



# Toronto Optimists History-Newsletter

This publication honours and continues the tradition started by Don Daber in 1960.  
Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter is published quarterly.

The Toronto Optimists History website celebrates:

The Toronto Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps 1958 - 1975 | The Seneca Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps 1976 - 1978

Published by Bob Carell. Please direct inquiries to: [Toronto\\_Optimist@rogers.com](mailto:Toronto_Optimist@rogers.com)  
A PDF version is available on the website: [www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca](http://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca)

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This issue includes Chapter 11 and 12 of Colin's History of the Optimists. The focus of these chapters is on the winter of 1961-62 and the Toronto Optimists very successful summer of 1962, a summer which included Optimists first victory over the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights.

Our feature article is about another of our competitors, the Cadets LaSalle Drum Corps from Ottawa. LaSalle was a force to be reckoned with. They competed at their first Nationals in 1964 and, only two years later, at the 1966 Nationals, they not only relegated De La Salle to third place but they beat Optimists in the prelims!



Toronto Optimists (Metro Championships, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1962)

## ISSUE 6 April 2022

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# Contribute to your newsletter

Send your suggestions, stories or articles to Bob: [toronto\\_optimist@rogers.com](mailto:toronto_optimist@rogers.com) or David: [openrd2002@yahoo.ca](mailto:openrd2002@yahoo.ca)

Remember "Sadie Mau Mau"? Here is an opportunity for you to start a by-line article in the newsletter.

The Newsletter is published quarterly: January, April, July and October.

IMPORTANT: The Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter is ONLY available in Acrobat (PDF) format.

Apr 2022



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Jan 2022

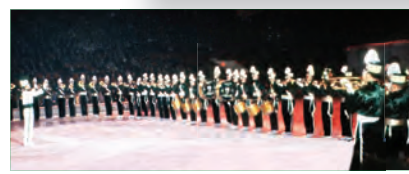


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and this issue to be both interesting and informative.



Ice Follies, Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto (1961)

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Bernie Beer inspecting the Toronto Optimists. (CNE, Toronto, 1960)

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Toronto Optimists. (Preview of CNE for the Preview of Champions for the Preview of Champions Ferrazzutti about the beginning find an article about Doug Buglers Hall of Fame. The focus of this publication we hope to include information included a special feature, were, not only, an important also a corps ahead of its time. We hope you will find the article to be both interesting and informative.

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Phil Hennings, Drum Major (1958)

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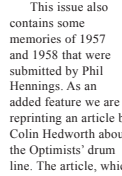
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### WEBSITE ADDITIONS

Additions to both the Main website and the Photo Gallery continue to be made. New photos are added to the gallery about twice a week.

## WEBSITE UPDATE: What's new on TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Some people have asked me “When will you be posting the next slideshow?”. It’s a good question for which the answer is “I don’t know.”

After posting the 1961 Slideshow and publishing our January 2022 newsletter, I looked at what I had recently done on the website. While I was spending lots of time on the newsletters and slideshows, I had not been scanning and publishing old GCCs. In addition, I had not been posting as many photos as I would like in the Photo Gallery.

Without feedback, it is a challenge trying to decide what people might want to see on the website so I try to imagine what visitors might like to see. I decided people might like to see a few more GCCs and more photos. If that guess was not correct, please let me know. By the way, I have made a change in the kind of photos that I have been posting.

While I continue to post photos of the Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Optimists, I am now including photos of some of the smaller corps, mostly from Ontario, that competed during the 1970s. Most Drum Corps publications focus on the top corps so I suspect that members of these corps might not have seen many photos of themselves. I hope that posting these images will give visitors an opportunity to see photos of themselves and their friends.

To give you an idea, this page contains two recent postings.



*Hyliters (Birchmount Stadium, 1977)*



*Oshawa Rebels (1978)*

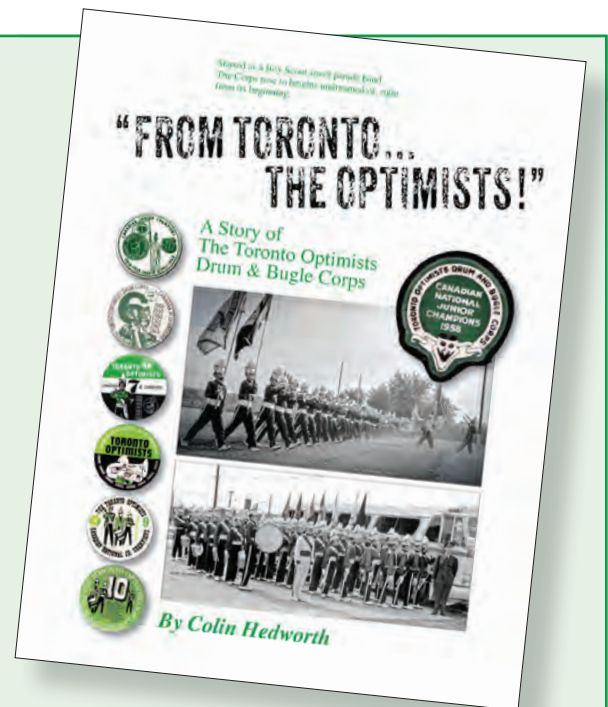
### In our next newsletter: Chapters 13 and 14 (Inside the Corps and Movin' On)

The next issue of the Newsletter (July) will include Chapters 13 and 14 from Colin Hedworth's book "From Toronto... The Optimists!".

In these chapters Colin, instead of writing about a specific year, focuses on what's happening behind the scenes. Topics covered include the Optimist Club, the corps' Executive and Instructors, its identity, traditions and the connections that develop, especially during bus trips.

The corps also had issues that needed to be addressed. For example, Mr. Baggs resigned as Corps Director. This was not a surprise considering the incident at the 1961 Nationals; however, it was a tremendous loss since his involvement with The Optimists went all the way back to the Scout Band. The new Corps Director was Don Daber, the corps' photographer, publicity director and creator of Optimists' newsletter, Green Capsule Comments.

In 1962 The Optimists won their fifth consecutive National Title and this, too, because an issue. How long could Optimists stay on top and what would be needed to make that a reality?



### *The Optimist Creed*

*Promise Yourself*

*To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.*

*To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.*

*To make all your friends feel that there is something in them.*

*To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.*

*To think only of the best, to work only for the best, and to expect only the best.*

*To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.*

*To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.*

*To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile.*

*To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.*

*To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.*



**The book "From Toronto... The Optimists!" is out of print.**

# 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*

**I**N 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)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE: Cadets LaSalle Drum Corps (continued)

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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.

**T**H 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)

*This article is used by permission – article originally appeared in “A History of Drum & Bugle Corps,” volume 2 and is among profiles on 86 junior and senior North American organizations. Both volume 1 and volume 2 are available for immediate download in the store of [www.drumcorpsworld.com](http://www.drumcorpsworld.com). The electronic files are \$1.99 each. Both books contain 432 pages.*



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)*



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



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

## Photos from Cadets LaSalle's 50th Anniversary Reunion





## Chapter 11: 1962 Winter — From Rags to Riches

After the conclusion of the previous season, nobody was seriously considering the future. They were just happy that we had survived intact and were still considered the number one Corps. The higher you get on the ladder, the harder it is to keep your balance. Eventually it is bound to take a toll somewhere. It did, in a rather subtle fashion that gradually crept up and took hold.

A comparison of this year’s Corps to that of the last year would definitely favour this year. The six new playing members compared most favourably with the over twenty of the previous year. Also, these new members were experienced at the business, all but one coming from full-fledged Drum Corps. The one, drummer Ron Kaiser, was a graduate from the Optimist Bantams. He had marched with us in parades, exhibitions, and rehearsals, and so had some experience and would fit in easily.



*Toronto Optimists (Varsity Stadium, 1962)*

The people who had been novices the year before were not new anymore. In one year of marching and playing, they had become veterans. Some of them had become as good, or better, than those who had been in before them. There were still a few left from the original 1958 Corps, and everybody else in between had degrees of experience ranging from one to four years. In Canada, this was not a common situation and was to have uncommon results.

There were no vast music programs in schools to draw people from nor any widespread interest in, or knowledge of, Drum Corps. Most Corps people came from other local Corps, which could be detrimental to the whole Corps scene. The enticing of players from one Corps to another had been going on for years and sometimes resulted in the building of one Corps at the expense of another. We had not had to do this but still had come up with that rarity in Canada, a fully experienced Corps. So, it would be thought that with everything seemingly going our way, everybody would be chomping at the bit and raring to go. In fact, as things developed, they moved in exactly the opposite direction.

## **A completely new show**

The Corps management, realizing the extent of its miscalculations of the previous year, threw out the entire show. This had never, ever, been done before and was like wiping the slate clean and starting over. It was a good move, and, as the new music came in and was revealed, everybody appeared enthusiastic about it. The new show was in the process of being learned but, at the same time, the effects of constantly striving for the top began to subtly creep in. It took the form of a lethargy that settled over the Corps. Spirit and unity sagged to an all-time low. People came to practices but were less inclined to do anything.

Fewer people came to practices and gradually, what was left of the Corps began to wonder if it was worth keeping it going. With the prospects for the coming year initially being as good, or better, than ever before, there had to be a reason for this.



*Corps members and guests (Rally Night, 1961)*

It was a classic case of burnout. Possibly, it was a combination of things. The same people, same old faces, doing the same things year after year had to have something to do with it. Even armies in wars get regularly relieved, but not Drum Corps, year after year, pounding out the drills and music. There has to be a reaction somewhere, and, in this case, this was it.

Also, the tension endured during most of the previous season probably caused a backlash. This might have dissipated if, say, a one or two month respite had been taken. With Corps, of course, you finish one year and immediately begin the next, so any reaction intrudes upon the Corps itself.

## **Lorne kicks us in the butt**

So here we were, a Corps in a situation that it had never been in before. It was bursting with talent and experience, yet seeing its ambition and potential dribble away in a debilitating torpor. This could not last and had to go one way or the other.

It came down to one miserable practice, and everybody, instructors and members alike, were at their wits end to produce a solution. A meeting was called of all those who were present. It was held at the back of Jarvis Vocational School, in the school yard. Barry Bell conducted the session, and the unspoken thought in everybody's mind was "Is this it? Is this the end of the Corps?" Nobody really wanted that! Barry asked what it was that the Corps wanted, almost despairingly. People replied with their various suggestions until the whole





Lorne Ferrazzutti in his Jesters uniform

resembled a cacophony of whiners. It was probably the lowest point, morale-wise, that the Optimist Drum Corps had ever seen.

Then, like a bolt from the blue, came a voice, edged with steel and tinged with scorn. The speech, lasting only a short while, touched everyone in attendance, as its derisive words found a target in every heart. When it was over, everybody was shamefully silent, digesting the scornful message, knowing it to be true. That speech was the turning point, and anyone who was at that meeting could say that it was indirectly responsible for ensuing events aside, the whole episode proved that the Optimists were, after all, only human.

Whatever, the Corps was kicked out of its junky mood and, from that moment, we never looked back. Lorne Ferrazzutti, by the way, delivered the speech, ad lib.

## The New Repertoire

With that nonsense out of the way, things began to move in leaps and bounds. What helped was that the new music, all of it, found hardly any disfavour in the Corps itself. It was a good mixture of Broadway, classical, jazz, ballad, folk, Latin, and popular music, in other words, a well-rounded show with contrast and variety.

Because this repertoire was so apt and partially responsible for the outcome of this season, we shall list it in its entirety.

- *Let Me Entertain You* – from the musical “Gypsy”.
- *Asia Minor* – a classical excerpt from a larger movement.
- *St. Louis Blues* – a jazz contribution.
- *In The Mood For Love / Down By The Riverside* – two contemporary concert pieces, one slow, one fast.
- *Tabu* – a Latin inspired offering.
- *I Believe* – a cheer inducer, as Colour Presentation. Later to be described as having religious overtones.
- *The Party’s Over* – a self-explanatory closing number.

These selections appealed, in one way or another to almost everyone in the Corps. This was, and is, an important factor; and, just as vital, would prove to appeal equally to judges and fans alike.

It was apparent, early on, that this year’s version of the Optimists would be like no other.

The musical arrangements, both horn and drum, were the most difficult that we had been expected to play until now. This would be a major factor in the year to come,



Toronto Optimists (1962)

combined with the fact that this year we could play them. Because of the depth of talent in all departments, the new material was digested in double-quick fashion. This left more time for the perfecting of the music, both in section and ensemble practice.

A good horn line can be recognized by almost anyone, whether possessed of Drum Corps knowledge or not. To a layman’s ear the recognition of the music, played with no obvious blunders, would qualify a line as good. To someone with a bit of specialized know-how, other things play a part: power, range, dynamics.

## The Drum Line and Rifles

A good drum line is a bit more difficult to assess without some knowledge. This line, even apparent to those not in the know, was shaping up to be outstanding. The snares, Victor Krukliis, Ronn Prokop, and Ron Kaiser were showing signs of being the best we had ever had. Prokop had now been with us for two years, going into his third. Krukliis, who had come to us the previous year, from the Knights of Columbus Corps, had gained the reputation of being able to “play anything”. The newest member, Ron Kaiser, had practised so much that it was a simple matter of minor adjustment for him to fit in.



*Toronto Optimists drums (Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1962)*

Among these three superb drummers, Ronn Prokop more or less gravitated to a leadership position, if only by personality, technical ability, and seniority. Not surprisingly, his talent and drive would take him a long way in the music business, long after the Corps. He was part founder and drummer for the Paupers, and the more renowned “Lighthouse” rock bands.



*Optimists rifles (Varsity Stadium, 1962)*

Although he was a leading figure, the line was still under the control of Lorne Ferrazzutti, who guided its various talents and moulded it into a top competitive unit. Prokop, this year, wrote some of the drum music for the show, the first time that Lorne had allowed anyone to do this. Talent cannot be suppressed. This was to be proven again, years later, in another department.

Three excellent, veteran riflemen, Al Miller, Bill McNabb, and Andy Henderson highlighted the colour guard, fully versed in showy, but military, routines. Their twirling and tossing routines, done with rifles equipped with bayonets, were to catch the eye of many a crowd and judge. In a nutshell, this corps had potential in all departments, and all could see that the future looked bright.

## To the outside world

To the outside world, of course, we were still the Corps that had barely scraped through the previous year, retaining our title by the merest of margins. So it was to be expected others would think that the coming year would be a repeat of the past.

We shall see.

Because the Corps was progressing so well and so rapidly, it was a favourable situation for early learning of the drill. The only obstacle to this ambition was the lack of an indoor place to rehearse. Due to politics, a somewhat indistinct affair, the details of which are long lost, the local armouries were not available to us. This delayed early learning of the drill but proved to be only a minor setback.

One major step forward, technically, was the acquisition of a complete set of bass horns, twelve in all. They replaced the ordinary baritones that we had been using until now, and we were the first Canadian Junior Corps to use them. These horns, an improvement on the baritone, were the precursor of the modern contra-bass. Incidentally, all of our instruments, drums and bugles, were still of pre-1958 vintage, hand-overs from the old Optimist Trumpet Band and varied sources. The new bass horns that we acquired this year were the first new instruments this Corps had seen since its inception.

There was to be a change in the uniform this year. New blouses and cummerbunds were on order. They turned out to be a definite improvement, with trimmings that would enhance the overall appearance on the field, but without altering the basic design. When they arrived, it was decided to save them for a certain, important event. The results of this event were to justify this measure, making it that much more a “special occasion”. So, for the first part of the season, the original uniforms, in their entirety, would still be used, going into their fifth year. This situation is not uncommon in Drum Corps. Uniforms and instruments are expensive items to replace, so you try to make them last as long as possible.



*Toronto Optimists Bass Line with their new horns and new blouses (Rome, NY, 1962)  
Left to Right: Dave Watt, Ron Cottrell, Mel Dey, Glen Durish, Rick Boehnke, Robin Weatherstone, Dick Ward,  
Al Lavigne, Bill Thorne*

Another Corps that had green blouses, St. Vincent’s Cadets of Bayonne, New Jersey, folded this year. One of the best and most famous of the US Corps, they had been one of those that we had first competed against in 1958 at Batavia, New York. The other two at that contest, Audubon Girls and Garfield Cadets, we had since defeated, but not St. Vincent’s. “Vinnies” as they had popularly been known, were another Corps sometimes called “The Green Machine” or “The Big Green Band”. Their disappearance left a big gap on the American scene, especially New Jersey.

In Canada, De La Salle were reported to be red hot and raring to go. This was hardly surprising considering their performance the previous year. They were still the major contender for top spot and were not to be taken lightly.



*St. Vincent's Cadets*

This year, the situation differed in that we were not down and were looking and sounding, even in January, like nothing that had ever come out of Canada before.

On another plane, “Green Capsule Comments”, our Corps paper, could not keep up with the demand for it. The mailing list grew too big for the supply available and had to be curtailed. This was in line with a statement in “Illinois Info”, a column in the February 1962 issue of *Drum Corps World*. “The Toronto Optimists easily have the best publicity set up

of any Corps in the country”. This included Canada and the United States and was a tribute to the imagination and dynamism of Don Daber. He was incomparable. And he was Ours!

## **The arrival of Jim McConkey**

Something happened during the off season that nobody would have ever thought could, or would, happen.

One night, in the hallway of Jarvis Vocational, a young man was seen sitting on a bench. He was dressed in a raincoat, self-consciously reading, while often glancing up nervously at the people passing by. To some of us he was vaguely familiar, and we all eventually learned who he was. This was Jim McConkey.

We had only ever seen him before, flamboyantly marching in front of some of the best drum Corps in the business; namely, Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights and the Archer-Epler Musketeers. These two Corps were both among the top in their leagues, and both had been majored by Jim McConkey. He was among the best in the business. What, then, was he doing here? Well, it turned out he had come to join up with us.

Some of us were a little bit in awe at first, if only because of his reputation. Although being perennial Canadian Champions and having a decent name in the United States, we had never yet equalled the calibre of Corps that he was used to leading. What had brought him here?

His presence caused debate that went on for some time, and no stone was left unturned. All this controversy had its effect, which showed when Jim finally majored the Corps for the first time at a Sunday rehearsal.

Visibly nervous, he directed his first number in front of the corps. From the first note, his superb showmanship took command, all tension disappearing as Corps and Drum Major performed as one. At the end, most of us were aware that if we did not use his offered talents, we would be crazy. We were not crazy and James McConkey became our Drum Major for the year of 1962. It was a decision we would not regret. To cement this relationship and make him quickly feel at home, it was decided to throw a party for him. This was a “Get McConkey in the Corps” party and was held at a downtown tavern. It was a place of dubious reputation but where one could put tables together and let one’s hair down. We preferred places like that. The party was a success, and McConkey was “in”, not only officially but as one of the boys. We were almost ready for our 1962 debut.

Regardless of the uproar at the 1961 Canadian Championships, Al Baggs was still Chief Judge of the C.D.C.A. and still our Corps Director. This situation, with its potential for conflict, could not last forever and eventually something would have to give.



*Jim McConkey and Barry Bell (1962)*

## **New York State assigns 45 points for G.E.**

One development that would have consequence for us concerned New York State. The New York State Chapter of All-American Judges had decided to use score sheets opposite in value to Official Legion National Sheets. What this meant was that score sheets in New York State would allow forty-five points out of a hundred for general effect.

The execution captions would now allow fifteen points for bugles, fifteen points for drums, and twenty-five points for marching and maneuvering. The general effect captions would allow fifteen points for bugles, drums and M & M. Although this arrangement would only apply in New York State, it was to have an affect on our fortunes, and later in the story we shall see how.

During the winter months, someone had suggested the formation of a mini-corps. It was brought into existence and consisted of representatives from each section of the regular Corps. They learned music that was played by other, well-known Corps and played it with great panache. First displayed at the Drum Corps Convention at the Sheraton Brock Hotel in Niagara Falls, Ontario, they caused a minor sensation. The quality of their performance gave a clue to perceptive people of what to expect from the main Optimist Corps this year.

Jim McConkey, who was staying with Mrs. Nonie McKolskey-Bear, was the first one to suggest the idea of a Corps yearbook. The idea, though it had merit, was rejected. It was thought that Green Capsule Comments was already fulfilling any purpose that a yearbook might serve. The idea, though, was not forgotten.

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 11. (continued)

Green Capsule Comments, started from scratch, had snowballed and was now accompanied by a host of other items. These were all for sale to the members and displayed at shows to the public, by our tireless Ladies Auxiliary. Some of these items were:

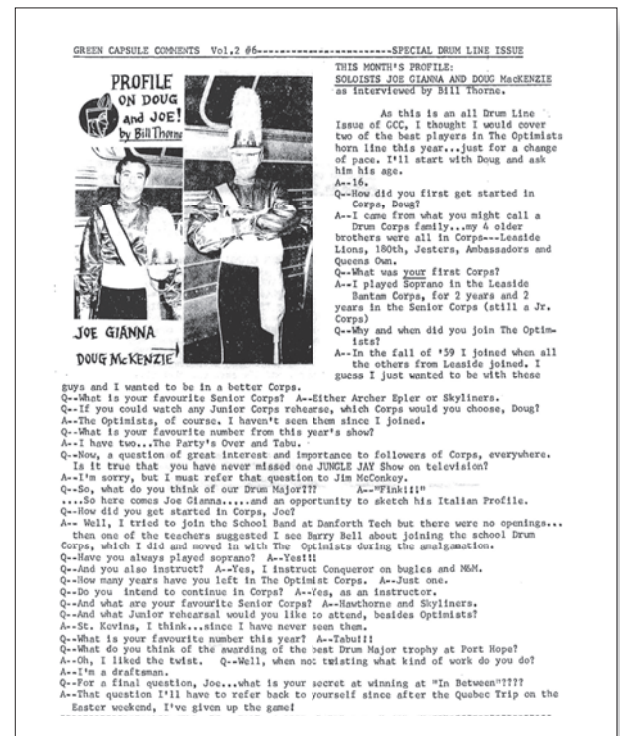
- Corps Pennant 50¢
- Corps Calendar 50¢, 10 photos of the Corps
- Jacket Crest 75¢
- Corps Button 25¢
- Booster Decal 25¢
- Toronto Optimist “Junior International Drum Corps Competition Button” 25¢



The last item is significant because it was representative of our first contest this year. It goes without saying that all of these items were creations of, who else, Don Daber.

Proving to be a creature of varied talents, Jim McConkey started a column in G.C.C. called “Personality Profiles”. In each issue, a few people and their characters were outlined in some depth, until the entire outfit had been covered. This frill was interesting, learning about one’s fellow Corpsmen. This fellow was proving to be a valuable addition to the Corps in more ways than one.

Finally, a winter indoor drill rehearsal area was acquired. Someone had cracked the wall of bureaucracy and got us an armoury. This enabled us to put the drill together earlier than usual, but not quite as soon as we would have liked. However, as with the music, the all-new marching formations were learned and executed faster than usual, all due to the experience of the Corps.



Profile of Joe Gianna and Doug MacKenzie from GCC

## The coming year

We were ready for the field, and capable, much sooner than in previous years. Yet, paradoxically, we would not this year be going to the Preview of Champions in Jersey City – the year when we would have been more ready for it than ever before was to see us staying in Toronto. However, we were not upset because there was a top-notch contest in Toronto on the same weekend. This was the previously mentioned “Junior International Drum Corps Contest”. It had a better than average line-up of Corps for a Canadian show, and we were committed to appearing in that one.

Sadly enough, when the Corps was undeniably looking and sounding the best it had ever been, the schedule that lay ahead was not ideal. Out of twenty-two appearances that the Corps would make this year, twelve would be exhibitions rather than contests. In fact, our first eight dates were exhibitions. For a competitive unit, this is not good; but one can only accept what one is invited to, and last year’s performance could have had an effect on this, Champions or not. Doing exhibitions is better than doing nothing, or possibly rehearsing. So we did them.

One reason for the high standards of the New Jersey Corps was their constant, high calibre competition. In Canada, and other regions, the few contests available made it harder to ever achieve the same standards. It did, though, happen. An occasional Corps would come from a region of lesser activity and beat everybody. Chicago Cavaliers were a good example of this. In the future, St. Kevin’s, Boston Crusaders, and most amazingly, the Casper Troopers, would bear out this observation. It only changed when the centre of gravity moved from Jersey to other regions.

The first of the exhibitions that led off our appearances was none other than the good old Ice Follies. This show was actually the product of an agreement between the Optimist Club, Ice Follies Management, and Maple Leaf Gardens. All the proceeds of that evening went to the Optimist Club, in support of their good works, part of which was, of course, us!

We often did special appearances for the club, knowing that without them there would never have been a Corps. Their support was, considering the relatively few people involved, quite expensive and would become more so as time passed. What they got in return was fairly extensive publicity and a sure crowd-pleaser when needed, for special occasions. Whether the Corps now embodied their original ideal of helping young people is debatable. It had certainly been eroded somewhat. The true purpose of a Drum Corps is to win contests, not be a charitable organization. This Corps had fulfilled that condition and would continue to do so. If in the process it steered wayward individuals onto the straight and narrow, so much the better.



*Ivor Bramley with Jim McConkey talking to the Drum Major of Audubon and others (Quebec City, April, 1962)*

The Ice Follies debut was at the end of January, and from February through May seven more exhibitions were performed. Most were in Toronto, but others were in Kitchener, Peterborough, and Quebec City. In March, we played at the show put on by our Bantam Corps, which was still a going concern.

For now, the trip to Quebec City saw us use, for the first time, two buses. Compare this with today’s top units, most of which use three, usually four, busses and a large vehicle for equipment. So, before our first contest we had fairly wide exposure until, at last, the first competitive activity approached.

In past years, we had been in Jersey City; now, Varsity Stadium in Toronto beckoned us to the “Junior International Drum Corps Contest”. The Optimist Club, acting independently of the Corps sponsored it, so we could compete in it. The line-up of Corps was above average for a Canadian show and we waited, more curious than anything else, to see what would happen.

Nobody could guess what was in store.

## Chapter 12: 1962 – The Steamroller

### The Junior International

It was early evening, June 2, 1962, and on Bloor Street, in the heart of Toronto, people were filing into Varsity Stadium. They were pouring in, not because this was football or hockey, our national pastimes, but Drum Corps. The eventual total crowd would amount to between six and seven thousand, and what they lacked in numbers they would make up for with enthusiasm. Almost every individual in that crowd was a Drum Corps fan, and, as a breed, they rival those of any other activity in their interest.



*Toronto Optimists on retreat at the Junior International (Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1962)*

What they were coming to see was the first “Junior International Parade of Champions”. This was the first show in Canada to feature three American and three Canadian Junior Drum Corps. Such a format had previously been confined to the senior division.

The US Corps were of good calibre, the top one being the Garfield Cadets. They were, by now, completely back in top-notch condition. Along with St. Joseph’s of Batavia and the St. Catherine’s Queensmen of St. Albans, New York, they would represent the United States. The Canadian entries were Preston Scout House, De La Salle, and the Optimists.

The original line-up had included the St. Kevin’s Emerald Knights from Dorchester, Massachusetts, a fine Corps that had come a long way during the late part of the fifties, becoming a match for anyone in the United States. They had succeeded in the toughest venue, New Jersey. Due to prior C.Y.O. commitments, they had to withdraw from this contest. It was unfortunate because they had never been in Canada and would have been a



*De La Salle and Midtowners on retreat (Junior International, 1962)*



definite hit. Their replacement was the St. Catherine’s Queensmen from New York. We had met them before, several times, but only defeated them once. Always good, they would be an entertaining substitute for St. Kevin’s.

Predictions had been made earlier by those aware of the situation that the Optimists would give the top US Corps a run for their money this year. Along with this, it was said that De La Salle were neck and neck with us in the sweepstakes. Scout House and St. Joseph’s were unknown quantities to the local scene at the time, so this show would really serve to sort out a raft of rumours and conjecture. In order that this contest be truly international, in fact as well as in name, the judging panel was mixed. Of nine judges being used, four were Canadian and five American.



*Toronto Optimists (Junior International, Varsity Stadium, 1962)*

When the Optimist corps came out on the starting line, it was to a subdued applause, probably due to the previous year’s near debacle at the Nationals. Some of it, though, was genuine appreciation and interest. We still had some fans.

Jim McConkey addressed the Corps and put it in readiness to step off. Then, turning, he marched out to face the crowd. Just watching this guy strut was an experience, and his display alone roused audience interest. A few yells of encouragement preceded his signal for the first note, and we were off. That first note from the horn line hit the stands like a clap of thunder, as the most powerful ensemble the Optimist had ever fielded let rip. The fanfare ended and the Corps stepped off the starting line and into their best season yet. Even before the first number was over, it was apparent to those in the Corps itself that everything was working as it should. You can tell these things. By the time that the first number was



*Jim McConkey conducting concert (Junior Internationals, 1962)*

completed, it was also apparent to the crowd. It started to come alive, realizing that this was the “old” Optimists but with a new face. Gone was the striving, but barely surviving outfit of last year, replaced by a robust, confident, powerful unit bent on regaining its stature. It was also, considering the early date, fairly accurate. Proof of this was the sight of judges walking around holding their clipboards and pencils, but not using them that often.

When the first half of the show ended, we had the crowd with us, on their feet, and their applause only served to fuel the fires of ambition. If we could do it, the second half would be better. Barry Bell had been observed doing a little jig on the sidelines as he saw all his planning, and that of the other instructors, unfold before his eyes. At the end of the standstill concert, the audience was in an uproar. The melodious rendition of “I’m In The Mood For Love”, followed by a rocking version of “Down By The Riverside” turned the place upside down. This, no doubt, was partially due to the change from “The Serenade From The Student Prince” and “In The Mood”. These two numbers had been very successful for us, but their time had passed. The now “fired-up” Corps literally “chewed-up” the field during the second portion of the show, and outdid themselves. Before the final note echoed through the stadium, the crowd was on its feet, remaining that way until the last man passed in review and disappeared under the stands. Never had there been such an ovation for this Corps. We were back!

However, there still remained the small matter of the score sheets to contend with. Often, no matter how good



*Garfield Cadets, St Catherine's Queensmen and St Joe's on retreat  
(Junior International, 1962)*

that a Corps feels it has performed, or how high the optimism bred by positive crowd reaction, judges’ opinions can draw a different conclusion. We were up against other good units and were ourselves still rough around the edges. The rest of the show featured good performances by all the units competing, and the final scores would reveal some surprises.

The Garfield Cadets were, as expected, the most smoothly professional Corps of the evening, not only in their execution but also in their arrangements, both music and drill. The complexity of their material, combined with the depth of talent that enabled them to execute well, was to prove a potent mixture. They easily upheld their status of a top US Corps, and it was not necessary to be an expert on the subject to detect this.

The other Corps involved, though, did not appear amateurish in comparison, and the crowd was treated to a good selection of various styles and degrees of competence. In giving the end result of this contest, let’s run through the Corps and scores as they ended up, giving a short report on each one.

In sixth position was Preston Scout House. Still a definite crowd favourite, they were hindered by an inability, or unwillingness, to accept change. Not only in style, but material, some of which was still of 1958 and before vintage. Although still a fine exhibition band, they lacked something for modern competition, scoring 69.76.

Placing fifth was St. Joseph’s of Batavia. They were new to Canada and still a young Corps. This was a Corps that was much improved over the previous year and would improve in leaps and bounds. Their performance on this night showed their potential. A good show, and the future would see them up with the best, scoring 73.95.

Now was De La Salle, who were held back by the problem all Corps face sooner or later, a lot of new people who needed to pick up experience. They had many fans that hoped to see them carry on where they had left off the year before. Eventually that would come about but not tonight. Although their show was effective with some good new material they garnered fourth place, with a score of 79.5.

Everybody loved St. Catherine’s Queensmen’s, music. Stan Kenton’s “Eager Beaver” was a crowd favourite, as well as an Optimist favourite. Music, content, and execution were the strong point, but a lacklustre drill presentation was to be a negative force. Always good, tonight’s show was for third place, barely edging out De La Salle with a score of 79.9.

By now we were really wondering what was going to happen. We had topped Del, and even the Queensmen, for a second time. We soon found out as the announcer droned, in second place, the Optimists, score 85.33. The Corps was jubilant. Almost six points over our closest Canadian rivals and a good US Corps. How well we had really done was revealed when Garfield, in first place, was announced with a score of 85.69. Less than half a point from a top American Corps was, for us, a definite success and more than we dared hope for. To some, who were involved in the business, but not at this show, this result was regarded as a fluke. No Canadian Corps had ever been this close to a top American Corps. However, all the Canadian Corps were getting better, and this was just the first time it had happened. It would happen again, more than once, in the future, and involving other Corps than the Optimists. As for us, this year, there was a whole season ahead that included chances to disprove the theory that this result had been a fluke.

## **The Port Credit Pear Pickers**

Things were now quiet for a while, contest-wise, until July 2nd. That was a whole month, but rehearsals were kept up at the same pace, not only to maintain but to improve our performance. During this slow period there were a couple of exhibitions and a parade that had an unusual aspect. We had already done one unusual parade at Christmas. It was unusual because of the fact that instead of uniforms we wore ordinary clothes but allowed the style to be any manner that each individual could devise. The result was a garish collection of costumes that caused great curiosity among spectators. Even that early, the quality of the Corps was evident and people were wondering who we were, as



*Toronto Optimists as the Port Credit Pear Pickers  
(New Toronto, Santa Claus parade, 1961)*

there were no emblems or distinguishing characteristics. We spread it around that we were the “Port Credit Pear Pickers”, and it was a great job and fun for all.

## The “Hatari” Parade

Now, the parade this month, on June 25th, was unusual for different reasons. One, we were the only Drum Corps in it, albeit this time in uniform. Two, this parade was for a rare occasion, especially in Toronto, as we paraded for the premiere of the new John Wayne film “Hatari”. The great man himself was there, along with other Hollywood celebrities, and followed us along Yonge Street to the location of the theatre. Mr. Wayne, larger than life, took the trouble to come over and see us, being made an honorary member of the Corps. With the true grace of the great, he accepted this, to add to his numerous lifetime achievements. He truly was big.



*Jim McConkey presents John Wayne with an honorary membership certificate in the Toronto Optimists (Hatari Parade, 1962)*

## On the Road

We were back on the road with more exhibitions, June 30th at the Tournament of Drums in Rochester, and July 1st in St. Catharines. These affairs were good for exposure, but what was needed to keep and hone the fine edge was competition, and the last day of this weekend saw just that. The two exhibitions served as rehearsals for July 2nd, in Port Hope, Ontario. De La Salle were about the only Canadian Corps that had any chance of surpassing us. They were still a good Corps and a whole month had elapsed since our last meeting. Not having been idle ourselves, at the end of the night, we were still six points ahead of anyone else. This was a great year to be in the Optimists and everyone who was knew it.



*Toronto Optimists (Metro Championships, Varsity Stadium, 1962)*

What was shaping up to be a banner year received a dent in its armour on July 7th. In Brantford, Ontario, De La Salle, who were never to be discounted, pulled themselves to within three points of us. Whether they outdid themselves, or we, overconfident, let things slide, is a matter of conjecture. It was, however, the first time that we got hauled over the coals for winning a contest.

## Rome, New York

All this activity was leading to something else. That “special occasion” mentioned earlier in relation to the new uniforms. On July 14th, off we went, again, to Rome, New York. This was the show for which we had saved the uniforms. It was more psychological than anything else, designed to give a boost in morale. Rehearsals were held every night for two weeks prior to this show, and every ounce of energy and know-how we had was poured into this effort. Being in New York State, the score sheets allowed forty-five points for general effect, more than anywhere else, or than had ever been allowed in the past.

What was the reason for all this preparation and calculation? There could only be one reason, Blessed Sacrament would be there. With the potential that existed in the Corps this year, we were really anxious to see what we could do against the best. Such sentiments would not have existed on their side, regardless of our good showing earlier in the year. They had never had to worry about us before, especially the previous year. We were as primed as could possibly be, at this time, and were out for blood. The “fluke” theory against Garfield earlier in the year, we hoped, would be laid to rest. So, aware of all the nuances involved and the fact that another such opportunity might never arise, off we went.

There were a total of six Corps in the show, four of which were American. We will limit discussion to two, only because not all of the others are known at this time.

When we rolled into the stadium, on the bus, Blessed Sacrament, or “Sac” as they were known, were on the field partway through their show. It was never a good idea to watch “Sac” when you had to go against them. You just felt like packing your stuff and going home. However, it could not be avoided, as we had to get ready for our turn.

At last, as the final, smooth strains of “In The Still Of The Night” floated over the stands to prolonged applause, we knew our time had come. Our new uniforms drew some comments from “Sac” people, who now stood around singly or in groups. Other than that they were unconcerned with us.

Standing on the line, we knew that tonight was now or never. As Jim McConkey marched out to face the crowd, some patriotic soul yelled “do it for your county, boys”. Well, if we could, we would.



*Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights (Jersey City, Dream, 1962)*

This event was an emotional one for Jimmy McConkey because he had spent many years with Blessed Sacrament. Now, here he was trying to beat them. It did not deter him from giving his best, and, when he signalled for the first note, the Corps responded likewise. For what was probably the first time ever, “Sac” people looked up and then came over to watch. Everybody in the corps noticed this, and it was a real morale raiser. Although we had played Rome before, the locals had never seen this version of the Optimist Corps, and they ate it up.



*Toronto Optimists (Rome, NY, 1962)*

“Let Me Entertain You”, the opening number went off well, but, in the second number “Asia Minor”, a disaster struck. There was a general breakdown on drums and horns when coming out of a standstill French horn solo. The Drum Major and the Corps got their signals crossed and half the Corps was out of time with the other. Here, training and experience took over, as the playing stopped, the drum line picked up the show, and the horns came back in on cue. The whole thing only lasted seconds and the show continued as if nothing had happened.

That was fortunate, because the performance was knocking the crowd and the judges over.

The lapse that occurred, and after, even prompted one judge to comment “nice recovery” on the score sheet, though of course it still cost us points.

Well, after that nothing else catastrophic occurred and the show picked up steam.

After the standstill concert, part of the show, Jim McConkey said audibly, “you better bleed on that finish line!” It was picked up by tape recorders and subsequently reproduced on records. It has since become a piece of Drum Corps folklore. (Editor’s note: This happened, not in Rome, but at Nationals)

Continuing, the horns played powerfully and well and the drums out executed themselves.



*Toronto Optimists on retreat (Rome, NY, 1962)*

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 12. (continued)

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Accuracy was one key to success and appeal was another. Would we have enough of both to make any inroads against the masters. If the crowd reaction was any indication, there was no doubt. The Corps marched off the field to a rousing standing ovation, but it remained to be seen what the verdict of the judges would be.

On the retreat ceremony, tension was evident in our ranks, aggravated by 98° F heat and the ever-present mosquitoes. All the Corps were lined up on the field, but at the judges table tabulations were still being done. This sort of thing is nerve-wracking. Finally the announcing of results began, and as they were reeled off excitement grew. Third place was given and we had still not yet been named. Nobody really dared hope for the unlikely, and at the official spoke into the microphone:

“In second place, with a score of 84.45, the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights”.

Nobody moved a muscle. It had happened, and it was a shock to everyone.

“In first place, with a score of 86.20, the Toronto Optimists”. The crowd roared its approval and, relaxing, the Corps members indulged in some well-earned self-congratulations. “Sac”, many times US National and New Jersey State Champions, had gone down to an outsider. Actually, it was the first time that a Canadian Junior Corps had ever defeated a past or present US National Champion. Now we had to find out how it had happened.



*Drum Majors on retreat as SAC announced in second place. You can see Jimmy's surprise as he covers his mouth!  
Drum Majors L-R: Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights, St John's Girls, St. Catherine's Queensmen, Magnificent Yankees, Appalachian Grenadiers and Toronto Optimists. (Rome, NY, 1962)*

Being the winning Corps, we were last off the field and stood patiently as the other units marched off in front of us, even “Sac” who were at the far end of the field. Everyone was now still and silent, but inwardly elated at being part of what was, up to now, the high point in the history of the Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. Finally, our turn came and we trooped off the field behind the stands, where we boarded our bus. Pandemonium reigned, while Barry Bell pulled out the score sheets and began to analyse the whole affair. Eventually chaos changed, slowly, to relative serenity and he was able to give us a breakdown of the sheets. Not surprisingly, the general effect captions had done the trick for us. Wins by 3/10 on bugles, 2/10 on drums, and a whopping 2.3 on marching and maneuvering. This last was a tribute to the creative genius of Doug McPhail. Self-taught and brilliant, he was mostly responsible for the devising and teaching of a drill that had out-marched the best in the business. Of course, without good execution, general effect suffers, and we had held our end up there, although not topping any captions. “Sac” took execution drums by 2/10, bugles by 7/10, and M&M by 0.15. These scores were the closest, in every category, that we had ever come to “Sac” execution-wise, and the margin of 2.8 in overall G.E. tipped the scales in our favour, to the tune of 1.75.

Well, there it was, and it was savoured all the way home. Would we have beaten them the next day, or in New Jersey? Only the gods knew that. Of course, back at work, in school, or even at home, when relating what we had done, often the reaction was “who?”, accompanied by blank expressions of incomprehension. We were happy, and in the Drum Corps world, it was an upset of major proportion that would reverberate for a long time to come.

Although the outcome of this affair had exceeded our expectations, everything afterwards was now anti-climatic. There was still much activity to contend with before the season ended. Most of this involved local competition, where our competitors could never be ignored no matter how successful we had been this far. This outlook on things was always to the fore in our calculations. If not always totally shared by the general membership, it was officially promoted from the top in order to forestall the onset of overconfidence or arrogance.



*Blessed Sacrament marching off (Retreat, Rome, 1962)*



## Post-Rome

Closer to home now, it was to Falconer, New York again for an exhibition at a senior contest. Then, on July 25th, at East York Stadium in Toronto, it was time for the first defence of our Ontario Championship title. We maintained our six point advantage over all other entrants, reinforcing the almost total dominance achieved this year.

In reporting this contest, it is noteworthy to recall remarks made, in a Drum Corps World column by the prolific writer, Bob Mannhardt. He penned more than one monthly column and was recognized by all as a knowledgeable source of news. Although he was an Optimist fan and an honorary member of the Corps, his articles were unbiased and critical of anyone, if such was deserved.

Regarding this show, he observed that De La Salle were as good as they were last year, which was decidedly good. Therein lay the problem. It was not good enough anymore to be “as good as last year”. Del’s horn line was as fine as ever and on par with ours; however, as Mr. Mannhardt pointed out, the Optimists had acquired a whole new show, moving ahead in material and competence. By regaining the initiative, the situation of last year had been reversed, forcing our rivals to contemplate inconvenient and difficult mid-season changes if they wished to remain competitive.

Early August saw us in Rochester, N.Y., again for the New York / Canadian Championship. Rochester was a good place to compete because interest in Drum Corps was widespread, and the stadium was always filled. This



*Toronto Optimists (Falconer, NY, 1962)*

one went down well as we topped a field containing St. Joseph’s of Batavia and De La Salle by six and seven points, respectively. An exhibition in Sarnia led, two weeks later, to a mixed junior/senior contest in Titusville, Pennsylvania. This town was noted for being the site of the first oil well drilled in the United States. Well, we drilled hard for this one, coming up against the Pittsburg Rockets Senior Drum and Bugle Corps. They were a good Senior Corps, but we managed to cap the field by a margin of 1.65. We had been in Titusville in 1961, but, as elsewhere this year, it was not the same Corps. To win this one was a definite feather in our caps.

It was no getting late in the season and increasingly unlikely that anyone in Canada would defeat us this year. Since July, we had maintained a minimum six point lead over all others and had not lost a contest anywhere since June 2nd.

## **Pittsburgh: The rematch that never happened**

But there was one more contest in the US before the Canadian Championships were held, and it was a big one. We focussed on it intently, and the list of Corps involved shows why.

There were six:

- Chicago Cavaliers
- Garfield Cadets
- Madison Scouts
- St. Catherines’ Queensmen
- Blessed Sacrament
- Toronto Optimists

What a line-up! The location was Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the show was an adjunct to the Allegheny County Fair, on September 2nd. Prior to this, on August 25th, we won back the CNE title we had lost to De La Salle the year before. This time it was by a huge eight points. One reason was that we had been rehearsing overtime in order to prepare for the Pittsburgh contest. It had been on our minds since it was announced eight months earlier. The added practice time made us more than ready for the CNE.



*Mr Baggs accepts presentation (Allegheny County Fair, 1962)*

At the time that the schedule was aired, we had not known how the Corps would turn out this year. Now, we knew. This contest was seen as an opportunity to go at the best, while realizing it would be far from easy to accomplish anything. There would be no huge general margin in the score sheets, nor any advantages of surprise. This was Pennsylvania, not New York, and everybody now knew that we were capable of an upset and would act accordingly. We, of course, were itching to get on with it. It was to be a three day trip, allowing much time for rehearsal.



*Optimists Rifles (Rome, NY, 1962)*

Away we went, full of beans, determined to again make our mark. Nothing could dampen our spirits, not even being accommodated in dark cabins reminiscent of Davy Crockett days. The rain that began to fall, also, could not suppress the spirit of the Corps. The trouble was that the rain began and did not stop. It rained, and rained, and rained. We still rehearsed hoping for a break in the weather, which did finally happen. What else had happened, of course, was that the contest field had turned into a sticky quagmire of wet, gooey mud. It was impossible to march on it, let alone compete. The contest was cancelled, and all the Corps were reduced to playing their shows in semi-circle, on a wooden platform. There was no other word for it but disappointment.

Drum Corps were nearly always subject to the whims of Mother Nature. Resignedly, we played our show to a small gathering of spectators, who probably had no idea of the lost drama confronting them. It was just a band show, a side show of the country fair.

Packing up our equipment, we boarded the bus for the long trip back to Toronto. There was always next year, but would we ever again have a Corps like this one.

## The Nationals

Never long subdued, the spirit was back by the time we got home and began to prepare for our own backyard contest, the 1962 Canadian Championship. It was less than a week later, and in the junior division it was not really much of a contest at all. Based on our record this year, we would have had to make several major blunders to lose this one. Still, it was the Canadian Championship, and, taking it seriously, as ever, rehearsals were not allowed to lapse. As a result, the six point margin established earlier was maintained. We became Canadian Champions for the fifth consecutive year. De La Salle, of course, were second,



*Toronto Optimists (Metro Championships, Varsity Stadium, 1962)*



*Toronto Optimists (1962)*

not having managed to close the gap since the beginning of the season; however, where other corps had disappeared, they were still there and would be for a long time to come.

Al Baggs, still our Corps Director, was also still the Chief Judge and presided at this show. This time there were no protests or political uproar. The scores were too far apart for that.

Other interesting things happened at this affair. The Optimist Bantams, our feeder Corps, placed second in the junior standstill division, a good omen for us, as they were one of our major sources of new talent.



*Toronto Optimists (Grey Cup Parade, 1962)*

Ivor Bramley’s proteges, the Oakville Trafalgar Patrolmen, won the title in their division for the first time ever. His influence on this Corps had been considerable, and his participation in their affairs had a lot to do with this result.

Back in the Junior “A” Division, Grantham, who had always been a dark horse and a viable contender, had suffered misfortune. Many of their members had, early in the year, left to form a Senior Corps. Consequently, they had not fielded a competitive Corps all year until the championships. Then they reverted to the Junior “B” Division, and, even then, only just made it to the finals. They seemed finished as a challenge to anyone.

The biggest surprise at this year’s Nationals was the first local appearance of a Senior Corps from Quebec. Les Diplomates de Quebec, unheard of and unheralded in these parts, came on and astounded all that saw them. A horn line of unequalled power, a crisp drum line, and a show crammed with general effect put Quebec Corps on the map. They were tremendous, throwing a real scare into the local establishment.

Before the season ended, there was one more function to attend, the Annual St. Catharines Grape Festival. Again, nature intervened and this was also rained out. So much for that!

The year was now officially over. What had started out seeing the Corps almost fold had become the most successful year in its brief history. A “Five Year Championship” dinner was held for all at the King Edward Hotel in downtown Toronto, the first of its kind.



*Toronto Optimists drums in concert (Falconer, NY, 1962)*

The savouring of the year just finished overshadowed speculation about the future. Plans and changes were announced, and it was revealed that from May to October about 1,800 Corps buttons had been sold. A lot of people had jumped on the bandwagon, so to speak.

There could be a lot more said about this year, but it would serve little purpose, let's just say that the Corps, rather than being merely good, had teetered on the brink of greatness. It was a heady experience, and one not easily discarded. Some Corps take much longer to reach such a plateau. Some never do. However, there were changes coming up, the foremost being the loss of at least twelve members. This, due to age, was unavoidable but not catastrophic. One of these was the spirited Ivor Bramley, who this year had been the guard commander and drill instructor. Staying around as an instructor, he would eventually become good enough to be sought after and used by top Senior Corps.

Oh yes, this was also the end for the author of this story. The time had come to go out into the real world and find out what was there. Six years in Corps, sometimes feted, applauded, always in good company. Now, I was to leave all this – for who knew what.



Toronto Optimists (Grey Cup Parade, 1962)

As far as this tale is concerned, it shall no longer be “we” or “us” when speaking of the Corps. Nor will there be any eyewitness reports for a long period, all information being culled from magazines, letters, and interviews. If the narrative suffers because of this, I offer no apologies. It cannot be helped.

## A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of 1962 progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Toronto (June 2)	Rome, NY (July 14)	Rochester, NY (Aug 4)	Titus- ville, PA (Aug 18)	CNE Toronto (Aug 25)	Nationals Waterloo (Sept 8)
Toronto Optimists	85.11	86.20	86.30	83.88	88.08	88.40
De La Salle	79.50		79.20		79.65	82.00
Preston Scout House	69.76				77.70	77.90
St John's Girls		60.35			69.50	
Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights		84.45				
Garfield Cadets	85.69					
St. Catherine's Queensmen	79.90	82.20				
St Joe's (Batavia)	73.95		80.55			
Magnificent Yankees (Utica, NY)		76.55				
Irondequoit Statesmen			76.35		77.30	
Pittsburg Rockets				82.33		

For a list of scores for this or other years, go to our website:  
<https://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca/>

*The 1962 album cover and the photo on which it is based.*



**F**UTURE ISSUES of The Toronto Optimists History Newsletter will, on occasion, pay tribute to Drum Corps that competed in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.



**S**IMCOE GOLDEN LIONS Over the years there have been a number of drum corps in Simcoe, Ontario. Included in these corps were the Optimists Trumpet Band, the Royal Blues, the Golden Lions and, later, the United Alumni.

The corps began during 1969 and was sponsored by the Simcoe Lions Club. They competed in the Junior B, Junior C and parade class categories. In 1977 they won the National Championship in the Junior C class. The Golden Lions final year competing was 1980. Below are photos of the Golden Lions.



*Simcoe Golden Lions (1974)*



*Simcoe Golden Lions (Nationals prelims, 1977)*



*Simcoe Golden Lions (1974)*



*Simcoe Golden Lions (1977)*



*Simcoe Golden Lions (1978)*

# Optimists Conquer Rome

By Richard Boehnke

First printed in the Aug-Sept 1962 issue of Green Capsule Comments

**R**OME, N.Y. July XIV —The Optimists entered Rome under their Emperor, Barrius Bellus and Field Commander Jimionus McConkcus and after some careful deliberation immediately selected the larger of two small local parks in which to set up Field Operations.

Chief Centurion Ivor Bramlonius gave words of encouragement during the manoeuvres; “Get that %&@#^\*\*% Line straight....and pick up your

%^&\*##@\*\*\* feet!!!! Twice through the show and with these stirring quotes in mind they returned to their temporary camp at the V.F.W. Rome Post to feast and rest. After much readying of their war equipment the Emperor called the men to put on their new armour and this duty kept Head Armourer Phillus Hennio (who had led the Optimists on the field of battle in Rome, years before) very occupied.

At VIII PM the large Battle Chariot of The Optimists rolled to the edge of the Colosseum grounds just as THE GOLDEN KNIGHTS were taking hard fought laurels from the crowd. To behold these old Veterans of The Field is akin to watching oil flow across a flat steel plate.

THE OPTIMISTS took up observation positions in the far stands and proceeded to scout THE ST. CATHERINE’S QUEENSMEN who swept across the Field in excellent form with all the



“...And in second place, with a score of 84.45, the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights”. (Retreat, Rome, 1962)

Corps Name	Totals	General Effect				M&M			Horns			Drums		
		M&M	Horns	Drums	Total	1	2	Avg	1	2	Avg	1	2	Avg
Optimists	86.20	14.9	13.1	13.7	41.7	19.1	18.61	18.85	11.6	13.2	12.4	12.9	13.6	13.25
SAC	84.45	12.6	12.8	13.5	38.9	18.6	19.4	19.00	12.8	13.4	13.1	13.5	13.4	13.45
Queensmen	82.80	13.1	12.2	13.3	38.6	17.5	18.6	18.05	12.1	12.3	12.7	13.1	13.8	13.45
Utica Yankees	76.55	12.7	10.5	12.3	35.5	18.0	17.5	17.75	12.3	12.5	12.4	10.6	11.2	10.90



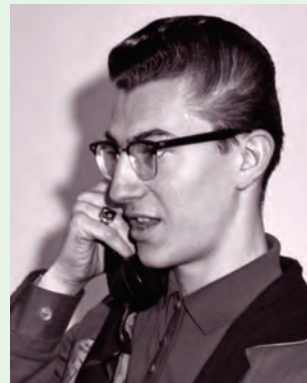


*Toronto Optimists guard on retreat (Rome, NY, 1962)*

audience's thumbs pointing up. Then, when the second last Contestant entered the ring, the Optimists gathered for inspection and at its completion paraded onto the Field of Battle.

The Battle was short and fast...and during manoeuvres some of the Field Manoeuvres didn't exactly go as set forth on the charts on paper as set forth during the winter campaigns but, during the heat of battle the Corps pulled through and almost continued marching through to the Retreat Ceremony. The dead-voiced announcer then simply dropped the placings into the Corps' laps and left them there... much to The Canadian Champions amazement and joy!!! It also affected Jimionus and caused him to drop the Guard Trophy when the results were announced.

A small feast was enjoyed by The Victors under the stands provided by The Optimist Club of Rome and the Corps of tired warriors then returned to the V.F.W. Post to play a few selections before heading across the border and home.



*Richard Boehnke 1962 and 2015*

# Optimists Top Sac, Queensmen At Rome Show

*From Drum Corps News August 8, 1962 issue.*

**R**OME, N.Y., July 14, 1962 — History was made tonight when for the first time, a Canadian Jr. Corps beat a National Champion U.S. Corps. The TORONTO OPTIMISTS surprised many in beating the BLESSED SAC and the QUEENSMEN along with three other corps. Rome Free Academy filled to about 2,000 people was the scene of this drum corps event.

The OPTIMISTS in new blouses and sashes, steam-rolled on to the field to “Wide World”. A very active colour guard, complete with bayonets, added to the enjoyment of their show. As the scoresheet later indicated, OPTI’s victory was in G.E., beating SAC roughly by two points and the QUEENSMEN by four points. Their score, 86.20.

BLESSED SAC presented a mediocre show, much likely due to the long ride from Newark to Rome<sup>1</sup>. High horns and drums, but lost out on the before-mentioned G.E. Their drill and music is neatly executed, but a show-stopper is needed. Their score, 84.45.

The QUEENSMEN, showing lots of spirit and drive, featured a new colour presentation and exit,

drill-wise. This topped off by new musical endings to “I’ll Walk With God”, and “Eager Beaver”, had the audience in constant applause. M&M was the only apparent drawback, but is bound to improve. Their score, 82.20.

The UTICA YANKEES featured a wide open drill and a proficient horn line. Highlights of their show is an extended company front and enlarged “V” formation. Repertoire included, “C’est Magnifique” and “Climb Every Mountain”. Look for big things from this corps and watch them at Legion State. Their score, 76.55

ST. JOHN’S GIRLS Corps, also of Canada, fielded the largest corps of the night. As with the case of many all-girl corps, drumming is their set-back. A large colour guard is used to the best advantage throughout the drill, along with a twisting major in concert. Their score, 60.35.

The APPALACHIAN GRENADIERS — a new corps, were rough in all captions, especially M&M. They deserve an A for credit and will be a corps to reckon with in a couple of years. Their score, 57.10.

Awards went to BLESSED SAC for major and OPTI for colour guard. The OPTIMISTS will have plenty of time to defend their new found title at Marion, Ohio and Pittsburgh, PA., when they’ll compete against the best corps in the country. Only time will tell what the outcome will be.



*Toronto Optimists on retreat (Rome, NY, 1962)*

<sup>1</sup>, Editors note - Toronto Optimists History: The distance from Toronto, Ontario to Rome, N.Y. is 280 miles . The distance from Newark, New Jersey to Rome is 253 Miles.

## A horn player looks at our drum line

by Richard Boehnke.

First published in GCC, Volume 2, #6 (1962)

**T**HE OPTIMISTS' DRUM LINE has always been a top contender in any contest the Corps has ever entered either here or south of the border. Certainly in Canada it has been on top for more than four years and shows even greater promise now. Well then, you ask, how come?

This high rating comes from more than one source, but a great contributor has been an amiable, dark-haired chap who sports a high forehead and glasses. He is usually seen wearing a drum sling and a pair of snare sticks in his right rear pocket. This man,

Lorne Ferrazzutti, is perhaps the main reason for the high quality of drumming the Corps enjoys. He is unquestionably one of the finest instructors on the continent and his lines back this up. He spends many sleepless hours fitting challenging drumming to the musical arrangements and then feeds it to his ever eager crew who then try to show him that it was too simple. How's that for a situation! Besides maintaining admirable control over his own section, Lorne also commands the full respect of every other member of the Corps as well as those who belong to other Corps. This is quite an enviable point of pride for any man dealing with groups as competitive as Drum Corps.

In order to carry out the wishes of such an instructor a Corps must have the caliber of talent suited to the task. This the Optimists have had in abundance throughout the history of the organization. Perhaps



Toronto Optimists drumline (Rome, NY, 1962)

Frans Rood, Ron Kaiser, Ronn Prokop, Vic Kruklis, Orest Burak, Mark Wicken, Colin Hedworth, David Johns,  
Front: Tom Bedford, Glenn Copp

## Reprints from Old GCCs (continued)

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the best way to illustrate this fact is to use the present members of the drum line as examples. Each and every one of them has met the required standards and are constantly trying to raise them even further. This attitude has always been prevalent in the Corps but is really shown in the various drum lines the Corps has been gifted with.

One of the most colourful drummers in the corps is the playfully serious Ronn Prokop whose two aims in life are to win on the field and keep the bus in an uproar. He is a walking gagbag during break or on a trip but becomes dead serious at a competition, He strives to have and belong to the finest drum line in the country and this becomes obvious on the field. He is forever fitting drumming parts to any piece that Barry Bell comes up with and these two have the most interesting discussions over the virtues of the drumming. It is hopeless to speak to Ronn after

a poor rehearsal but if everything went perfectly he becomes an animated cartoon.

Vic Krukalis is another example of the serious attitude of the drum line with hours of individual practice and his spirit to win. Both he and Ronn resemble mules if any of their passages are imperfectly executed and they both proceed to analysis the flaw. Picking him up for morning rehearsal is like carrying a double sack of cement into the car, that is, until he feels a pair of drum sticks in his hands. This is one boy who doesn't crack a smile from the beginning of the contest to the end of retreat.

To make up for the straight faces of Vic and Ronn the snare line has a bouncing baby in Ron Kaiser. This guy always looks like the cat that swallowed the canary. However his desire for perfection is no



*Toronto Optimists (Quebec City, 1962)*

less because of it, in fact he practices continually; on his school desk, the bus seat, or on your head. He and Ronn Prokop team up to beat the daylights out of the bass drums in the dressing room and they attempt to get the same execution from the large heads as they do from the snare drums. Ron Kaiser (in 1961, before he was on the line) spent the whole time of the New York-Canadian Championships drumming inside the bus while the Corps was on the field.

Among the tenor drummers we find one, Colin Hedworth, a most excellent Corps member in every respect. He has been with the Corps since its inception and his enthusiasm appears to increase every rehearsal. Besides much diligent practice on his own, he is always calling for rehearsals with the other two tenors and he usually meets with favourable response. Colin does not say that much to his group or to the rest of the Corps, but when he does speak, his words hold solid thought that never fails to benefit everyone concerned. There is barely a Corps activity in which Colin does not accept much responsibility and this may range from peanut peddling to organizing a Corps dance.

Both the management and the Corps proper hold this man, Colin Hedworth, in the highest esteem as a Corps member; for his efforts off the field are as great an asset to the Optimists Drum Corps as is his contagious desire for flawlessness while in competition.

Playing beside Colin is a plump-faced, pleasant mannered lad named Mark Wicken. Defiantly the most casually dressed member in the Corps, he forever looks abnormally comfortable in any situation. This relaxed appearance however, is not reflected in his performances which rank with the best. Mark's usual clean-cut appearance is a credit to both himself and the Corps while he is on or off the field.

**S**TANDING NEAR these two men is their third associate who becomes conspicuous through the quality of his drumming and his concealed smiles. Orest Burack is perhaps the Corps' most "romantic" personality which can be best illustrated by his girl friends in 9 States and 3 Provinces. Due to his being as colourful to watch as to listen to, he is a competing performer in every sense.



*Toronto Optimists (Metro Championship, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1962)*

## Reprints from Old GCCs (continued)

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A perfectionist to the end, he is constantly working out with the others at extra rehearsals. Orest also mingles well with the members of other corps, notably girl guards, and in general helps keep up the Corps' public relations.

Perhaps the most noticeable pair in the drum line are Frank Rood and Dave Johns who are on bass drum. Their hammer-like approach to these instruments is exhibited in both their playing and their carriage on the field. The hair-splitting pivots out of concert and the close shaves they give the cymbal player are all part of their showmanship. (In 1961, while Ivor Bramley was still on bass drum, he had the ill fortune to drop his stick in the concert. From then to the end of the show he beat that drum with his bare fist until the skin on his knuckles split: Needless to say, this red-headed, square-jawed Englishman displayed a cool head and steel will.) When Frank interviews Dave during a break in rehearsal it usually results in severe laughing pains for the rest.

The amount of rehearsal that the drum line puts in is tremendous and this is all in addition to the great deal of individual practice they do. If the Corps is rehearsing at 10 o'clock in the morning, the drum line usually begins at about 7:30 a.m. just to get into shape for rehearsal. This also includes the cymbal

players who practice for hours in front of mirrors to perfect their twirls. Glenn Copp, who has been with the Corps from the start, has his entire cellar filled with recording equipment and mirrors so that he can constantly check himself to the music, and this year, he finally carries 18" cymbals; he has been heard to remark, "At last the judges notice me, even though I'm doing the same cymbal work as in past years!" If an indoor rehearsal is called, he and his showy young understudy, Tom Bedford, will spend the entire day in his cellar perfecting their part of the show. If the weather clears they practice on the lawn to gain experience in preventing sit-down slips; situations which Glenn prefers to forget.

When the snare line began playing with "broom-stick" style drum sticks and the tenors decided that all-wood sticks would help the sound, there was a strange rush for these sticks by the other drum lines in the city. When however, they were dropped, we understand the sales on them correspondingly fell off. The snare line has even had their competitors come to rehearsal and lie on their stomachs to watch the sticking. Although this was rather bothersome when the drummers wanted to move around, it made them feel somewhat proud ....although annoyed.

This constant aim to lead, their individual perseverance, and their glue-like togetherness as a body is what has typified Optimists' drum lines since the Corps' beginning. When you combine this desire for perfection with the talented instructing of Lorne Ferrazzutti along with his colourful drumming arrangements, you cannot help but rise and gain the respect of the entire Corps and the Drum Corps World.



*Toronto Optimists (1962)*

## 1962 and Rome, New York

By Mark Wicken.

**T**HE YEAR WAS 1962 – my first year in the drum line and we were in Rome N.Y. to compete against Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights (SAC). They were the best and I am not sure, but I don't think we had ever competed against them.

We were pumped to say the least.

Jim McConkey was our new drum major.

Off the line we played “Let Me Entertain You” and then “Asia Minor”. At the end of “Asia Minor” the corps came to a halt and Len Perrin on French Horn played a ‘glissando’<sup>1</sup> at the end of which McConkey was to give us the downbeat and we would then finish the tune.

But “OMG”, McConkey forgot to stop and kept marching right through the French horn solo. I know everyone in the drumline was saying...

“Oh Sh\*\*t”... What now? But we all (including the horns) hit the downbeat together... exactly in time and we finished the show.

There was a terrible feeling after the show but when the scores came in, I don't think we lost a single tenth for what could have been a true disaster.

And BTW we won!  
We beat SAC!

Mark Wicken  
Drumline 1962-64



Mark Wicken

<sup>1</sup> A **gissaando** is a continuous slide upward or downward between two notes.



Toronto Optimists (Falconer, NY, 1962)

### Québec City, 1962

By Frans Rood.

**F**OR ME, 1961 was a year to remember in the annals of Optimist Drum Corps history. We barely won the Canadian Championship and I had just finished my first year with the corps.



*Canadian Nationals (1961)*

Now, it was on to 1962. Little did I know, nor did the corps, that this was going to be a very special year for all of us.

We worked our butts off during the winter in order to learn a completely new repertoire. We even managed a bit of outdoor drill (probably in the snow) at the Shell Tower, part of the familiar CNE (Canadian National Exhibition) grounds. There seemed to be something in the air about this year's corps. I couldn't put my finger on it, but I think it had to do with a certain pride and motivation, commitment, and the future for all of us in the corps. The following recollection was first in my mind, although 60 years later, it still rumbles around in this old brain. So...

Our staff told us that, in April, the Corps would be in Québec City over the Easter Weekend for a couple of standstill performances and a parade. Québec seemed so far away, but that's where we were going. We were leaving Friday and arriving late Friday night or early Saturday morning. I'm not sure.

Now you have to remember, in past years we travelled by bus and a couple of rented station wagons; however, the corps had grown during the winter of 1961-62 and management decided that The Optimists would travel in two

buses. That was "boss", that was "Class". That was "BIG time".

The corps stayed in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, about a half hour out of Québec City. I think the Huge Motel double decker place was called the "Laurentide". Most of us had to sleep four to a room since there was another corps there as well.

I think that the other corps was the Rochester Grey Knights.

We got settled in our rooms before boarding the buses to go to Québec City, to the Colisée. It was all new and kind of strange, especially with people speaking French. We had French Canadian organizers leading us around. It was all so upscale, if you will. The usual rehearsal followed and I am in a bit of a muddle but I think we did an evening show here and this was when we saw the Cambridge Caballeros perform. They were an amazing corps from Cambridge, Massachusetts! Their arrival on the drum corps scene was very impressive, a junior version of Hawthorne Caballeros. Another corps was the Bon Bons, from Audubon New Jersey, an all girls drum corps with top drawer talent. Also performing were The Grey Knights from Rochester, New York, and, of course, The Optimists. Certainly not too shabby a line-up. There were also a couple of local area corps as well and an all girl Troupe that may have been the forerunner of the "Les Chatelaines".



*Toronto Optimists warming up with Audubon buses in the background (Colisee, Québec City, 1962)*



## Recollections from Corps members (continued)

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A similar event was to be held on Sunday except this was a matinée performance which was preceded by a parade. First, though, I visited the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Shrine with Vic Krukalis, Ron Kaiser and perhaps a few others. It was not the modern basilica that is there now, but the older, smaller church, still very impressive in its own right.

Now I can't tell exactly when the following took place. It may have been Sunday. We were to leave

on the cobblestones, it couldn't manage the hill! We stopped, the brakes went on and then an announcement: "off the bus!" It was overloaded, so we had to get off. The bus started up and we were asked to actually PUSH the bus!! We helped it along and the bus made it to the top of the narrow street before we all piled back on and continued to our destination. Alas, not much was open. It was a bit of a letdown, but the bus trip was worth it!



*Toronto Optimists (Quebec City, 1962)*

on Monday morning. The corps members who wanted to go into the city could meet at the bus that evening and it would take them into the city. We would then meet at a designated time to return to our motel.

Well, the bus holds 42 seated, 15 standing that was full capacity, and I'm sure we had a few more. On our way, the bus driver travelled up one of the rather steep narrow streets. With tires spinning

Monday morning arrived and it was "On The Bus" and we headed home. There are a couple of humorous incidents on our way back to Toronto, but they are best left untold.

Thank you for letting me share this recollection one of so many of the best times with the corps, the people in it and the Optimist Club that sponsored us. One of the best times of my life!

### Art Tamaki

#### Corps: Toronto Optimists

Even though Art came to the Toronto Optimists without any drum corps experience he quickly found his place in the French Horn section. My recollection is that Art's first trip with the corps occurred when The Optimists were part of "Symphony in Brass", a drum corps show held at the Chicago Opera House in February 1965.

It must have been a big thrill for Art since that show included many top-ranked corps such as the Hawthorne Caballeros, Chicago Cavaliers, Chicago Royal Airs and St Kevins. We were billeted by the Cavaliers and stayed with the families of corps members. Art marched in our French Horn section until he aged out in 1967.



Art was a solid horn player and a good human being. He was a kind, intelligent guy with a quick wit and a good sense of humour. He almost always had a smile on his face. I suspect that Art touched the hearts of all who knew him.

#### Here are a few comments from some of those who knew Art.

*"Art was a wonderful person. He was genuine, kind, bright and had a pleasant disposition."*

*"He was a wonderful, intelligent and supportive guy. One who could always find a reason to smile."*

*"I have so many good memories of this great guy. He was one of the most intelligent, caring and humorous persons I have had the pleasure to know."*

*"He was a larger than life husband and Dad and certainly enjoyed every day with joy and a smile."*

*"I liked Art, a good fellow and fine corps member. Solid comes to mind."*

*"I have not seen Art for many years but have fond memories of his being in the Toronto Optimist Drum Corps and contributing to our National Championships.*

*Art was a stalwart; he never complained*

*and was always congenial; he was a good French horn player and corpsman. He was one of those guys who was, well, just always dependable, upbeat, quiet, with a smile on his face and "optimistic." In reading his obituary and the outpouring of sympathy, it is evident that Art was, as we say, one of the good guys very much appreciated and loved by those who knew him."*

*"He was just one of those guys that made Optimists so great."*



Art Tamaki, Alan Acron, John McAlpine, Mike Thys, Brian Byrne, Bob Burman (1967)



**John Kubicz**

**September 10, 1943 – June 9, 2021**

**Corps: Port Credit Saints, Toronto Optimists**

*During the '60s John was one of my closest friends. He was a french horn player and joined the Corps in 1963. He came from The Saints (Sr. B) Drum Corps in Port Credit. Although John was only in the corps for two years, he made a major contribution to the success of the corps in those years with his hard work and enthusiasm for drum corps.*

*John was a gifted athlete and became a very successful businessman. He leaves behind his wife Cynthia, two children and a lifetime of good friends and wonderful memories. He is missed by all those who knew and loved him. RIP 'Kubes'. Mark Wicken*



*John is the French Horn in the centre, between Terry McKolskey and Bill Hannah. Rehearsal, Racine, Wisconsin (1964)*



*Kidding Bill Grigg about his "wardrobe malfunction". (Menominee, Michigan, 1964) (John is on the left in this photo)*



*Toronto Optimists (Metro Championships, Varsity Stadium, 1962)*

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