



The Royal Gazette

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.theroyalgazette.com

Article published Jun 10, 2005

Drumline Festival may become an annual event as 10,000 spectators cheer on the bands

BERMUDA'S first-ever Drumline Marching Band Festival that drew more than 10,000 totally uninhibited, singing and cheering spectators to the National Sports Centre was such a tremendous all-round success that plans are already in the works to make it an annual event.

The world-famed Howard University Marching Band from Washington, DC and three other college and high school bands from the US were joined by five Bermuda bands three weeks ago providing what Dr. Melvin Bassett termed "an enriching spectacle for all concerned".

Dr. Bassett is the man who conceived the idea of the festival. He summed up as "extremely positive" the feedback that has been flowing to the organising committee, not only from the participating American institutions, but from Bermuda Government sources and other local interests who see tremendous tourism potential.

"Also there are signals from a number of colleges and high schools that are larger and as spectacular if not more so than the one we saw three weeks ago.

"When I approached the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Dr. Ewart Brown, he suggested ways for an annual festival, such as having charters from cities where the bands originate, for their parents, friends, fans to accompany their bands to Bermuda. The potential is there," said Dr. Bassett.

Overall, he said, the objectives of that initial festival were definitely met.

"First and foremost it was to stimulate young musicians and music teachers in the country and next to fill the National Sports Centre and to excite Bermuda. We are gratified with the support from the community at large. It was what we anticipated, and that was the reason why we produced 10,000 tickets, which were sold."

Aside from the uniqueness of the festival, we discerned there is a general public interest in marching bands; there was the impact of the movie *Drumline*, and that coupled with the large number of Bermudians who have studied in the US and associated with colleges with marching bands; also a large number of Howard University and Livingston College graduates virtually guaranteed the success.

PLANNING for the festival began in September last year when contacts were made with overseas bands. The committee came together just after Christmas with the support of the Ministry of Community Affairs & Sport. The Minister, Dale

Butler, underscored his support by arranging for his Director of Community Education Mrs. Pat Chapman to serve as co-chairman along with Dr. Bassett. Other executive members were David Durham and Crystal Bean of Youshi Productions, and Mrs. Meredith Lee, one of the directors of the Sandys Foundation. Most the funds to be derived from Drumline will go towards the Sandys Foundation which was the original motivation for Drumline.

Dr. Bassett had responsibility for co-ordinating the three bands along with Howard University. They were the Frederick Douglass High School Marching Band of Baltimore, the Maryland Livingstone College Marching Band of North Carolina and the **Port Chester High School Marching Band of New York.**

"The Howard U. Band were, in fact, the guests of the Ministry of Community Affairs for the annual Bermuda Day Parade. We simply took advantage of their visit and built Drumline Bermuda around them," said Dr. Bassett.

"Dealing with the logistics of the operation, the committee had to organise travel for the bands. The latter paid a portion of their airfare which we supplemented with a portion from the Ministry of Tourism. With hotel costs being what they are we had to find alternative accommodation for such large groups.

"The Commanding Officer of the Bermuda Regiment, Lt. Col. Eddie Lamb, facilitated the accommodation of Port Chester and Frederick Bands at Warwick Camp. Howard U. were accommodated at Willowbank Hotel in Somerset; and Livingston College at Messina House on Boaz Island."

ONE of the biggest challenges for the organisers was co-ordinating transportation for the participants, as they were spread halfway across the island.

"It all worked out extraordinarily smoothly, without a hitch, with the co-operation of the Ministries of Tourism, Community Affairs and the Public Transportation, along with the Bermuda Regiment," said Dr. Bassett.

"They all played a part in helping us to carry out the challenging logistical part of the project. At least two buses were required every time they moved. Howard required three buses along with two or three trucks for their instruments.

"It was a massive undertaking getting them to the schools they visited, the parade and to the National Sports Centre. As many as 12 buses were co-ordinated to pick them up at the end of the programme.

"Regarding the feedback being received from the institutions abroad, all four bands have asked us to consider their returning to Bermuda. They were all excited, not only with their participation in Drumline and the Bermuda Day Parade, in which Howard and Fredrick Douglass High School took part.

"They enjoyed Bermuda generally, and interacting with Bermudian students of both college and high school age at their schools and at the stadium. Two bands went to Berkeley Institute and CedarBridge where they conducted clinics.

"That exposure and interaction was part of the objective of the Drumline project, to inspire our aspiring young musicians. Additionally, the visitors were taken on land and sea tours. It was an enriching experience for their students in so many ways and at the same time, they made a great contribution towards enriching our young people.

"We already have one student saying he's going to college, and he told his parents he's going to one with a marching band. So the objective as conceived

has been achieved, even if there is only one Bermudian planning to go to college with a marching band. Bermuda was not left out in the cold. There was representation from the Bermuda Regiment Band, the Bermuda Island Pipe Band and the Gombey Drummers, and making their debut to a great ovation was the Bermuda Middle School Drumline.

"Our decision to form the Bermuda Middle School Drumline proved to be the highlight. When we initiated the Drumline project, we did not anticipate having a Bermuda band involved. But we used the opportunity to pull together boys and girls from each of our middle schools. They trained for eight weeks on a weekly basis, and daily at the National Sports Centre during the week leading up to the event.

"Eight weeks prior they began as typical, excited young, bright potential musicians. Virtually undisciplined, they performed as an extremely co-ordinated, disciplined corps on the night. They have become proficient percussionists. We were so impressed with the discipline of the group and the contrast over the eight weeks.

"This will be an ongoing project to keep the Bermuda Drumline as one of the features of the Middle School programme. Each school will have its own Drumline and will combine on occasions in future. So we have been able to use this venture as an opportunity to engage our students and to form a percussion group."

DR. Bassett credited Wendell (Shine) Hayward, Government's Education Officer for the Arts, with enabling this to happen. He had the support of the Ministry of Education to buy drums and he co-ordinated the Drumline. They also had the support of Clifford Wesley of New York, who came to Bermuda on three occasions to prepare the students for the Festival.

"I believe we will possibly see this on an annual basis. There is interest by the Ministry of Tourism for it to happen, because it has tremendous tourist potential. Youshi Productions, along with our team, are prepared to run with it. They are already planning to host a Marching Band Festival next year."

Dr. Bassett added: "Personally, because of the original objectives in my role as a school principal, I do not think I can afford the time we had to devote to do it again, so I am happy to turn it over to another group. It should be done because of the tremendous success it was and its tremendous tourist potential, as well as to facilitate our young people."
