

# Vanguard breaks 90 to capture Drums Along the Rockies title

by Steve Robinson

July 22, 1989—Denver, Colorado . . . The Santa Clara Vanguard bounced back from its defeat in Concord a week earlier to better the Blue Devils by more than a point, breaking 90 to win the 19th annual *Drums Along the Rockies* Championship.

This battle between California rivals headlined a 12-corps show in which the Velvet Knights topped the Freelancers, and Florida Wave came out ahead of the Troopers and the Blue Knights. The Sunset Regiment concluded its season ahead of the Quad City Knights, the Spartans, Black Gold and Rocky Mountain Magic.

Thousands of knowledgeable fans attended the contest, held in Denver's spectacular Mile High Stadium. Shifting winds buffeted many corps, often blowing dust up from an on-field baseball diamond and making guard equipment hard to handle.

Santa Clara won every caption except visual performance on its way to the win. The corps was masterful once again, flowing through an emotive book that carried the crowd away. Except for gripping drum and visual work in the middle of *Masquerade*, the corps flowed beautifully in and out of all its variations of mood, carrying the audience wherever the corps wanted to take it. The Phantom appeared briefly in tonight's show, and the corps was obviously beginning to make real strides toward its championship bid. The Vanguard won this regional and its audience, scoring 90.20.

The Concord, CA, Blue Devils, who had beaten Santa Clara only a week earlier, were strong runners-up tonight. The corps was

vintage Blue Crew, black uniforms notwithstanding, and gave a show as pleasing as any we've seen from them. Though marching precisely and winning by 0.4 in visual performance, the corps' broadest strength on tonight's score sheets lay in showmanship, with the Concord tying or ahead of Santa Clara in all the showmanship subcaptions. The Blue Devils scored 89.10 for second place.

The Velvet Knights' powerful percussion, a close third tonight, made up for fourth- and fifth-place rankings in other captions. Well-liked, the Velvet Knights' show seemed to gain polish over earlier performances, especially in the opening Rio production, which was well-balanced in every respect. The Anaheim, CA, corps romped to 78.50 points and third place.

The Sacramento, CA, Freelancers closed on the Velvet Knights with a stunning drill and a strong brass performance. John Williams repertoires have been disdained, but this one was quite dramatic and the Freelancers bring it to the field so spectacularly, from that chilling opening contraction to the inverting zig-zag finale. The Freelancers placed a strong fourth at 77.10.

The Florida Wave of Pembroke Pines, FL, took well to the heated drama of its *Malaga* production. With a clean, sparkling look on the field, the Wave's soprano solos and ensembles vividly impressed those Latin themes on the crowd. Florida Wave scored 72.50 for fifth place.

The Casper, WY, Troopers, considered a local corps all over the region, took a

surprising third place in visual performance, coming within shouting distance of the California powers in this caption. Besides marching well and looking good, the corps achieved a pleasant choral mood in *No Goodbye*, and the fiery *Cheyenne* sequence displayed every section well and effectively developed and sold the sustained drama of the segment. The Troopers scored 69.90 for sixth place.

Denver's own Blue Knights nipped at the Troopers' spurs with a powerful show of their own, with strong musical and visual repertoires and rapidly improving performances. Playing absorbing arrangements of *Moorside March* and *Punchinello*—an interesting and likable collection of themes—the Blue Knights showed good progress toward mastering their challenging Zingali drill. Scoring 68.60, the Blue Knights took seventh place.

The Sunset Regiment, hailing from southern Arizona in general and based in Tucson, looked and sounded sharp. With their best performance in the region-wide series of *Drums Along the Rockies* shows, the Sunset Regiment integrated all sections into a well-defined and enjoyable *Les Miserables* production. Quite unfortunately, this was the corps' last contest for 1989. The Sunset Regiment scored 53.40 for eighth.

The Quad City Knights of Bettendorf, IA, led a pack of three corps scoring in the high 40s. The Knights' bright rock sound carried well, and their valiant but small color guard helped out with a fantastic wedding party near the finale. The Quad City Knights scored 49.40 for ninth place.

The Spartans of Vancouver, WA, featured professional-sounding soprano soloists, and in fact their soprano line in general was a real highlight. With visual sparkle and a spirited, energetic and very capable color

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guard, the Spartans took 10th place with 48.90.

After scoring higher and placing above Quad City and the Sunset Regiment earlier in the week, Tulsa's Black Gold must have been disappointed with tonight's result. The corps is improving, however, and pulled off an impressive drill that fit well in the big stadium. Black Gold's color guard had some fine moments and made the corps something special. Scoring 48.00, Black Gold came in 11th.

The Rocky Mountain Magic of nearby Thornton, CO, rounded out the field. This small corps performed with a great deal of spirit, and entertained the crowd quite well with tunes from *Little Shop of Horrors*. With plenty of showmanship and bright visuals based on the theme, the corps scored 33.10 for 12th position.

Jim Farrell, Magic's director, provided further excitement before the contest's finale when he used the public address announcer to propose marriage to a young woman who is apparently now his fiancée. It was a touching scene in section 309, except perhaps for Mr. Farrell's many secret admirers.

The contest ran like clockwork again this year, and the contest staff provided a beautiful computerized recap sheet that showed all of the subcaption scores in a readable format, and included a separate placement recap, showing placements instead of scores for every caption and subcaption. Our congratulations to contest director Lynn Lindstrom and all of her staff and volunteers for such an intelligently presented and well-operated show.