

THE CAPE TOWN MILITARY TATTOO 2009 - MEDIA RELEASE 8 OCTOBER 2009

The count-down has started for the fifth Cape Town Military Tattoo, which will be presented at the Castle of Good Hope on the 19th, 20th and 21st of November this year, and the tattoo production team is hard at work preparing a programme intended to entertain and educate Capetonians and visitors from all over the country and beyond its borders, as only the military can.

Primarily funded by the South African National Defence Force and supported by the Cape Town City Council, the Cape Town Military Tattoo is now well on the way to becoming a fixture in the Mother City's annual calendar of events.

Scores of full-time and part-time military personnel have been working for months to set up the intricate processes which will culminate in that magic moment when trumpeters sound a fanfare, muzzle-loading cannon belch smoke, noise and fire into the darkened arena and the announcer says: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Cape Town Military Tattoo..."

The word "tattoo" is derived from a centuries-old military ritual which originated in the Low Countries during the 80 Years' War in the 16th and 17th Centuries, when patrols would be sent out near nightfall to warn off-duty soldiers in the taverns that it was time to return to their barracks

At each tavern the tavern-keeper would be told: "Doe den tap toe!" (close the taps on your beer-barrels). All the armies fighting in the Low Countries adopted this practice, and as the centuries passed the nightly ritual became known by various names - such as "tattoo" in English, "taptoe" in Dutch and "Zapfenstreich" in German, and turned into a unique form of military show business.

In old Cape Town, where the Castle was the centre of most activities for many years, a drummer would be sent up to the Leerdam Bastion near nightfall, where he would beat his drum for half an hour to warn the off-duty soldiers of the Castle garrison that it was time to return to their barracks for the evening parade and guard duties.

Like its predecessors, this year's tattoo is like the traditional bridal outfit, something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue.

There will be evergreen "repeat-customer" acts that Cape Town audiences love, including the opening ceremony by the Castle Guard, the playing of Tchaikovsky's "1812" Overture, complete with thunderous fire from the Cape Field Artillery's Saluting Troop, and the lump-in-the-throat Final Muster, when a kaleidoscope of performers comes together to wish the audience farewell.

Then there will be performances by some of South Africa's finest bands, including the renowned SA Army Band Cape Town and South African Navy Band, and a guest performance by the band of the Koninklijke Marechaussee, the Dutch gendarmerie. There will also be an exciting horse act by the South African Police Service's Mounted Unit and a heart-stopping battle re-enactment.

The tattoo is always closely linked to South Africa's, and the Cape's, military history, and so, two significant anniversaries in our heritage will be commemorated; South Africa's entry into World War II in 1939, 70 years ago, and the Battle of Isandlwana in 1879, 130 years ago. Music specially composed by the SA Navy Band will be part of the Isandlwana act.

Audiences might be surprised at some of the music. There will be the usual foot-tapping traditional military marches, but the Tattoo Director of Music, Major Martin Chandler, is also working in some famous old tunes, which are embedded in the Cape's heritage.

But the tattoo will not be merely for entertainment. It has a greater purpose, to foster the image of the South African National Defence Force, to build bridges between the armed forces and the community, and to highlight the on-going rejuvenation of the SANDF to ensure that it will be able to ward off any future threats to the country's sovereignty, which might arise.

The audience response to previous tattoos shows that it is succeeding in its purpose, in both, 2007 and 2008 all seats were sold out before the first performance had even taken place, and it is beginning to attract international notice.

As in previous years, booking will take place through Computicket, starting a few weeks before the tattoo, with any leftover tickets being sold at the door immediately before each performance. But the surest way to prevent disappointment is to pre-book, since space inside the Castle is limited.