

COLOURFUL COSTUMES, ROUSING MUSIC AND PRECISION DRILLS AT THE CAPE TOWN MILITARY TATTOO 2012

Article and photos supplied by Mrs Regine Lord.

The audience that attended the Opening Night of the Cape Town Military Tattoo 2012 on Wednesday, 31 October 2012, as well as the successive night's performances, witnessed a slick and smooth running production, as the backstage and front of house assistants became more comfortable with their roles and duties, and the participating bands increasingly confident of their routines.



Photo 1: The massed pipes and military bands of the Cape Town Military Tattoo 2012

The final show of the Cape Town Military Tattoo 2012 tonight, Saturday, 3 November 2012, promises to be a fantastic finale!

The southeaster wind that had wrought so much damage in the early part of the week, had settled down slightly by Opening Night, although it was still very chilly on the stands. On Thursday, the restless wind had died down at last – much to the relief of the pipe majors with their elaborate headdresses, and the musicians bearing bass drums and massive tubas, who risked becoming airborne in the blustery wind. It turned into a balmy summer's evening, just perfect for a very enjoyable night out with family and friends. Perhaps in response to the pleasant weather, the mood that night was more mellow and intimate than it had been thus far.



Photo 2: A dense bank of fog flows in from the sea and blankets the Castle and its surrounding buildings, creating an eerie atmosphere

But the Mother City always has a surprise up her sleeve: After the temperatures on Friday had soared into the mid-thirties, that evening's audience witnessed the dramatic arrival of a dense bank of fog flowing in from the sea and spreading a damp blanket over the Castle and all the surrounding buildings. The spotlight operators, evidently caught up in the excitement of the moment, theatrically swung their lights around to spectacular effect, as fingers of light caressed the mist.



Photo 3: The Wynberg Boys High School Senior Steel Band entertain the spectators during the pre-show

Spectators who arrived at the Castle before 20h00 were entertained by some talented young musicians: The first group consisted of 10 to 13 year-old girls and boys from the Westcott Primary School Band, who wove their gentle spells with soprano and treble recorders, as well as Orff xylophones, glockenspiels and Djembe drums. The second, slightly older group of youngsters were the Wynberg Boys High School Senior Steel Band, who performed at last year's Sunset Concert.

After its gentle and mellow beginnings, the pace began to heat up quickly. The traditional first acts of the Tattoo recalled the early military history of the Cape of Good Hope when the Castle was first constructed between 1666 and 1679. This makes it the oldest surviving colonial building in the country and the only building to have had a continuous military presence for over 350 years.

A fanfare on the balcony by trumpeters from the various military bands introduced the ceremonial locking of the big Castle gates by the Castle Guard with their tall halberds gleaming in the light. The musketeers of the Cape Town Muzzle-loaders Association, dressed in the period costume of early Dutch militiamen, and the men of the Cannon Association of South Africa fired their respective historical weapons.

The massed pipe bands – consisting of the Drums and Pipes of the Cape Town Highlanders as well as the Pipes and Drums of the Cape Field Artillery, 1 Medical Battalion Group of Durban and the South African Medical Health Services - were the first musical act.

They were followed by the massed military bands – consisting of the SA Army Bands of Cape Town and Kroonstad, the South African Medical Health Services and visiting musicians from the Botswana Army Band and from Congo Brazzaville.

As they launched into the theme song of the Cape Town Military Tattoo 2012, the well-known ABBA song, "Thank you for the Music", the bands changed formation until they had shaped the letters of the word MUSIC. Each of the military bands individually took their turn centre-stage during the course of the show.



Photo 4: As per tradition, the Cape Town Military Tattoo starts with a BANG!

The musicians from Botswana and the Congo were not the only international visitors to the Cape Town Military Tattoo 2012: The second group came from further afield – the Historisch Tamboerkorps der Koninklijke Marechaussee, the Historical Drum Corps of the Royal Dutch Military Police, standing out with their blue uniforms and gleaming white drums.



Photo 5: Drummers and trumpeters of the Historisch Tamboerkorps der Koninklijke Marechaussee

The SA Navy’s Silent Drill Squad, which had starred in the 2009 Tattoo, once again impressed the audience with their precision drill movements, all controlled by the beat of the drum, with no shouting of commands. Clad in black and white, they marched, swung their arms and twirled their rifles in perfect sync with each other. Not surprisingly, their sterling performance was greeted with enthusiastic cheers and applause.

A popular program item was the lovely long-legged lasses of the Celtic Dance Tapestry and the Claddagh Studio, who displayed exceptionally nimble footwork with their hard shoe and soft shoe dancing sequences on the stage in front of the illuminated Kat balcony.



Photo 6: The teams participating in the Mortar Run

An entirely new act was the mortar run by three teams from the Cape Town Highlanders and the Cape Field Artillery, who were assisted by three band members from the SA Army Band Cape Town in their chilli-red tunics. This was a reminder that military musicians are often enlisted soldiers who serve alongside their comrades both in peacetime and in war. The teams were required to execute deployment and firing drills for the 81 mm M3 mortar, a patrol and base weapon.

The dramatic 1812 Overture with the firing of the four 25-pounder guns outside the Castle was, as always, a high point of the show. It led to the Final Muster, during which all the participants in the Tattoo lined up on the front arena. The bands also played a new piece: the heart-stirring and slightly melancholic “The Gael”, otherwise known as the theme from The Last of the Mohicans”. After the Lone Piper played on the Kat roof, the bands withdrew, and one more evening’s performance had ended.

The feedback from the spectators and the invited guests was very positive, as they expressed their delight at the quality of the production: “A wonderful evening most professionally conducted” (Rear Admiral R.W. Higgs, Chief of Naval Staff). “Excellent military tattoo. Actually the only military tattoo. Thoroughly enjoyed it” (Maj Gen L.C. Ford, SAMHS). “Very nice evening and an excellent show. Thanks for the ‘Cape’ hospitality” (Brig Gen A. Fredericks, SA Army Training Formation).



Photo 7: The lovely lasses of the Celtic Dance Tapestry

DVDs of the Cape Town Military Tattoo of 2009 and 2010 are available at R80.00 each; a double pack of the 2009 and 2010 DVDs costs R140.00 each. The 2012 DVD can be pre-ordered at R100.00 each; enquiries for pre-orders – tel: (021) 787 1162/1167/1198 or email: defencereserveswc@gmail.com or johan.conradie@dod.mil.za.

More photographs can be found here:

<http://namibsands.wordpress.com/category/defence-reserves/cape-town-military-tattoo-2012/>