

Cadets LaSalle

By *Bill Serson*

(Marched in LaSalle's drumline from the Autumn of 1969 to it's final season, 1973)

Performance photos taken by Eric McConachie

IN 1963 a drum corps emerged literally from the shadows of the magnificent granite “Peace Tower” of Parliament Hill in Canada’s National Capital of Ottawa. This group would go on to set the drum corps world on fire... but unfortunately the flame that was the “Cadets LaSalle” would burn out much too quickly, lasting for only one decade. Born out of the original army cadet program started by the Christian Brothers in 1911 at the Academy De-La-Salle on Sussex Avenue in lower-town Ottawa, and under the direction of Corps Director Claude Brisebois (The Monk) and in later years Rene Rockburne the “Red Socks” was easily one of the most identifiable drum corps of its’ era and was well known for it’s flamboyant visual and musical style.

Taking the field in their red cadet style hats, white satin blouses, red black and white sashes (worn distinctively by the corps on the right side) and the famous red socks, the Cadets LaSalle always stood out in a sea of woolen tunics, heavy shakos and feather plumes!

The corps fielded consistently strong horn lines under the instruction of first, Mr. Maurice Legault and then Mr. André Campeau and featured a long list of exciting soloists through the years.

Who can forget Denis Proulx’s soprano solo in “Johnny One Note” from 1966 or the haunting baritone solo in the concert of “Summertime” played by Billy Cross in 1969. The great Jean Leblanc set a new standard for top note players with his spine tingling solos in both the opening and closing fanfares of 1970. He was joined by the two Marcs (Chartier and Sarda) for



Cadets LaSalle (1964)



LaSalle Academy School Band (1955)

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the stirring soprano trio in the opener of “Jezebel”. Jean was followed by a succession of young “up and comers” including the likes of Serge Mercier, Claude Scott (who later went on to some fame with his “Mr. Bud” sports fan routine) and Monty Kirkpatrick in 1972 and 1973.

The drum lines under the instruction of Mr. Rene Rockburne and later Mr. Roch St. Jean assisted by Mr. Fred Johnson were consistently top rated and featured some of the biggest lines of the time. It was anchored in the early years by snares Roch St. Jean, Ray Houle and Marcel Mathurin. The famous six snare - six tenor line of 1970 included the likes of Terry Kirkpatrick, Michel Monette and JP. Seguin. The World Open Championship line of 1972 and the corps final year of 1973 was made up of members such as Charles St. Jean (Roch’s younger brother), Peter ‘Stinskie’ Gravel, Jim Udall and Bill Serson. One of the great stories told about the big 1973 line (as told by a Toronto Optimists

competitor) relates to south stands at the CNE Stadium shaking as the Cadets LaSalle drum line marched the corps out of the tunnel and onto the field for competition in the era when corps played their “street beat” both on and off the field.

The Cadets always featured an exciting musical repertoire that featured such numbers as Brazil, Johnny One Note and Softly As I Leave You in 1967, Jezebel, Summertime and Aquarius in 1969, My Kind of Girl and Traces in 1970 and finally One Fine Morning (by Canadian Jazz/Rock fusion group Lighthouse) and the Theme from Shaft (by Isaac Hayes) in 1973.

In an article written for the drum corps publication “The Ontario” in the spring of 1970, Mike Bowman said this about the Corps:

One corps that been in the drum corps headlines recently is the Cadets LaSalle of Canada’s Capital, Ottawa. This junior corps is one of the fastest



Cadets LaSalle (1966)
(This is the first photo that Eric took of LaSalle)



Cadets LaSalle (1968)

rising in North America and 1970 should see the results of this growth.

Started in 1963 by the Christian Brothers and under the sponsorship of LaSalle Academy of Ottawa, the "Red Socks" have become one of the most noted corps on the continent. Known best for their unique French-Anglo style and well-disciplined members, the Cadets may knock a few noted junior corps' heads come contest time.

Throughout 1964 and '65 LaSalle was just another corps and who could tell that within three short years of existence the Cadets LaSalle would become one of the most feared corps on Canadian soil! They lost out to the Toronto Optimists at the 1966 and '67 Nationals by mere tenths. If any of you has the 1967 record LaSalle put out, you too, will notice the appeal this corps had (you can hardly hear the corps for the fans).

Yes 1967 was a great year for LaSalle as they visited two provinces, seven states and logged over 22,000 miles. 1968 was a considerably poor year, yet the Cadets had the guts to stick it out and with

sheer determination and hard work LaSalle was back in the forefront in '69. All the work paid off, of course, as the Cadets defeated a strong St. Joseph's of Batavia in June. This was a feat that no other junior corps from Canada had matched since 1966. It's too bad that LaSalle did not take many trips across the border in '69 but this will soon become a thing of the past. Plans are being made to take part in the CYO Nationals in Lowell Massachusetts in August. Look for the Cadets at the Sixth Shriners International on June 29th in Toronto when they are given the chance to take on St. Joe's, 27th Lancers and the Kilties.

At the present time their Colour Guard in undefeated in action! They have won every guard contest this year as well as taking the Provincial Guard Championships held in Toronto on March 7th. They did so by defeating the De La Salle 'D" guard by 1.45 and defending champion Optimists by 2.9. Recent reports indicate that they have also won the Nationals held in Ottawa on March 14th. Right now I'd like to see them go up against the Aquinas Color Guard of Rochester and give them a good run for their money.

Individually LaSalle is the best in the country. At the Ontario Individual Championships on February 7th, cadets made a clean sweep by winning every caption they entered! Solo soprano, brass duet, trio, quartet, and sextet as well as finishing 1-2-3 in both solo snare and solo tenor as well as taking drum duet and quartet. WOW! If they play as well together as they do individually you are going to see one of the hottest junior corps ever. I also heard that they wiped up at the National individuals as well!

Right now I am dying to see these guys on the contest field – great Colour Guard, hornline and drumline – what more could you ask for? Watch for

FEATURE ARTICLE: Cadets LaSalle Drum Corps (continued)

these guys in Syracuse, April 25th at the Cavalcade of Drums sporting new satin blouses and sashes. They may just surprise a few of you non-believers.

During that summer of 1970 the corps had the Drum Corps world talking after demolishing a strong field on August 15th in Kingston New York by a full seven point margin and the next weekend knocking off the 1969 VFW Champions the Racine Kilties in a tight battle at old McArthur Stadium in Syracuse New York. Dave King wrote this in a late August edition of "Drum Corps News":

Amid speculation as to how they may have scored at the CYO Nationals last Wednesday, the LaSalle Cadets swept past four of the nations better known corps here this evening before a capacity crowd at Dietz memorial Stadium. The event was the Kingston Indian's 6th Annual Pow-Wow of Champions and LaSalle's seven point margin over the Des Plaines Vanguard brought up the question of how good the Cadets really are. Had they been in competition at Boston, as originally scheduled, would they have held that 7-point margin, a spread that would have catapulted them into the top five.

Later in the same article he described the corps this way:

The LaSalle Cadets (Ottawa, Canada) were definitely the most superior corps in the show. The horn section showed good control throughout the performance, never over playing or blasting, and the quality and intonation was excellent. The percussion section, 23 men strong, was clean and effective and the guard was as good as always, accented by a superb five man rifle section that is nearly equal to that of the Casper Troopers. Concert of "Eloise" was well liked and the exit of "Traces" was very good. Jean Leblanc and Bill Cross did some fine solo work for drum majors Gilles Longtin and Robert Nault, who were awarded the prize (a watch) for best drum major. The evening's only standing ovation went to the Cadets!

Unfortunately for the corps the fine summer of work could not be translated into a national title as the Cadets lost to arch rivals De La Salle Oaklands by a mere 0.1 of a point in an exciting contest held at Toronto's Varsity Stadium. Also, by the summer of 1970 the corps that had once been comprised totally



Cadets LaSalle (Shriners Contest, 1967)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Cadets LaSalle Drum Corps (continued)

of students from the Academy had a membership that was now almost sixty percent comprised of members from eastern Ontario and western Quebec. The corps was attracting the strongest players from the smaller neighboring “Junior B” corps surrounding Ottawa. Members were arriving from Arnprior, Carleton Place, Smiths Falls and Kingston in Ontario and Gatineau, Buckingham, St. Jerome and Montreal in Quebec.



LaSalle with female guard (Nationals prelims, CNE, 1972)

The following year of 1971 was somewhat of a rebuilding year and much of the momentum that the corps had gained in 1969 and 1970 was lost. There was a huge turnover in the horn line and especially the drum line, but to the great credit of the members they managed to grow together during a very challenging summer.

The summer of 1972 saw a much stronger Cadets LaSalle take the field featuring a five snare, five tenor drum line and for the first time in it’s history a female banner section in the colour guard. The rifle

line was still tossing full weight British army issue Enfield rifles and continued as an all male section. The corps had a full summer of competitions including another stop in the Manning Bowl in Lynn Massachusetts for the World Open where it was rewarded with the High Execution Drums trophy. Unfortunately, a night of triumph soon degenerated into chaos as the bus driver on the drum line bus (Gordie) became disoriented by the “we’re number one” chants from the back of the bus and took well over an hour to get back to the



Cadets LaSalle (Big 10, Hamilton, 1972)



LaSalle (Nationals, Kingston, Ontario 1968)

corps school accommodations... even though you could see the school high on a hill from the valley where the Bowl was situated. Instead of returning to receive accolades from our horn line we returned to an empty gymnasium long vacated by young men in search of food (and dare I say refreshments)! This capped off a great weekend for the bus driver as he had missed the turn-off for the Massachusetts Turnpike the evening before and had driven the drum line almost all the way to NYC! Another close loss at the September National Championships in Toronto followed.

TH CORPS FINAL year was one of its' best ever. Scores went up and down from weekend to weekend and from judging panel to judging panel. "Jezebel" was played when the corps won and "Shaft" (what else?) was played when it lost, and when the Cadets lost, their fans got to hear all of "Shaft" as the corps always seemed a little tardy leaving the field. While winning its' fair share of contests against the evil Toronto duo (Del and Optimists) and respected Upstate rival St. Joes the corps was always competitive and entertaining. The pressure of fielding a full sized drum and horn lines meant bringing in an all female colour guard (rifles included). The corps fielded six experienced snares for the first time since 1970 but was forced to field five side tenors as they could not keep up with the new financial realities of modern drum corps and multi-tenors were just not an affordable option. Still, the drum line made a name for itself by playing a tough Roch St. Jean arrangement of

the Don Ellis tune "Upstart" for its second drum feature.

During this period the corps' bills were adding up and travel was becoming more difficult. Equipment was now being carried aboard the buses as the equipment truck had been sold the previous summer. The corps had no steady source of income and was running on the credit cards and largesse of its directors, instructional staff and friends. The corps, always being slightly isolated by geography was now totally out of the Toronto loop and the inception of DCI seemed to further muddy the water. Disappointing prelim results at Nationals held at Toronto's CNE Stadium in early September led then Corps Director Rene Rockburne to make a classic "on field speech" to the corps at that evenings finals. In language that was sometimes less than flattering he implored the corps to ignore the judges (who were by that time standing by with clipboards in hand) and to play to its strength, which was the legion of LaSalle fans at lovely old CNE.

As the opening notes of "One Fine Morning" came echoing back onto the field from that beautiful roof overhang of the old stadium the corps knew it would be a special night. Not only would the Cadets tie De La Salle for the title of National Champions in their own back yard but also it was arguably the most emotional performance of the corps ten-year history. One week later the corps performed for the last time at a half time show for the Ottawa Rough



Cadets LaSalle with female rifles (Ajax, 1973)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Cadets LaSalle Drum Corps (continued)

Rider of the Canadian Football League. Back at the corps hall after the game, uniforms were removed and instruments cased for the last time and the Cadets LaSalle was no more.



Cadets LaSalle (Nationals prelims, CNE, 1972)

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Cadets LaSalle (1967)



Cadets LaSalle (Nationals prelims, CNE, 1972)

Photos from 1973, LaSalle's final year in competition



Cadets LaSalle waiting to start their show and in concert (Nationals prelims, CNE, Toronto, 1973)



Cadets LaSalle (Nationals prelims, CNE, Toronto, 1973)



Cadets LaSalle (Nationals prelims, CNE, Toronto, 1973)



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Photos from Cadets LaSalle's 50th Anniversary Reunion



