

Southeast Asia

by Christopher Atkinson

While the corps of the United States are the originators of the modern drum and bugle corps activity, the universal appeal of excellence in the marching arts is something that is appreciated around the world. In addition to following the grand achievements of the corps of the United States, marching fans in other countries have plenty of opportunity to witness the level of local marching and performing talent, figuratively in their own backyards.

Drum corps has become quite popular in the United Kingdom, somewhat throughout Europe and Canada, and in Japan. Most people are surprised, though, when they hear that drum corps and marching activities are something of a burgeoning movement in even more exotic locales. Drum corps as a movement, whether in the traditional form of the American model or in more brass band-oriented contexts, is gaining steam even in places like Southeast Asia.

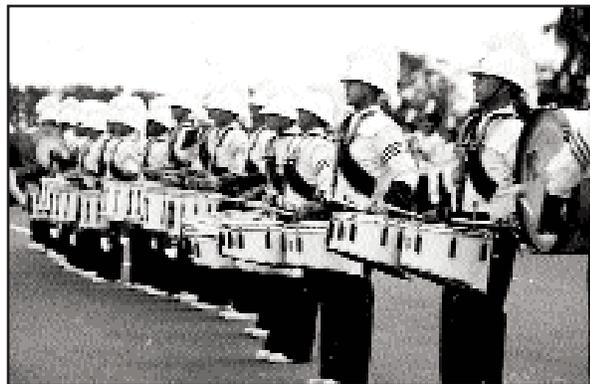
For American fans, drum corps in Asia over the recent past is synonymous with names like Yuehfu. Certainly, Taipei Yuehfu

is the most visible to American fans in terms of drum corps from the region, because they have made several trips to appear at shows in the Drum Corps International tour and during championships, walking away with international division titles.

The corps was founded in 1996 and is named after the imperial Chinese bureau responsible for maintaining the country's musical literature. Interestingly, while this corps has taken its cues from the wind music of the region, it has taken its arranging cues

from such well-known names as Chuck Naffier and Ralph Hardimon.

The mix has ensured thrilling drum corps for fans over several years at the beginning of the 21st century, both in Taiwan and in America.



Knights of Caloocan, Manila, Philippines, November 26, 1995 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

From Japan, corps like the Yokohama Scouts have performed for American audiences on the DCI tour. Yokohama has also brought its own brand of drum corps to Drum Corps Associates in the form of the Yokohama Inspires, which performed at DCA events in 2002 to enthusiastic crowd support.

Other corps, like Bay Max, Cherry Blossoms, Imperial Sound, Legends of Angels, Phoenix Regiment, Pride of Soka, the Renaissance Vanguard, Sonic Lancers and Tokyo Phoenix have performed in Japanese drum corps championship events. These corps are perhaps more alike drum corps in America than different in that they program selections from American popular culture (largely movies) and from styles as diverse as Celtic dance ("Riverdance") and pop music (Beatles, Queen, Toto and others).

Some corps have gone toward the "total package" shows, not unlike many division I corps in America. These shows are either based on music by one artist or in one style, or on a cohesive theme (like humanity, in the case of one Cherry Blossoms show).

Judges from DCI have evaluated

(Top to bottom) Putri Santa Ursula at the Indonesian Grand Prix Finals, 1994, in Jakarta (photo by Bill Bjil from the collection of Drum Corps World); Taipei Yuehfu, Republic of China, August 2000 (photo by Harry Heidelmark from the collection of Drum Corps World); Philippine Marines Drum & Bugle Corps, October 27, 1996 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).



competitions in Japan; this is a good example of how the American activity has influence around the world, given the frame of reference DCI judges bring to evaluation of performance.

Chumpol Techakraisri, a former marching member of the Madison Scouts, is an important player in the drum corps movement in Thailand. His comments illustrate some of the realities of drum corps around the world.

"In Thailand, there have not been any drum and bugle corps, in the American sense," he said. "It might be a small group in a military unit, for instance; a bugle with no valves, just for fanfare. Such groups perform for the king and his family in royal activities.

"On the other hand, marching band seems to be very popular. In 1999, after my friend and I came back from being in the Madison Scouts, many bands started to know DCI and tried to imitate DCI shows in many ways. For example, show concepts, more members, playing loud and high notes, less woodwind instruments.

"Especially in year 2000, when DCI allowed B-flat instruments in drum corps, performance of brass bands on the field are very close to drum corps. Now, many brass bands in Thailand are sometimes called drum corps because of their appearance and their productions.

"Many students in Thailand know about the Blue Devils and Cavaliers. They know other division I, II and III corps and DCA, less well."

Techakraisri notes that most of the groups in Thailand are not stand-alone organizations, but rather, affiliates of a school or military unit, largely due to concerns with personnel and financial resources.

He continues, "Since drum corps is primarily of Western culture, the group of people that are interested in this kind of art is very small. Few Thai people are aware of the various instruments or even the difference between woodwind and brass instruments.

"The target group is therefore very small



Olayama, Japan, Police Drum & Bugle Corps, 1988 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Illusian Magic from Japan, July 30, 1998 at Marion, OH (photo by Dan Scafidi from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Bugle Corps, performing martial music and acting as the goodwill ambassador of the corps and, occasionally, the nation.

for members and fans. Also, due to the hot weather, most of middle class people don't have a chance to experience this kind of art.

"Upper classes prefer indoor activities rather than traditional drum corps for weather-related reasons. For the same reason, watching outdoor sporting events is

Daanghari, from Navotas, Metro Manila, Philippines, has also been an active local corps, but has not performed in any major American drum corps events. A "Drum Corps Philippines" organization existed until the mid-1990s. Current marching music activities are largely centered in Metro Manila

and associated with education.

Perhaps the most surprising story has to do with the strength of the drum corps/marching music activity in Indonesia. René Conway, director of the marching band Bontang Pupuk Kaltim, of Bontang, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, and a representative of the Dynasty Group in Asia, relates some of the interesting aspects of the pursuit of marching and music



Kansai Drum & Bugle Corps at the January 18, 1977 All-Japan Marching Festival (photo by T. Komatsu from the collection of Drum Corps World).

not popular with the Thai people."

Techakraisri also notes that financial considerations hold the drum corps activity back in Thailand. "Due to a small target group, it's very hard to get corporate support," he said. "Government support is possible, but they do not know about drum corps. To survive by themselves, corps depend on member dues, selling tickets or appearance fees."

It is difficult for a corps to stay afloat because of the limited audience potential. And with limited resources, most people are not willing to pay to see drum corps shows.

Drum corps also exist in the Philippines, though the movement has much of its contact with the American drum corps activity. The reasons for this are much the same as they are in Thailand: the economic issues that followed in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 frequently played havoc with intents for drum corps, which is a capital-intensive activity that requires a fair amount of convincing of its importance and value for people not familiar with it.

Perhaps the most famous Filipino drum and bugle corps is that of the Philippines Marine Corps. Established in 1963, this group is well-known throughout the Philippines and performs in much the same style as the United States Marine Drum and

excellence in the region.

"The marching band activity is quite widespread throughout the country," he says. "There are marching bands that join the National Championships (Grand Prix Marching Band) from West and South Sumatra; Jakarta; West, Central and East Java; Bali; South Sulawesi; East Kalimantan; and others.

"There is only one *real* drum and bugle corps (in name only for all intents and purposes). That's Garuda Flight Drum and Bugle Corps. But most of the larger groups are comprised of brass, percussion and color

Padang Semen Drum & Bugle Corps, sponsored by Padang Portland Cement, 1991, at the Indonesian Championships (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).



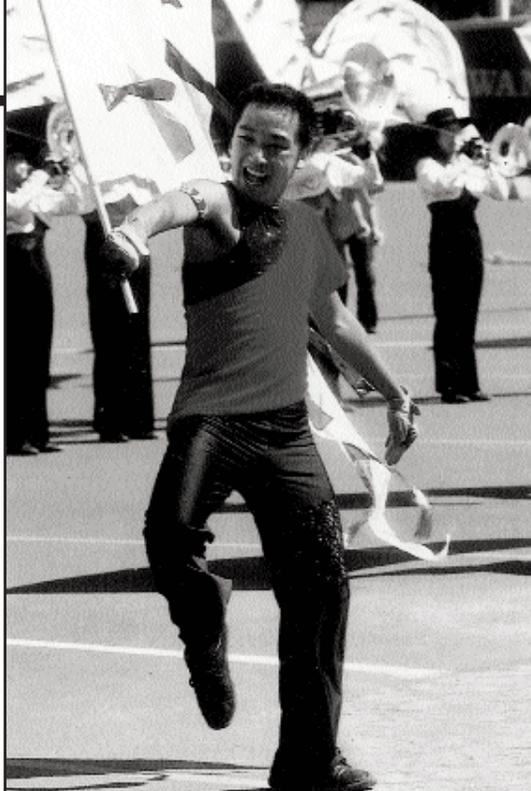
guard and are modeled after the drum and bugle corps of DCI."

Conway continues, "The activity has taken on a larger scale since the early 1990s, when a famous cigarette company named Sampoerna started a marching band that performed for all sorts of government events, toured the country, appeared in commercials on television and at movie theaters.

"Perhaps their biggest claim to fame was two appearances in the Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade in 1990 and 1991. My colleagues and I later went on to consult with several marching bands in 1992 before moving to East Kalimantan to instruct with marching band Pupuk Kaltim.

"In 1994, we became the first marching band from outside of Jakarta to win the national championships since the competition began in 1980. At that point, many other groups began to realize the potential of units from the rural areas and the overall quality of the bands began to grow."

Conway says marching bands in Indonesia generally fall into five categories (in no particular order): 1) school bands -- sponsored by high schools and universities, comprised of students and/or alumni; 2) company bands --



Yokohama Inspires Senior Drum & Bugle Corps, Japan, at the 2002 DCA Championships in Scranton, PA (photo by Alan Winslow from the collection of Drum Corps World).

either younger (elementary school aged) bands or some military groups comprised primarily of bell

lyres, drums and Pianikas, although there are some which have limited brass instrumentation.

"I'd say that there are probably more marching bands now than in the past, but I might be mistaken; my experience only goes back to the early 1990s,"

Conway says.

"The activity is definitely flourishing in that there are many new competitions lately. The level of awareness in terms of quality of technique and musicianship is starting to grow at a fast pace. This is in part due to the availability of DCI videos and clinics sponsored by Dynasty USA, Premier, Yamaha and Pearl over the past few years."

Conway notes, "Many of the marching

competitions in Indonesia are held indoors in basketball stadiums, therefore limiting the numbers that can be fielded, although some of the more recent competitions are being held in soccer stadiums.

"However, most groups still have between 70-110 members, with only a few going above these numbers. This is in part due to the high costs of instruments and operational costs of supporting the bands. The economy took a big blow in 1997-1998 and a lot of bands have gone through some hard times.

"Things are slowly starting to come back to normal. According to information provided by Dynasty USA, Jakarta's Wijaya Music was the third largest international dealer of Dynasty instruments before the economic crisis. That alone can give you some idea of how large the marching band market was in Indonesia!"

Conway also notes the age range is a little younger than in America. "Regarding the ages, on average, most competitive marching bands are comprised of junior high- and high school-aged members, although there are many groups that have members who are in college or working," he says.

"The junior drum bands have members as young as seven and the university and open class bands have members up to 26 years of



"Phantom of the Opera," San Sebastian College Drum & Bugle Corps, Cavite City, Philippines, October 27, 1996 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

sponsored by large companies as extracurricular activities for their employees and their children or the community; 3) independent bands -- sponsored by outside sources such as foundations, individuals and community/youth organizations; 4) military and police bands -- in addition to the traditional military bands, each of the

academies has its own band and among the best of these is the Police Academy in Central Java; 5) drum bands -- these are usually



Bay Max, Yokohama, Japan, at the 1995 DCI Championships in Buffalo, NY (photo by Ron Walloch from the collection of Drum Corps World).

age and older, but it is rare for anyone to continue to be an active member above the age of 32."

In terms of repertoire, Conway notes, "By and large, many competitive groups model their shows after DCI programs, although there are occasionally groups that perform music from their respective provinces (using traditional Gamelan instruments and the

like). In 2002, the University of Indonesia Marching Band did a show based on Indonesian regional music with jazz and classical influences, including a lot of visual ideas taken from the Broadway



Gita Teladan Drum & Bugle Corps, Philippines, 1989 (photo by Arnem Batobara from the collection of Drum Corps World).



27th Lancers, Philippines, November 26, 1995 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).



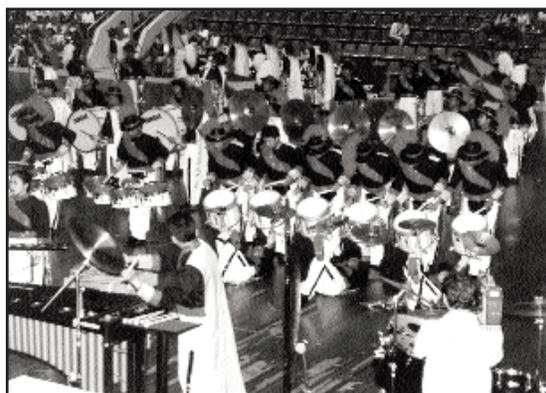
Drum Corps Indonesia at the World Marching Band Championships in Hamar, Norway (photo by Hans Kloppert from the collection of Drum Corps World).

show 'Stomp.' It was a very entertaining show and the instructors were able to meld the minimalist ideas of 'Stomp' and interpret them onto the marching field using buckets, brooms and other basic cleaning tools."

Conway notes, "Our band has

performed a wide variety of pieces, from Blue Devils versions such as *Pinball Wizard* and *T.O.*, to Madison Scouts versions of *Concerto de Aranjuez* and *Strawberry Soup*, to original arrangements of Western songs like *Santorini* and *Charge of the Batmobile*, as well as Indonesian pop and traditional songs.

"This year for our performance at the



Pupuk Kaltim at the Grand Prix Championships, Jakarta, Indonesia, December 31, 1995 (photo by Iwan Christanto from the collection of Drum Corps World).

World Showband Championships in Monza, Italy, we will be performing Jim Wren's arrangements of *Nessus Dorma* and *Pagliacci* (based on Phantom Regiment's 1991 show) and Yanni's *Santorini*."

Some of the marching activity in Indonesia has shades of the country's more militaristic past under Suharto. Conway

notes, "In the past, there was an organization sponsored by the government called PDBI that held competitions which were more athletically oriented in nature, combining events such as 'speed marching' and 'Enduro' and various types of military-type formation competitions. These were mostly prevalent in the 1980s and before, although some still exist because they are

government-supported. Even the smallest villages had performing groups, granted the quality was not the level you see in today's field shows.

"Currently, there are some drum bands and military bands that primarily do parades and official ceremonies, but most groups generally base their programs on a field show. In addition, there are some color guards that occasionally perform exhibitions for grand opening ceremonies and also winter guard-type competition performances."

Bands are frequently sponsored by corporate interests in Indonesia. Conway remarks, "Our (sponsoring) company is the largest chemical fertilizer producer in Southeast Asia (ammonia and urea), called Pupuk Kalimantan Timur (abbreviated Pupuk Kaltim, meaning East Kalimantan Fertilizer).

"The second-place band over the past few years is sponsored by one of the largest cement companies in Indonesia called Semen Padang (in West Sumatra). There are several other bands sponsored by companies like this. There are others sponsored by schools and universities, Muslim educational foundations, police foundations, private foundations and the like."

In addition to the impressive nature of the marching activity in Indonesia, Conway notes that the activity is also prevalent in Malaysia, which is adjacent to Indonesia.

"I have consulted with a group from a high school named Victoria Institution located in Kuala Lumpur. They are previous national champions and have performed in a couple of World Showband competitions in Australia and Canada, and will be joining the championship in Monza this July," he



University Gojah Mada, Indonesia, 1991 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

says. "In general, the style of bands in Malaysia are based on the British style, including what they call the 'tattoo' type of competition (performing a military-type drill in a relatively small arena, as is common with English groups like the Band

of the Black Watch, the Band of H.M. Royal Marines and the Band of the Coldstream Guards). "They do not use pit instruments except for marching bells and xylophones. They have not, until this past season, allowed the use of color guards. In addition, many groups still use bagpipes in their performances. This is also indicative of the British style, which was prevalent due to the British occupation until the mid-1940s."

The drum corps and marching music activity in Southeast Asia, while not widely known by American drum corps audiences, is alive and well and is creating impressive displays of visual and musical precisions for audiences in the region and, occasionally, to audiences in America and elsewhere. These corps add much credibility to the argument that drum corps and marching music truly have universal appeal, regardless of performer and audience background.

Certainly, the potential good that drum corps is known for in its American context is an excellent reason for drum corps to be pursued elsewhere and there are many hard-working people that are bringing the dream of competitive drum corps and marching band to life for young people in the region. These corps and bands of Asia, performing music and drill in DCI style or pursuing their own creative approaches, broaden the activity in new, innovative and important ways that transcend national and cultural boundaries.

For a photograph and bio of Chris Atkinson, turn to page 71.



Yakohama Scouts, Japan, 1999 (photo by Ron Walloch from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Pride of Soka, Tokyo, Japan, August 11, 1997 at the DCI Championships in Orlando, FL (photo by Harry Heidelmark from the collection of Drum Corps World).