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**Grand National Championships**

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## A Grand Evening at Grand Nationals

by Michael Boo

A quarter century ago, Larry McCormick of McCormick's Enterprises had a dream to bring together many of the finest marching bands in the country for a rousing display of musical brotherhood, sharing the spirit of competitive excellence with one another while pushing the activity forward towards the 21st Century.

On November 11, 2000, after three days of incredible performances, twelve of the finest marching bands in the country capped off BOA's 2000 Grand National Championships with incredible performances, delivered in front of a huge and captivated audience of music educators, fans, parents, and other band members. Despite being BOA's silver anniversary, everything about this event was solid gold.

At the end of Semifinals, Class Champions were announced, based on placement in the 32-band Semifinals competition. Class A Champion honors was awarded to Bellbrook HS, followed by Bassett HS in second place and Jackson Academy in third. Class AA Champion honors went to Tarpon Springs HS, followed by Ooltewah HS and King Philip HS. Class AAA honors went to Marian Catholic HS, followed by Plymouth-Canton Education Park and Carmel HS.

Twelve bands were announced to perform in Finals, based on having the highest scores in Semifinals. These bands then drew for position of performance. After the drawing, the order for Finals was announced as: Bellbrook, Tarpon Springs, Plymouth-Canton, Broken Arrow, Lake Park, Centerville, Marian Catholic, Carmel, Center Grove, Union, Northmont, and Lawrence Central.

After a rousing medley of songs by BOA favorite Sandi Patty, whom has become quite a marching band fan in her own right, the 25th Anniversary Finals was set to begin.

MARIAN CATHOLIC - 1st place, 95.95  
 "The Tragic Medusa" propelled Marian Catholic HS (Chicago Heights, IL) to yet another BOA Grand Nationals Championship, their seventh. Movements from the Christopher Rouse music included Curse and Transfiguration, Meditation and Insanity, and Rage and Renewal. Make no mistake; this is angry, unsettling music. But it was delivered in such a polished manner, with such attention to nuance and detail, that the audience ate up every grating, disturbing moment. Pulsating, throbbing, and stabbing like a thousand stilettos falling from the sky, the music was bitter and cataclysmic, and so were the angular and deformed drill movements. Every instant captured a sense of torturous rigor that drained the audience while making their mouths fall open in total amazement, forcing the audience to put

as much energy into listening and watching as the band members did in bringing the production to fruition.

PLYMOUTH-CANTON - 2nd place, 94.60

When a giant lit signboard has an entire audience in the palm of its digital hand, you know you're in for something that is totally unique from anything you've ever seen on the field before. Plymouth-Canton Education Park's (Plymouth, MI) "Reflections On Obsessions" included; Bizarro, What's That Spell?, Ives' The Unanswered Question, Transmission, and selections from The Matrix.

Commencing somewhat angry and confused, the show soon took a satirical broadside at the icon Barbie, complete with blond wigs, self-adulation in front of mirrors and a digital IQ test that the Barbies failed, (not knowing what 2+2 equaled). The atmospheric Ives selection was thoroughly haunting, as placards of words about greed and self-indulgence were turned over to form a giant American flag, a wry commentary on contemporary values. Even the 2nd Amendment was held up to scrutiny, with the show ending with a bombardment of warnings of the perils of contemporary life.

TARPON SPRINGS - 3rd place, 93.55

Spanning great and important developments of the 20th Century, Tarpon Springs HS (Tarpon Springs, FL) "The American Century 1900-2000" was largely based on a recurring visit to Aaron Copland's Appalachian Spring, with representative music of each of the decades interspersed on the way. The wonder of the discovery of flight, the automotive assembly line, and the big band swing era anchored the early part of the century. Later, the turbulence that held much of the latter century hostage (and even a get-down salute to Michael Jackson and a poke at cell phones) pushed the show towards the 21st Century in a most captivating way, ending in "2000" spelled out as the "You've Got Mail" voice from America Online software bade the audience "Goodbye."

LAWRENCE CENTRAL - 4th place, 92.60

Exploring Andrew Lloyd Webber's more serious liturgical music, based on his Requiem, Lawrence Central HS (Indianapolis, IN) delivered "The Passion Dances" with a sensitive stylistic control and smoothness that would befit a fine symphonic orchestra.

Eerily commencing with the main leitmotif theme from the original production, the band progressed into the more joyous Hosanna, infused with jazzy riffs. The solemn Pie Jesu followed, restrained and beautiful, touching the emotions like a heartfelt prayer. Ending positive and upbeat, the curtain of sorrow was lifted in grand fashion as the band recapped the Hosanna theme with one final push, ending like the glorious refrain of a cathedral organ pounding out a message of hope and glory.

CARMEL - 5th place, 91.70

With an original music program, Carmel HS (Carmel, IN) went beneath the surface of paintings and sculpture in "The Art of Life," taking an interpretive peek at the creative process of art through the ages. Sculptures Awake, Living Painting, and The Next One provided sort of an historical, non-literal timeline of the development of art.

With elements of jazz infused amidst the symphonic strains, the opener served to animate the guard out of suspended animation, while the next work echoed strains of baroque sensibilities as the guard picture framed small ensembles and danced upon a blow-up of the Mona Lisa. Whimsy highlighted the quirkiness of the closer, with the "boing-boing" of pogo sticks bringing smiles to all as the music became more electronic and animated, ending with the wind players bouncing in the air like popping kernels of popcorn.

CENTERVILLE - 6th, 90.65

Always radiant, the Centerville HS Jazz Band (Centerville, OH) delivered an

upbeat "Adventures in Jazz," to The Contender, Blackbird, and Minuano. The bright, sequined orange guard costumes stood out in stark contrast to the band's black uniforms, directing the eye to a continuous flurry of jubilant equipment spins.

Solid, improvising soloists captured the spirit of a big band in a big, big way, as the largest big band to ever grace any venue swung its way into the hearts of the audience. It's always interesting to see how this ensemble captures the idiomatic nuances of a jazz ensemble with a grace that makes one forget they're watching a marching band.

#### CENTER GROVE - 7th place, 90.40

Turning the sharp corners of a large painted grid, Center Grove HS (Greenwood, IN) commenced Andrew Boysen's Scherzo and Ovations with a structured geometry that was to be a visual theme through much of the show. Quivering woodwind motifs emanated out of the musical stew like a swarm of bees hovering over a meadow of clover. There continued to be a strong sense of orchestral restraint throughout the show, as balance and blend were primo considerations from start to end, with the band's award-winning guard concentrating more on accompaniment rather than being a focal point as so often in the past. From beginning to end, this was a show that appeared seamless in design and execution, seeming to end way too quickly, akin to the passage of time experienced by a surf boarder riding a perfect wave into shore.

#### NORTHMONT - 8th place, 89.80

With music from Carmina Burana, Northmont HS (Clayton, OH) captured the dark richness of the source material in "Carpe Diem," exploring a number of the best-known movements from the sacred and profane cantata. Pulsating brass chords underscored an amplified chorus of robed and hooded penitent monks, emphatically proclaiming the text in the native language. The searing strains of O Fortuna brought the show to near conclusion, with the band scurrying to the far back corner of the field as two flutes wrapped up proceedings with a final statement of poetic reverence.

#### LAKE PARK - 9th place, 88.10

Quite a stylistic departure for Lake Park HS (Roselle, IL), "April 19, 1995, To Bind The Nation's Wounds" was a heavy message program of intense darkness and pathos, in memory of those who lost their lives in the Oklahoma City bombing of the Murrah Federal Building.

With the guard in garb that appeared soiled by the destructive elements, children were shown at play in unsuspecting innocence in the day care center of the building, with the accompanying frivolity of the music suddenly interrupted by the surprise bombing as the entire band was covered by the huge darkened silk. The music became painful and labored, soaked in anguish, but ultimately ending with hope and optimism for a future that heals the wounds of a country devastated by the senseless act.

#### UNION - 10th place, 87.65

And now for something completely different. Union HS (Tulsa, OK) turned the audience on its collective ear with "Distorted Reality," at times an extremely bizarre soufflé of abstract sounds and psychedelic guard visuals, like a dream one might have after consuming too much pepperoni pizza late at night.

Occasionally threatening, sometimes purposely confused, and always on the edge, this was a show, delivered with conviction, that forced people to open their ears and minds to accept previously unexplored concepts, which were overlaid upon traditional marching band elements to form the essence of the distorted reality, ending with brutal chords wafting out of the side tunnel.

#### BELLBROOK - 11th place, 87.10

It's not every year that a Class A band makes it into Finals on the basis of

placing in the top twelve bands in Semifinals. Often, the Class A Champion performs at the start of Finals in exhibition, but this year, Class Champion Bellbrook HS (Bellbrook, OH) defied the odds and outscored several excellent bands from larger band classes to enter Finals in competition.

Frenetic, hurried, and edgy, "Tyranny of the Clock" demonstrated how time can enslave humanity if society allows it to do so. Fanfare, Mechanism, Clock Worship, Busy Lives, Regrets, and Killing of the Clock were rather serious-minded, by a short snippet of As Time Goes By was thrown in for comic relief.

**BROKEN ARROW** - 12th place, 85.80

With 28 massive columns refocusing the borders of the field, Broken Arrow HS (Broken Arrow, OK) covered moods of frenzy and introspection with Bacchanale Opus 20 in a program titled, "What's Past is Prologue."

Lots of sensitive woodwind runs and solo voices soaring above a chordal accompaniment created a tasteful ambiance that was tender and reflective.

There was no overt theme or message, just solid music and visual interpretation. The ending of the show was a big "ahhhh" from both the band and the audience, as the band faced backfield in one of the loveliest chorale endings seen on the field in years.

The 25th Anniversary of BOA's existence was a glorious party of excellence, a celebration of the best America's youth has to offer. It was truly an event and time to behold.

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