Soldier Show highlights Army talent, teamwork

Story & photos by Joseph Mancy
Special to The Citizen

Sitting in the front row of the audience with her hands pressed over her ears, it was clear that 3-year-old Emerson Caravona was not a big fan of rap music.

Fortunately for her and 560 other community members watching the U.S. Army's 2011 Soldier Show at the Patch Fitness Center June 6, the show included a mix of country-western, rock, pop, classic, Polynesian, Latin, African and Oriental musical genres.

The 90-minute show, themed "Carnival," was designed to entertain service members and families of all tastes. However, the performance that brought everyone to their feet was a patriotic rendition of the song "America the Beautiful," sung by all 25 Soldier Show performers, each wearing their Army uniform.

The Soldier Show visited U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart as part of a 10-month global tour, which kicked off in Fort Belvoir, Va., in May. The visit was sponsored by Navy Federal Credit Union and the Army G1's Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention, or SHARP, program. The tour will include 106 performances in 65 locations.

While they get to travel the world, Soldier Show cast and crew members aren't just having a good time.

As USAG Stuttgart Deputy to the Commander Kathleen Cole put it following the June 6 performance, "This is not a leisure tour."

Performers set up their own stage, props, lights and equipment. After each show, they tear it all down and load it into trucks and buses.

"This is much tougher than American Idol," said Spc. Enjolee Williams, who serves in the Army National Guard, and is a high school math teacher in New Orleans when not performing in the show. "We don't have extra help, so we do all our own support. It is not uncommon to work an 18-hour day."

True to the Soldier's Show creed, "For the Soldier, by the Soldier," performers also need to fulfill their obligations to the Army while on the road.

"We must maintain all Army standards, to include the physical fitness test," Williams added.

The Soldier Show cast and crew also adhere to Army principles of teamwork by backing each other up. Each performer must know at least one other Soldier's routine, in case a substitute performer is needed.

To join the Soldier Show, applicants had to submit a DVD of personal musical performance for consideration last October. Ten weeks later, the best were invited for a live audition. Once selected, performers were given six weeks to learn the routines before their first performance in front of an audience.

Despite the long hours and hard work, these musician-Soldiers love what they do. Many of them have served in Iraq or Afghanistan and have taken a year off from their normal military duties to bring smiles to the faces of other Soldiers and their families.

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>
> **Spc. Enjolee Williams**
> *2011 Soldier Show performer*

U.S. Army Soldier Show cast members dance and sing the opening number during the show's performance for U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart June 6. The Soldier Show's creed is "For the Soldier, by the Soldier."

Pfc. Erik Tue performs a Samoan dance during the Soldier Show on Patch Barracks June 6.

Emerson Caravona, 3, displays her dislike for rap music during the 2011 U.S. Army Soldier Show held June 6 on Patch Barracks. Fortunately for her, the show included a variety of musical genres.

The 2011 U.S. Army Soldier Show rendition of "Arima Arima" was part of the June 6 performance on Patch Barracks.

Staff Sgt. Talitha Vaugh-Nettles sings "A Little Bit Stronger" during the 2011 U.S. Army Soldier Show's performance in USAG Stuttgart June 6 at the Patch Fitness Center. Soldiers in the show act as their own support system.

Sgt. Jeremy Wesby, a 2011 U.S. Army Soldier Show performer, shakes hands with a fan following the show on Patch Barracks June 6.