

“A Band of Brothers: Remembering World War I” The 10th Anniversary Cape Town Military Tattoo 2015

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The Opening Fanfare of the Cape Town Military Tattoo 2015 against the magnificent backdrop of iconic Table Mountain



An international singing sensation, a colourful 60-piece military band from far beyond our shores, a larger-than-life puppet horse, and a foot-tapping troupe of traditional riel dancers from the Cedarberg – these were just some of the exciting acts who participated in the Cape Town Military Tattoo (CTMT) 2015 at the Castle of Good Hope. Running from 11 to 14 November 2015, with an additional matinee on Saturday afternoon, this was a very special show in celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the CTMT.

The production team, under Lieutenant Colonel Tienie Lott of the Cape Town Highlanders and production manager Warrant Officer Class 2 Charles Canning (who is also the Pipe Major of the Drums and Pipes of the Cape Town Highlanders), drew on the experience they had gained at 13 international tattoos and numerous local tattoos over the years, to implement some new ideas.

These included a complete redesign and realignment of the arena and the seating stands, the construction of a very tall scaffold, shaped like the ramparts of a castle, the elevation of the seating stands to improve lines of sight for the spectators, and the installation of a slightly raised wooden floor, covered with a special carpet, which improved the quality of both sound and lighting.

Our new announcer – Andy Dippenaar, the voice behind the annual South African Tattoo in Montecasino, drew the theme of the CTMT 2015 – ‘In remembrance of World War I’ – through the entire show. We were privileged to welcome some wonderful international acts.

Irish singer Chloë Agnew, one of the original members of group ‘Celtic Woman’, enchanted us with her beauty and grace, as she sang “The Prayer”. Her angelic soprano also harmonised beautifully with the tenor voice of Maruwaan de Bruyn in the stirring duet “Band of Brothers”. Maruwaan is a champion singer within the Cape Malay Choir Board and the leading drummer in the CTH Drums and Pipes.

At the CTMT 2015, he also sang the stirring and patriotic “I am my country” to the tune of “Highland Cathedral”. The Pakistan Army Band, which has performed at many international tattoos and events, was also a first time visitor to the Mother City.



The Pakistan Army Band with Conductor Subedar Major Ghulam Ali puts an exotic slant on some familiar tunes

The band consists of the best musicians selected from the Pakistan Armed Forces bands, and their repertoire includes national anthems, classical music, national folk melodies and songs. An unusual participant in a tribute to the trench diggers and stretcher bearers of WWI was Joey, the larger-than-life naturalistic horse puppet from ‘War Horse: The Show’, a moving drama set in WWI.



Chloë Agnew singing “The Prayer”: “Lead us to a place, guide us with your grace, give us faith so we’ll be safe.”



Created by the Handspring Puppet Company of Cape Town, Joey was brought to life by a three-man team of skilful puppeteers. 'War Horse' has achieved international acclaim, having been seen by more than 4,7 million people in several productions worldwide. In the WWI tribute by the Chris Hani Secondary School dance troupe, the eerie throb of drums and the rattle of gunfire created a mesmerizing musical soundtrack for their energetic dance routine, as Joey the War Horse circled around the arena.

In addition to the dance troupe, this Khayelitsha school also has an excellent choir, which has won the Western Cape Provincial Championships organised by the South African School Choral Eisteddfod (SASCE) for the last three years. Two other groups of talented young local performers performed at the CTMT 2015.



The soldiers of the Precision Drill Squad of the SA Army School of Infantry in Oudtshoorn impress audiences with their discipline and concentration

The Nuwe Graskoue Trappers from Wupperthal introduced their high-energy Riel Dances. This unique form of dance was born out of traditional Khoi and San ceremonial dances around the fire, and includes courtship rituals and mimicry of animal antics, along with much bravado, showmanship and foot stomping.



The Nuwe Graskoue Trappers from Wupperthal perform some traditional Riel dances – the girls swirl their skirts flirtatiously, while the boys respond with much vigorous foot-tapping and leaping

These lively youngsters won many medals at the World Championships of Performing Arts (in Los Angeles) in July 2015. Also participating was a string quartet from the Cape Town Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, which consisted of Noluvuyo Nteta (violin), Shaheema Lakay (violin), Jessica Rossouw (viola) and Pearl Yung (cello).

Military bands from all four arms of service performed at the CTMT 2015: the SA Army Band Western Cape (Director of Music Captain Vernon Michels), the SA Air Force Band (Director of Music Lieutenant Colonel Matthys Pienaar), the SA Navy Band (Director of Music Commander Kenny Leibbrandt), and the SA Medical Health Service Band (Director of Music Lieutenant Colonel Gerald Seekola).

Their professionalism, discipline and dedication to their work as military musicians certainly contribute to the positive image of the SANDF. They were joined by five of the finest pipe bands in the country: the Cape Town Highlanders, Cape Field Artillery, Cape Garrison Artillery, Knysna and Districts, and Algoa Caledonian pipe bands. Spectators were kept on the edge of their seats with some dramatic high-speed action on the arena.



The young sea cadets of TS Woltemade manoeuvre a heavy Hotchkiss naval gun around an obstacle course



In a sequence orchestrated by 3 Parachute Battalion and executed by the paratroopers of 1 Parachute Battalion, the fearless soldiers from the sky fastroped into the arena from above to rescue a hostage, while engaging and capturing rebel forces.

The Precision Drill Squad of the SA Army School of Infantry in Oudtshoorn displayed their discipline and dexterity, as well as their levels of fitness and concentration, in their silent drill, twirling and spinning their R4 rifles to the beat of the drum.

And a squad of young cadets from Training Ship Woltemade demonstrated their agility and strength with an exciting gun run, tackling several obstacles as a team, before reassembling and firing the heavy Hotchkiss naval gun, which had last seen action during the Boer War. In addition to all these new acts, some old familiar traditions continued.

Since the first CTMT, held in 2003, each performance has begun with a re-enactment of an 18th century drill: drummers would beat out the 'taptoe' – or 'doe den tap toe', instructing tavern keepers to close the taps on their beer barrels and off-duty soldiers to return to their barracks for the night. After the Castle Ceremonial Guard had locked the heavy Van der Stel gate to the Castle of Good Hope, the Cannon Association of South Africa, a stalwart of the CTMT, fired a small quarter-pounder muzzle-loading cannon dating back over 200 years.

Another stalwart of the CTMT is the Cape Field Artillery Saluting Troop, whose salvos from the four 25-pounder guns made the ground tremble and set off car alarms across the city centre during Tchaikovsky's famed '1812 Overture'.

A thrilling action sequence involving the fearless soldiers from the sky has spectators on the edge of their seats



The Massed Pipes and Drums form up in the shape of a World War I medal, as Joey the War Horse moves slowly among them

The fire control officer who synchronised the firing of these guns outside the Castle with the music being played inside was Staff Sergeant Andrew Imrie, the Pipe Major of the Cape Field Artillery Pipes and Drums. Apart from the performers, there are countless organisations and military regiments, both Regular and Reserve Force, as well as individuals, both civilian and military, who contribute to the CTMT 2015. An incredible amount of work, much of it invisible to the audience but nonetheless essential to the smooth functioning of the event, happens behind the scenes.

This was acknowledged when the flag bearers and the silent guard marched on the national flags of the countries who are represented this year – South Africa, Pakistan and the Republic of Ireland – as well as the SANDF flag, the flags of the four armed services, and the flags of the participating regiments.

The CTMT draws together role players from different sectors of society, and fosters cooperation and communication between the different regiments, whether performing on stage, involved in the production side, or active in a support capacity. When unexpected challenges and urgent crises arise, they are dealt with and overcome because the goal – hosting a world class Tattoo – creates a strong sense of common purpose.





The Chris Hani Secondary School dance troupe and Joey the War Horse pay tribute to the brave men and women who fought and died in World War I"

Many of the military – and civilian – men and women involved have a remarkable 'can do' attitude and a willingness to go beyond the call of duty, to step in and assist where help is needed. Instances of this occur at all levels, from the officers at the top to the troops on the ground.

All of this contributes strongly to the feeling of being "one great Band of Brothers", as Chloë and Maruwaan sang so beautifully during the Finale. The CTMT is a highly entertaining and popular event – as evidenced by the enthusiastic applause of the spectators at each performance.

Positive responses and some constructive criticism were also received afterwards, particularly via email and on the social media. Praise was also received from the functionaries and dignitaries at each of the performances: Major General W.S. Mbambo (Chief Air Staff Ops), Rear Admiral (Junior Grade) G. Jameson, Major General L.R. Smith (Deputy Chief of Army) and Major General K.C. Motlhabane (Chief Directorate of HR Management).

In addition to promoting a positive image of the South African National Defence Force, the Tattoo also creates opportunities for youth development and gives artists and groups from other communities and cultures a platform to perform. Since the first CTMT in 2003, the producers have always incorporated local youth groups, marching drill squads, school music bands, church marching bands, choirs and dance groups, musicians and performers

who came from all communities of Cape Town and the rest of the country.

Military musicians have travelled here from overseas (the Koninklijke Marechaussee from The Netherlands with their Trompetterkorps and the Dutch Fife Band of the Historisch Tamboerkorps) as well as from other African countries (Namibia, Zambia, Rwanda, and Botswana).

With the Tattoo being hosted in the Mother City, it creates a tremendously positive view not only of the SANDF but also of the City of Cape Town and the country of South Africa among locals and visitors from afar alike.

The Executive Committee, led by Lieutenant Colonel Johan Conradie of the Defence Reserves Provincial Office of the Western Cape, is responsible for organising and coordinating the CTMT 2015 – and they can rightly be proud of their achievements this year. 



Final Muster of all the participants in the Cape Town Military Tattoo 2015 rounds off the evening

