

Santa Clara Vanguard no longer the bridesmaid 18th DCI crown won by 0.4 in KC

by David Simon

August 19, 1989—Kansas City, Missouri . . . On a hot, steamy evening, the Santa Clara Vanguard edged the Phantom Regiment to capture their fifth DCI championship title. For the Vanguard, 1989 marked the end of a half-decade of enduring heartbreaking disappointments and narrow misses during which they placed second in four consecutive title contests. Their announcement as champion with a record winning score of 98.80 registered both thunderous approval and relief from the capacity concert side audience, secure in the knowledge that the ever-elusive DCI crown had been returned to the most competitive corps in modern history.

Drum corps pundit Dave Shaw astutely commented that no corps in this year's finals possessed a bona fide championship show, but one corps would provide a championship performance. Clearly, Santa Clara's effort tonight was their best of the season, and it provided them a slim 0.4 margin of victory over the Regiment. This evening's performance of *Phantom of the Opera* delivered the power, precision and scintillating control the crowd had anticipated all week long. At long last, the potential in this most demanding undertaking was fully realized.

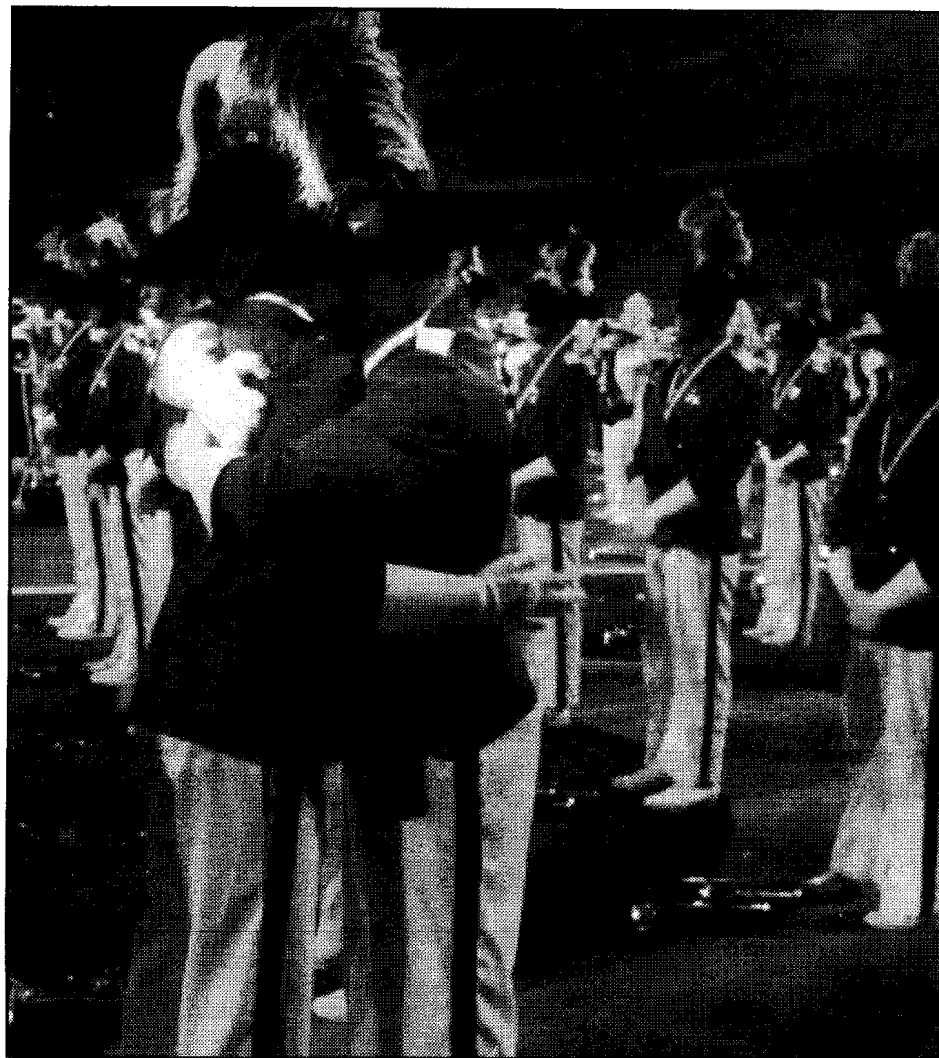
While the Vanguard achieved an exceptional performance level tonight, many nevertheless questioned the late season addition of props and costuming into this year's non-literal reworking of the hit musical. Once again, Santa Clara capped off the production with the now familiar disap-

pearing Phantom magic trick and a revised but no more impressive method for the corps to apparently vanish into two black tunnels. Although extraordinary and beautiful, the conclusion regrettably lacked the surprise and astonishing impact of last year's finals effort. The award of the championship flag to the Vanguard seemed to be appropriate recognition for both tonights' performance as well as the entire decade's awe-inspiring record of excellence.

Phantom Regiment took the field with a vengeance and determination reminiscent of their runs at the DCI title a decade ago. Although they gave the single emotionally draining performance of the night, history seemed destined to repeat itself and once again the Regiment found themselves in second place. From the hauntingly beautiful introduction to the driving finale of Dvorak's *Ninth Symphony*, the Regiment held the audience on the edge of their seats and brought them to their feet time after time. As the sentimental favorite, Phantom received the same uncontrolled crowd support bestowed on the Scouts a year earlier. Over the course of the performance, the audience's involvement grew progressively deeper through repeated standing ovations. The Regiment's 98.40 tied the previous record-high score and, by winning both the high visual and high brass awards, nearly stole the championship from the Vanguard.

The Cavaliers presented the most conceptually original program in this year's finals. The uplifting sections from John Rutter's

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As though their Phantom of the Opera performance wasn't enough, Santa Clara's fifth DCI championship title elicited tears of joy and embraces ending a long, rewarding summer. (Photo by Orlin Wagner)