



**TEARING UP TATTOO:** Author and Chorus musician Shannon Dunlap captures all the action behind the scenes of the International Tattoo.

## A Worldly Affair

BY SHANNON DUNLAP

**THE BAGPIPES' WAILING** AND the spotlight's red glare, the pyrotechnics bursting in air created a heart-pumping shot of patriotism at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Virginia International Tattoo.

As a member of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra Chorus, I had the kind of up-close-and-noisy view that few are lucky to experience. It's hard to keep a glamorous frame of mind when you're looking for an empty piece of stage where the trumpets haven't emptied their spit valves, but the truly interesting stories took place in the chaos behind the curtain.

Performers from South Africa, Turkey, Australia, the Netherlands, Canada, and the UK mingled in the hallways as they waited for their turn to take the floor. A group of Aussie guys remarked on how few fat people they had seen in America, and that *Super Size Me* must have been mostly hype. A certain Dutch brass player tended to wiggle his bum to the marches during rehearsals,

and one man's accidental fall revealed exactly what a piper wears under his kilt, or should I say doesn't wear. All the while the people with the clipboards directed traffic and tried to keep us from getting run over by flying sets.

But perhaps the most interesting tale took place last year. Bob Shoup, the Chorus Master, told us of a Korean band that wanted to leave before the shows had finished. When they pressed them for a reason, they revealed that they feared for their safety in light of the recent Virginia Tech shootings, which had been done by a Korean-American male. The directors con-

vinced the band to stay, and the members were shocked when they not only felt welcome but received large ovations from the crowds. They said this would not have happened in their country.

An unexpected perk of the countless hours of labor put into Tattoo is that it not only introduces our area to other cultures, it also introduces those cultures to hometown America. We're known for our brash, outspoken, overeating ways in the global community, but hopefully the participating countries of our yearly shindig can return home and add a few positive comments to the mix. ●