Come Marching In* featuring Jeff Gibbons and *Sweet Caroline* closing in a most entertaining way with the solo work of Chris Castellone -- a great addition to the evening.

Keeping the audience busy while retreat was set up, Ghost Riders mini-corps played their 2011 production from Copland to *Shenandoah* they continue to perform at the highest level and will certainly be near or at the top come the Labor Day weekend mini-corps championships.

Our thanks to David Bruni, Allen Buell and all the Empire Statesmen Organization on a most unique and entertaining evening of drum corps. ■