

Brass band championships draws fans

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A brass band from Bolton, England, with its 11-year-old trombone prodigy, helped to draw a record crowd Saturday to the U.S. Open Brass Band Championships in Arlington Heights.

Nearly 1,000 people turned out over the course of the day to the St. Viator High School auditorium for the competition, which featured three of the top brass bands in the world, and eight bands in all.

The Wingates Band is one of Britain's oldest brass bands, and its members displayed quite a show for the full-house audience.

They opened by playing a traditional British march, "Ravenswood," which later earned them "best performance of a march" by the panel of judges.

Director Andrew Berryman then threw off his black jacket to reveal a shirt patterned after the American flag, before he led the band in a spirited rendition of, "Mambo."

The band drew an emotional response from audience members when their principal trombonist, 11-year old Peter Moore, played the lyrical hymn, "Blessed Assurance."

Crowd members were so moved, they jumped to their feet afterward, to applaud the youngster's mature performance.

Master of ceremonies Frank Renton of the BBC radio revealed that Moore is a two-time defending British Open Solo Competition champion, who passed up a chance to go for a three-peat to travel with the band and compete in Arlington Heights.

Berryman, knows of Moore's talents first hand. Besides conducting him in the band, he also teaches him privately at Chethams School.

"What Peter has, you can't teach," Berryman said. "He has all the phrasing and feel and touch. He's extraordinary.

"He has perfect pitch," Berryman added. "I teach trombone to college students, and he's as good or better than them. Musically, he's almost a genius."

In the end, however, after a close tally of scores, it was a brass band from Kansas City -- the Fountain City Brass Band -- that won the championship trophy, and the \$1,000 prize.

Its members, playing under the direction of Joseph Parisi, also retained their title of "most entertaining band," mostly for their innovative formations playing in their "space program" of their set.

Band members spread out to all four corners of the auditorium, as well as up on stage, while Parisi stood on a seat in the middle of the crowd to direct them. It seemed as if they were playing in "surround sound" for such dramatic scores as "Fanfare from Planet Krypton," by John Williams, "Mars from the Planets."

Their cornet player, Rachel Rodriguez, also won best featured soloist award, and drew a standing ovation for her solo performance in "The Carnival of Venice."

Members of the Prairie Brass Band hosted the event. Led by former Hersey High School band director, Dallas

Niermeyer, its members played a variety of pieces, ranging from the film score from "Robin Hood and His Merry Men," to a pop jazz tune by Chuck Mangione,

"This year's event drew a record crowd, with spectators coming from several states as well as the United Kingdom," Niermeyer said. "We're already making plans for next year's contest."

U.S. Open Brass Band Championship results

1. Fountain City Brass Band from Kansas City, Mo.
2. Brass Band of Central Florida from Orlando
3. The Wingates Band, from Bolton, United Kingdom
4. Eastern Iowa Brass Band from Mt. Vernon, Iowa
5. Prairie Brass Band, from Arlington Heights
6. Illinois Brass Band from Libertyville
7. Milwaukee Festival Brass from Milwaukee
8. Motor City Brass Band, from Detroit

Most Entertaining Band: Fountain City

Best Solo Performance: Rachel Rodriguez of Fountain City

Best Performance of a March: Wingates Band

Best New Composition: Lucy Pankhurst, of Wingates

Best Percussion Section: Brass Band of Central Florida

Best Cornet Player of the Day: Rachel Rodriguez of Fountain City

Best Buskers group: The Prairie Dawgs of the Prairie Brass Band