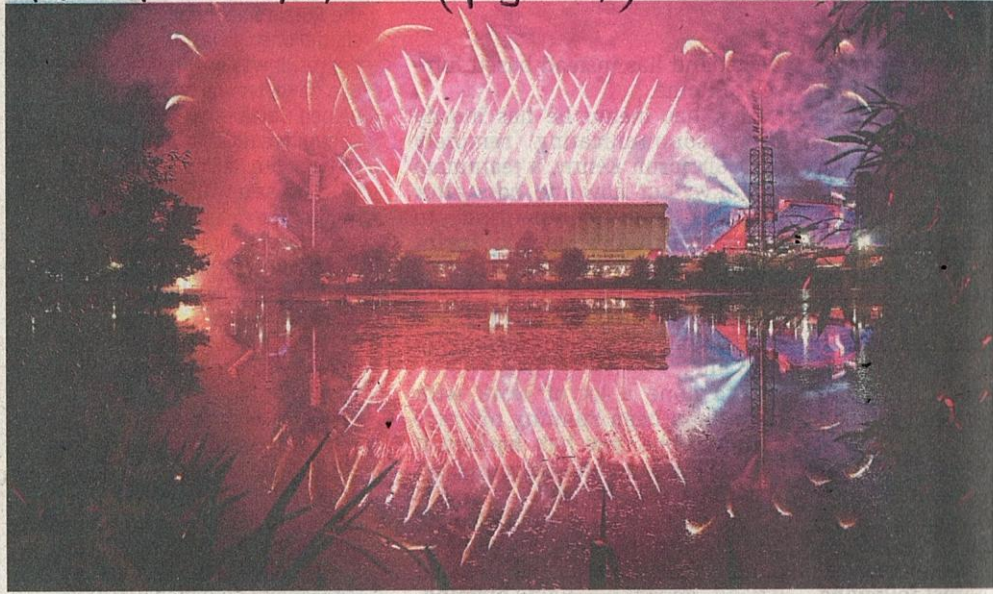


Opening ceremony breathes life into the Games

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Starting with a bang: (clockwise from left) Fireworks display above the Alexander Stadium; Stella and The Dreamers performing atop the 'Raging bull'; Duran Duran playing in front of spectators. — AFP/AP



A COMMONWEALTH Games that once appeared doomed exploded into life with a dazzling opening ceremony that put a modern spin on a sporting event often seen as a relic of the British Empire's colonial past.

Ten years after the 2012 London Olympics, it was Birmingham's moment in the spotlight although a smaller one, as Prince Charles, reading a message on behalf of the Queen contained in a Baton that had travelled through all 72 nations and regions of the Commonwealth, declared the Games open.

No one could deny Birmingham for giving itself a massive pat on the

back for taking on the responsibility of staging the 2022 Games after Durban, South Africa, was stripped of hosting duties for failing to deliver on promises made in its bid.

Instead of the usual six-seven years to prepare, Birmingham had four and that challenge was multiplied by the arrival of Covid-19.

While the pandemic forced the delay of an Olympics and an Asian Games, Birmingham pushed ahead, delivering on its promise of an on time, on budget project.

"I'm a Brummy and this is a great city founded by people who just got on with," said Birmingham 2022

chair John Crabtree.

For one night at least, Birmingham got its due as 30,000 spectators packed into renovated Alexander Stadium to take in a slick show that would match up against any Olympics production, organisers say it was watched by over a billion people.

The ceremony delivered all the classic staples of an opening night extravaganza from the parade of athletes to a shower of thundering fireworks.

But it was the high-tech story-telling of Stella and The Dreamers, a group of young athletes from around

the Commonwealth who explore Birmingham's history representing a better, brighter future that provided the backbone of the two and a half hour show.

The evening began with a flyover by the Red Arrows and ended with West Midlands rock band Duran Duran revving up the crowd under a canopy of fireworks.

As always, however, the most anticipated moment of the night was the parade of nations as nearly 5,000 athletes from 72 countries and territories, who will compete for medals in 19 sports over 11 days, made their entrance. — Reuters