

Report: Southern Classic 1 (29th January 2006)

Matt Johnson

Winterguard paid its first visit to the South with the first of this year's two Southern Classic competitions, sponsored by the Southern Knights. With all those units who had not yet debuted at Stoke in attendance – plus several coming out for their second performance of the season – we were treated to a contest full of contrasts and some great shows from the competing guards.

Cadet Class

We opened the day's competition with the **Southern Knights Rugrats**, with their show entitled "Puzzle" to Hot Chocolate's "Put You Together Again". With 16 members on the floor – a big Cadet Class guard – they got off to a good start with the solo silk and the gradual introduction of more silks to the floor, working very well with the soundtrack and proving to be a hallmark of solid and achievable writing from beginning to end. With a very good combination of sabre, movement and silk shortly after, including a well-executed sabre toss, we moved into a yellow double flag section which was generally effective but occasionally got lost in the clutter of the yellow floor. The partner work with the silks leading into the finale was very convincing indeed, taking the show to an elegant conclusion with the performers leaving the floor. This was a very competent first performance; there were a handful of timing problems in places, but these will undoubtedly improve. With the effective and elegant writing and books, this was a great start and will provide ample opportunity to improve and expand as the season progresses. *(1st, 68.50)*

Next were **Moonlight**, with their show to the music from "Billy Elliot". With lots of scenery, including a ballet barre and a stage with drapes, all the members bar one were dressed as ballet dancers, with the remaining one as a boxer – concept shouted from the rooftops! The opening solo sabre was good – the ensemble movement was generally reasonable but slightly unclear at times. The guard members showed a few nerves on their season debut: there was noticeable insecurity over a lot of the vocabulary and timing throughout the show. There was a very good mood change into the second motive, although the timing of the change on the floor was slightly questionable with relation to the soundtrack; however, this was rescued by some exuberant movement and flag work. The use of their stage to reveal a guard member is a lovely visual moment, as will be the double flag hit when the timing works out – it wasn't quite there for this performance. Overall, the set pieces show promise, but the development and progression through the show is rather fractured at times – that said, this is likely to be an "early season product" and so things will change as we move through the contests. This was a very good effort by the guard – now the nerves of the first performance are shaken out, I look forward to seeing how this very promising show fares in future shows. *(2nd, 32.00)*

Finally in Cadet Class, we welcomed a new unit from the Guardsmen organization, the **Guardsmen Nippers**, to the floor. While there were only four members on the floor, the "production values" were high, with sumptuous red and gold costuming and curtain flats for their show to music from Disney's "Beauty and the Beast". The movement opening was solid, with slight interpretation differences but elegant and legible throughout. Both the movement and flag work throughout were generally reasonable, with the guard showing understanding of accent points and delivery, but also a few nerves and some insecurity with the show. The concept is clearly understood by the members – but only having four of them is going to mean that producing effect will be a struggle. The writing is good, if perhaps very slightly on the weak side when compared to other Cadet Class guards, and occasionally not entirely reflecting the soundtrack. The show is fairly clearly a "work in progress", but there is plenty of scope for development here – this was a good first showing for this new unit, and I look forward to seeing how the programme evolves in later contests. *(3rd, 24.00)*

Junior Class

Essex Marching Corps, a new organization to the Winterguard circuit this year, opened the Junior Class with their show “A Latin Sway”. Their opening movement feature was solid, with several good hits elegantly introducing the silks. An early silk sequence stuttered noticeably, but was recovered with a reverse sequence with much better timing. Staging and forms were generally good if occasionally rather unclear; functional and legible, but not much else. Introduction of the new silks halfway through the show went very well indeed, and the set piece was delivered quite reasonably. However, the vocabulary employed in both books throughout was unadventurous – the lack of any weapon work was also quite surprising. The ending wasn’t particularly clear, and the members were apparently not confident in its execution; this was in contrast to other parts of the show where execution was generally solid, particularly where the coordination between the writing and the soundtrack was understood. This was a creditable first performance – I did get the feeling that the members may be able to handle further challenges in the writing; this, along with improvement in execution and the portrayal of concept will help to improve this unpretentious but viable show. A good first outing in Winterguard, and I look forward to seeing more from this new organization in the future. (*6th, 30.0*)

Next to perform were the **Guardsmen Cadets**, with their “playground” themed show. They got off to a very good start indeed – the opening ensemble silk hit and feature was exquisitely timed and really solidly executed, staging movement and sabre solos. The change of motive into “Baggy Trousers” was handled with panache, and the development through the sabre and flag feature to reintroduce the full ensemble silks progressed logically and elegantly. Indeed, the silk work was a very strong suit in today’s performance, with noteworthy timing and execution throughout. The weapon book was also strong – some tough work was evident on sabres and rifles, which were generally handled well. The transition back to “This Used To Be My Playground” and the ending was slightly rocky, with a few timing issues becoming apparent, but if it can be brought up to the level of the rest of the show it will be absolutely fine. This was a very confident second performance which succeeded in engaging the audience and the judges – reflected in the contest-winning GE caption. The show has a great concept and challenging writing – as usual, Guardsmen communicate their shows during the performance very well. Some of the books are still rather ragged, but given that some of the vocabulary is demanding this is only to be expected. If the members can nail all the trickier pieces of this programme – and that looks very likely – this show will undoubtedly be in the running for the top three. (*1st, High General Effect, 60.4*)

The **Southern Knights** then made their season debut with their show entitled “One Opportunity”. The eye-catching blue costuming, along with a bold “moon” drape at the back of the arena, sets a striking scene with what looks like a fairly big guard out on the floor at the beginning of the show. The movement opening in the centreline form worked very well indeed, with the timing on the first accents being handled very accurately. Then – yet *more* members appear from behind the drape and add lots of power to an excellent full ensemble movement section to the music of Eminem. The movement section draws to a close with lots of tension being built – all the members are ready to pick up flags – we’re expecting a *big* hit at the resolution – but then there’s a complete mood change to classical music and a very elegant, “quiet” introduction of the silks! The equipment feature in the classical section was occasionally ragged at times but generally good, and staging for the various elements was handled very well indeed. We’re thrown back into Eminem with the finale: a superbly timed sequence showing off impressive ensemble skills. The execution in the movement book was incredibly strong; equipment was generally good with silks much stronger than weapons at the moment. The staging and writing shows great promise, and the concept is a keeper – once the mood changes become second nature, the effect should be amplified even more. A great start to the season, and I look forward to seeing this show develop. (*2nd, High Equipment, High Movement, High Ensemble, 56.9*)

Next were **Moonlight**, performing to music from “Mary Poppins” with an aptly costumed – and large – guard! Lots of props on the floor certainly set the scene, but perhaps served to clutter at times. The opening with the chimney sweeps appearing from behind the blinds worked very well indeed, and the progression from there to movement, silks and then a combination of both was generally reasonable, although the execution of the movement proved rather unconvincing. The equipment work was handled adequately – there were some real high points, such as the ensemble silk work near the middle of the show and the double flag introduction later, but weapons in particular were rather ragged. I also noticed that the full ensemble was rarely used – the show seems to focus on small groups a lot of the time, and the staging is not yet strong enough to direct attention to the right part of the floor. The finale was handled with aplomb – but the central part of the show seemed to lack direction; development and the correspondence with the soundtrack were very questionable at times. Having said this, the members made a huge effort in characterization, delivering the concept, and showing their enjoyment: these elements were a real success. The concept is charming, but the way that the show is currently constructed doesn’t quite gel yet. The programme can certainly work, and I would not put it past Moonlight to see them have a slow start to the season but end with a strong result – as they did with a similar type of show in the Cadet Class last year. (5th, 37.0)

Mayflower then performed their “Funkadelic” show – this floor certainly wins the prize for “loudest” in Winterguard this year! The movement opening worked well, and provided an excellent introduction for the groups of silks. Forms early on in the show were reasonable but not great; an early centreline crossing was not particularly legible, but the later “triangle” form worked very well indeed. The sabres took the floor, staged very well by the small group on movement and showing good vocabulary and execution. “Freak Out”, with the chained sabre and flag tosses was very solid, and forms and staging here were much better than earlier; however, the ensemble silk section here had a little trouble with the timing on their sequences. These small timing issues continued into the small group flag work, but were resolved with the integration of the full ensemble in “Dance”. The staging with interlocking sabres and movement near the end is particularly effective – showing off some very strong writing and execution. The ending itself is satisfying and builds the tension very well indeed, to be resolved by the powerful final movement statement. From my point of view, this show “felt” better than the performance at Stoke, so the judges’ reduced overall score is a mystery to me. This was a solid and generally confident performance with greater expression and understanding of the concept – this show will undoubtedly evolve, and I look forward to seeing the next iteration of it at Crystal Palace. (3rd, 53.8)

We concluded the Junior Class with a season debut from **Alliance**, with this being their first year in this class after a successful first outing last year in Cadet Class. With their show “Autumn Dreams”, using the music “California Dreaming” by Queen Latifah, their white floor with leaf motifs, tree flats and autumnal coloured clothing set the scene. The opening individualized movement was generally convincing, and the transition to silks worked very well, with a good accent reflecting the soundtrack. Timing and sequences were generally solid, and vocabulary showed elements of challenge – much of the sabre vocabulary was pacey and on the whole achieved adequately. Some transitions were rather sluggish and overlong on occasion, but this was countered by some particularly strong set pieces – some double full flag work swiftly followed by a centreline sequence was a highlight. The ensemble rifle work near the end was acceptable, with some very good writing manipulating the accents in the soundtrack. The finale was notable, with an excellent movement sequence, but the very ending felt a little “throwaway” and didn’t really offer a sense of completion. Overall, this was a very good first outing for Alliance in Junior Class; they communicated with the audience very well, and showed ample understanding of the concept and expressiveness, gaining them second place in General Effect. Other aspects of the show still require attention and practice in order to improve, but this was a very creditable performance; the show has the potential to do well this year. (4th, 51.3)

'A' Class

Mayflower began our 'A' Class competition today with their show entitled "Eden". The costuming and props in use certainly fit the concept well, and the opening movement was significantly more convincing than in the first performance. The guard did well to handle marching a gap – the forms were all still legible and a real strong point throughout. The introduction of the silks was a real success, and throughout the show silks and movement were both very strong suits. The sticks are an unusual addition to the show, and proved a little messy today – it looks like getting the timing to be sufficiently tight might be a tough job. The green sickle rifles were handled well, with good execution and vocabulary in evidence. The transition from the rifles to the solo sabre was noticeably rushed, but this was recovered by convincing staging and development through the solo, all the way to the three sabre feature at the front of the floor. The major mood change in the show takes a little time to materialize – this looks a little strange in my eyes when compared to the soundtrack, but I think it is slowly growing on me. The tough vocabulary across all the equipment disciplines was generally handled well, and the changes made to the finale really improved the development and resolution at the ending. This was a solid and much improved performance today – the changes that have been made added a lot of value and expression to this show and were rewarded with High General Effect. However, as with Mayflower's Junior Class, I'm at a loss to explain the overall score reduction from the judges. (*2nd, High General Effect, 59.5*)

Next to perform were **Reflexions** with their show featuring the music of Gwen Stefani – you couldn't get much further away from their previous year's repertoire if you tried! With a bold pink and purple floor, the initial costuming is a little bizarre, involving the performers wearing white masks on the front and back of their heads, and some white piece of clothing over some very loud and "funky" costumes underneath. The initial movement and effect is strong but rather unclear, as is the concept and delivery at the moment. The opening worked well with generally convincing execution; the ensemble rifle work soon after was particularly notable, with some very high risk vocabulary being handled really quite well. As we changed to the much more "bubblegum pop" second section, a very different guard took the arena – the members were much happier with the second half of the show than the first, and this came out in the performance – with vastly increased confidence, some great expression and a ton of effort and "fun" evident on the floor. The staging of the different features throughout was solid; however, the primary Achilles heel in this show was timing, to the extent that some forms and vocabulary were not legible. The ending was rather unsatisfying, and the audience was very uncertain as to when the show had ended – this aspect really does need to be fixed so the members can get the positive audience reaction they deserve. That said, the programme is undoubtedly viable and shows a lot of promise! This show might take a show or two to warm up and "find itself", but I have no doubt that Reflexions will be among the runners as this year's 'A' Class progresses. (*3rd, 46.4*)

Cohesion then took the floor, with their show to music from "Brooklyn". The movement and solo silk opening was reasonably effective as far as vocabulary and execution went, but the ensemble movement afterwards was very hard to read indeed. As we moved to the ensemble silks, the first accent reached was handled reasonably well, but timing proved to be an issue on the floor. There was some good execution at various points throughout this show – the double flag section, the combination section around halfway through the show, and the finale were all really strong and handled well by the members. However, the programme has some significant issues in how it manipulates accents and the stage: staging of the different elements was frequently insufficient, to the extent that I was left looking at the wrong side of the arena for the next set at times. Vocabulary throughout is slightly weak – equipment is reasonable, although some of the technique in use appears visibly unwieldy; but movement is generally rather unadventurous and, I suspect, is frequently not rigorous enough for the judges to reward. The members put a vast amount of effort into their performance, and this showed on the day with them performing what they were asked to perform really quite well. The main route to improving this show, I suspect, lies with the writing more than anything else. (*6th, 27.9*)

Next on the floor were the **Southern Knights** with their show “The Giving Tree”. I have to admit I did make a small “double take” with their new show costumes – the ochre and brown is (coincidentally) very similar to Mayflower’s ‘A’ Guard. I guess brown is the new black...! The opening movement feature worked very well indeed with some good expression coming to the fore, setting up some strong staging and forms. This led into a silk feature, which showed off some really good timing and ensemble skills. The introduction of the sabres and the correspondence with the soundtrack was very solid – each new sabre being introduced with a toss and some more excellent staging. The tension was built admirably, all the way to a massive double flag feature staging the rifles, with excellent execution on both types of equipment and great manipulation of the accents. There were a few notable weapon drops, but given we are still relatively early in the season that’s to be expected. The finale featured a strong introduction of some blue silks, but unwound a tiny bit with a few timing issues, and perhaps some very slightly weak development to the ending – it was clearly going for the “make you think” value, and it didn’t really resonate with me. This performance was definitely much stronger than their first outing at Stoke, with solid and tricky vocabulary across the books being handled very well indeed by the guard. The programme is growing on me, and certainly has room left to grow and blossom as the season continues. With nearly a clean sweep of the captions – having been nudged out of High General Effect by a very small margin – SK have another great ‘A’ Class show on their hands. (*1st, High Equipment, High Movement, High Ensemble, 62.1*)

Moonlight then performed their show to Nelly Furtado’s “Try”. The opening, featuring movement and sabres, was staged reasonably well with some good execution – timing was occasionally a little lax, but this was recovered in the ensemble silk section with a lovely sequence. Staging and the interpretation across the guard was rather questionable throughout – there were several instances where the staging was obscured or unclear. The early weapons section was executed very well, but the vocabulary on show was rather “middle of the road” and, while functional, didn’t really excite. Accents and development throughout were reasonable – there were some moments of brilliance from my point of view, such as the section involving pink silks and movement, but other times the soundtrack wasn’t reflected as strongly as it could have been on the floor – an early big accent and timbre change saw very little difference in the programme. The members seemed to be less confident with the latter half of the show – I suspect that there may have been quite a few changes which will need time to bed down. The finale involving the solo silk and movement was very convincing, although there was a hint of an issue with intervals between the members. This was a very good effort by the guard – and I believe that quite a few changes had been made to the show since its first performance at Stoke; these changes are certainly improving the programme. (*4th, 34.3*)

I think **Garrison** might well be going for the record of “how many different motives can we fit into one Winterguard show” – from baroque music to Irish dance to Bombay Dreams, there was certainly something for everyone to enjoy in this frenetic performance! The sabre opening used some good staging techniques to split out to two stages and rejoin back into one ready to stage the movement group – execution on both elements was generally good with strong timing. We swiftly hit a new motive with a big ensemble flag feature which showed off some good timing, and introduced a rifle line with slightly questionable staging (coming from behind the flags) but which won me over, along with some good vocabulary. The motives are very hard to keep up with, and some of the mood changes are not quite “there” yet – indeed, I think the success of this show will hinge not only on the development of the technical elements, but also how the numerous – perhaps, too numerous – changes in motive are handled. There were some highlights in this show for me – the “Irish” company front, a great rifle feature delivered with some real verve, and the finale – again delivered with a lot of enthusiasm, but perhaps lacking a tiny bit of amplitude when compared to the soundtrack. However, while there are lots of accents and hits, there is an “evident” lack of horizontal orchestration – the motives are almost entirely disjoint, and scotch any coherent development from start to end of the show. This may be a serious problem from the judging point of view, which with this concept may be rather difficult to overcome! However, I look forward to seeing how this show grows – it might just be a “slow starter”. (*5th, 32.8*)

The final guard in today's 'A' Class was the **Squires**, performing to John Dankworth's "Further Experiments with Mice" – a series of variations upon the nursery rhyme "Three Blind Mice". The floor was rather laden with scenery – lots and lots of flats, with the effect of looking like a theatre or concert hall – with the guard dressed as "conductors" in dress tails. The opening worked really quite well – the movement solidly reflected the soundtrack and had good execution. However, the staging and reflection of the soundtrack became less coherent as the show progressed – sabres were obscured by flags on several occasions. The second motive introduced pink flags with good delivery and reasonable effect – timing was a real problem though, with significant differences in interpretation throughout. The rifle book was noticeably weak, with only spins and small tosses evident; these were generally executed reasonably, however. Forms throughout were highly variable – linear forms were handled well but other types were almost illegible. Execution was good, but there was some rather awkward-looking technique being used at times. The guard are generally handling what they are being asked to do, and the way they are delivering the show as they are trained is evidently clear – they generally understand what has been asked of them as far as the concept and delivery is concerned. Overall, the show is currently marginally viable: there are major holes in both the orchestration and the technical work being asked of the guard, which really must be addressed if this show is to take off this season. (*7th, 19.8*)

Open Class

We began the Open Class with **Moonlight**, performing their show to the music "Feelings" by Il Divo and "Dancing in the Street". The movement and silk opening worked well, with the split stage having the desired effect all the way up to the solid flag hit. The introduction of the weapons was reasonable, with passable vocabulary and execution, and some clearly legible forms being exhibited. The change of motive was handled strongly, with a good mood change and communication with the audience – the flag transfer shortly afterwards was convincing and proved to be one of the visual high points in the vocabulary of that book, along with some good partner work later on. Staging throughout was rather variable – some were very strong, but others were rather unclear and didn't snap together – there was quite a bit of questionable timing and interpretation, indicating that lots of cleaning needs to be done to bring the show up to scratch. The concept just about works, in that it "explains away" the big mood change, but this doesn't hide the fact that there's not a great deal of development across the show as a whole. The General Effect this programme possesses lies in its aesthetic moments more than the manipulation of phrases and horizontal orchestration, and, for that reason, the writing is perhaps a mite simplistic for an Open Class guard. Nevertheless, the members are putting in lots of work, and the show itself does manage to come across to the audience really quite well – some of the characterization being produced on the floor is highly appealing. (*5th, 33.5*)

Alliance were next, with their show entitled "Trust". After the troubles with their soundtrack at Stoke, this time we could hear all the nuances of the music, which undoubtedly also helped their performance. The opening movement was convincing, with some very good staging of the partner work by the rest of the ensemble – this led into a series of reasonably strong accents and hits, amply reflecting the soundtrack. The equipment book in particular was vastly improved – there were notable vocabulary challenges, especially on weapons, and the majority of them were handled well; this is reflected in the very competitive caption result. Likewise, movement vocabulary was much more interesting and clearly delivered. However, there is still plenty of cleaning to do – timing and interpretation across the floor was very rocky at times, and several forms degraded to the point of illegibility. That said, some of the staging was gifted – a three part stage featuring silks, movement and rifles was particularly strong, and set up the following movement feature very well indeed. The use of the balls is ingenious, but is going to be a bear to ensure that the timing is precise – some good vocabulary was on show here. The point where the flags are sailed into the centre of the floor is a big visual moment and a crowd-pleaser, and the development to the finale is good but not great – there is more tension and amplitude in the soundtrack than what seems to be reflected on the floor. Overall, this was a good performance, with major changes in the programme having significantly improved the show. (*4th, 52.8*)

Guardsmen then took the floor with their thought-provoking show “Today”, with the self-referential soundtrack – a cute twist. The movement feature to open worked very well indeed, and the staging of the four sabres with the movement was excellent; the sabre work showed off some tough vocabulary early on, which was generally executed very solidly. As the silks were introduced, we saw some very good timing, but perhaps on a rather overly wide stage. The sustained silk section led into an equipment feature with sabres, rifles and flags – the rifle vocabulary was strong and reflected the change of timbre with good execution, but occasionally questionable timing. Weapons throughout were very solid and subject to some gifted staging – usually, obscuring rifles with silks in front doesn’t work for me, but in this show it seemed to be logical. The ensemble silk section was particularly powerfully executed; the different writing apparently being performed by some members is very difficult to see, however – this may be down to subtle timing issues. The finale was also strong, with the ensemble movement combined with the solo silk bringing the program to an agreeable end. I am now far more convinced about this concept than I was after its first showing – it’s clear that it really is going for “intellectual effect” and the “make you think” style of Winterguard, and it’s well on the way to getting that effect across. This was undoubtedly assisted by the fact that the look of the show and concept is now much stronger and far more pleasing. This was a vastly improved performance when compared to that at Stoke – I hope that this show continues to go from strength to strength. (3rd, 67.5)

After a promising but slightly uneasy start at Stoke, the **Southern Knights** sought to find their form at their home contest, performing their show “Hymn to Love”. The opening movement section was very strong, featuring a clean sequence followed by an ensemble accent with great correspondence to the soundtrack, along with some excellent expression. The introduction of the equipment was equally strong, with all three disciplines coming into play early on – capped by a subtly staged trick rifle catch. Some of the forms were written particularly strongly, but were a little unclear at times, making things a tiny bit hard to follow. This was the exception rather than the rule, however, with some tough equipment vocabulary amongst several impressive sequences and accent manipulations on show. The SK “writers’ magic” is beginning to show once again, with the reflection of the soundtrack showing true brilliance on several occasions. Equipment and movement were equal and strong partners throughout – tough and high risk vocabulary was evident, and on the whole the challenges being asked of the members were being accomplished with some aplomb. Highlights as the show progressed were some excellent partner movement work being staged by the sabres and flags, and a big colour change reflecting the change of timbre in the soundtrack, swiftly followed by an outstanding series of form manipulations – from circle, to linear and then an extremely powerful wedge formation which had massive effect. The company front to the finale worked very well this time – the big movement hit landed, and the finale gave the programme a really convincing sense of closure. SK undoubtedly had the bit between their teeth for this performance – as they finished, I felt that they had “thrown down the gauntlet” to Mayflower, and convinced *themselves* that they were in the running for this year. This was a very strong performance indeed – the show will be a joy to watch as the season progresses. (2nd, High Equipment, 73.6)

Today's final performance was from **Mayflower**. Having won the Stoke show, they needed to keep up the pace at Burgess Hill – and they clearly succeeded. The opening solo movement developing to the full ensemble was excellent, and the sequence and vocabulary in use reflected the soundtrack immaculately. This leads into some great “discovered” forms, and the sabre introductions which work very nicely indeed. The sabre work is evidently very tricky, but is being carried off very well. Some of the staging in the first half was particularly gifted – a big silk sequence drew the audience to the left of the floor, just in time for a big sabre accent – great writing. The transition between what I see as the “two halves” of the show was a little on the messy side – the sabres and flags were a tiny bit ragged to my eye and there was a hint of an interval issue. The second half of the show feels very amorphous as far as drawing the audience into the show, and providing strong forms to latch on to – but it *is* a showcase for some truly outstanding “technical Winterguard”. The movement being carried out while equipment is being manipulated is of incredibly high detail, and this adds major amplification to what is being performed. As the purple and orange silks are introduced, some big challenges in the vocabulary are evident – while the introduction itself doesn't really seem to line up with the soundtrack, the reflection returns in very short order. Expression, mood and understanding of the show are most of the way there already – there are points where there is a lack of clarity, but these are rare. The closing movement feature is nothing short of incredible – the effect, detail and cleanliness are truly awe-inspiring. That said – at the moment, I'm personally unsatisfied by the second half of the show, barring the finale – I admire the programme right now, but, in all honesty, I can't say I “like” it. While there is still some cleaning to do, the programme makes much more sense than at Stoke; this was a very strong performance indeed from Mayflower. While I doubt they will get an easy ride to Finals from the several other very strong guards in this Class, they may well prove hard to beat. (*1st, High Movement, High Ensemble, High General Effect, 78.3*)

Finally, after members from 6th Hove played the National Anthem, the scores were announced – with significant improvements for a large number of guards.

Our first trip to the South this season was an unqualified success, in no small part thanks to Alan Chatfield, Alan Thompson and the Southern Knights for their sponsorship and running the show. Many thanks also to the volunteers who assisted, our hosts at the Triangle Centre, all the WGUK staff, judges and tabulators, all the members and staff of today's competing guards, and to everyone who came along to clap and cheer.

Due to “circumstances outside of my control”, this report has taken a little longer to write than I would have hoped! As a result, the following show at Burton has already taken place! While I was not present at the content, the recaps show that **Pride of Bristol's** shaky start to the season is well and truly behind them, **Northern Academy** are still very much making the running in Junior Class with their Open Class show continuing to improve, and **The Avengers** are making great strides through the ‘A’ Class.

We already find ourselves in February, and approaching the middle of this year's Winterguard season. The circuit's busy month continues this Sunday with this year's Academy Awards sponsored by The Academy taking place at Crystal Palace, with a particularly large number of guards in competition. Less than a week after that comes this year's WGI European Regional in Drachten, The Netherlands where guards from WGUK, CGN and WGI will meet – an event not to be missed! See you at Crystal Palace!