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## by Michele Peloquin

The year was 1969. Two senior drum and bugle corps, the Holy Rosary Caballeros and the Skylarks from Providence, RI, merged. Rick Harrington was instrumental in getting the corps started by calling members from the disbanded Holy Rosary Caballeros and getting them to join.

He called Gil Silva and Silva told him he would be there for



The Rhode Island Matadors, approximately mid-1980s (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

three weeks and ended up staying 30 years.

This new corps would become known as one of the finest, crowd-pleasing corps in the history of Drum Corps Associates.

The management consisted of director Michael Corso, assistant director Gil Silva and business manager Anthony N. Carcieri. Instructors were Eddie Denon on horns, Erie LeClare on drums and Paul Palange on marching and maneuvering.

The Matadors started off competing in the Red Carpet Association circuit. During the next few years the corps grew in size.

In 1972, a tradition was broken



The Rhode Island Matadors, approximately 1972 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

and women were allowed to join. Mary Lou Sagat was the first female in the corps.

Ace Jordan was added to teach color guard. For the first time the corps qualified for DCA Finals. The senior circuit had expanded from the top 10 corps in finals to 12 and the Matadors finished in the 12th position.

The following year, the Matadors aggressively recruited more members. Individuals from Massachusetts and Connecticut came to see the corps and joined. The organization decided to give the audience the type of show they wanted to see and hear. Show after show, the audience gave them standing ovations and booed the low scores. They moved up two

positions to 10th in 1973.

The 1974 season -- what a year! Joe Genero took over as horn instructor, Gil Silva became assistant drill



(Above) The Rhode Island Matadors, approximately 1972 (photo by Alan Winslow from the collection of Drum Corps World); (below) the Matadors, approximately 1976 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

instructor and Leroy Andrews assisted the color guard. The corps' repertoire included *Tico Tico*, *Popcorn*, *Ritual Fire Dance*, *Mexican Hat Dance* (highlighted by a sunburst of horns and flags) and *La Virgin de la Macarena*. It was also the year Jim Centorino joined the corps and added a few great solos (the middle soloist in the photo below in front of the megaphones).

The corps worked hard at perfecting the show. Hours and hours of practicing in the hot sun were about to pay off. The Matadors were known for a powerful horn line. Again, the corps received standing ovations from the fans, but not higher scores from the judges.

Finally, on August 24, 1974 in Amherst, MA, the corps got to celebrate a memorable moment -- defeating the Connecticut Hurricanes. Show after show, the Matadors would party as a family and celebrate the great job on the field because they knew they did the best job they could. The fans loved the corps and finally the judges woke up.



The Rhode Island Matadors, July 12, 1980, at the Grand Prix, Meadowlands, NJ (photo by Joseph Zepko from the collection of Drum Corps World).

The moment came to announce the scores at the DCA Championship: "And in fourth place, with a penalty of 1.1 and a score of 70.35, the Rhode Island Matadors."

Ritchee Price joined the corps in 1975 at a time when the organization was going through some rough times. That year's placement was ninth at the DCA Championships.

In 1976, there was a change in the instructional staff, adding Bobby Hoffman on marching, John Bodnar on percussion and Jim Centorino assisting with brass. Even with these instructors, the corps still could not pull it together, placing 10th at the DCA Championships.

Many were about to sacrifice their love for drum corps and find out what it would be like to have a summer off. Being Matadors, "I give up" was not in their vocabulary. They had to figure out what needed to be done to make 1977 one of the best years.

The summer of 1977 was beyond a doubt the best year for the Matadors. Tom Pratt joined the color guard staff. The corps had new red uniforms for the horn and drum line, which many called "pajamas."

# Rhode Island Matadors

The color guard wore below-knee-length black skirts with slits on both sides up to the thigh, yellow stockings and white peasant shirts. Hmmm . . . think Bobby Hoffman had anything to do with this?

The repertoire included *Oklahoma Crude*, *Rodeo*, *Channel One Suite*, *Malagueña* and what would become the corps' signature exit, *Rocky*. Centorino and Price would become known as legendary duo soloists in DCA. They were incredible, waking up every dog in



The Rhode Island Matadors, 1980 (photo by Joseph Zepko from the collection of Drum Corps World).

make it in time.

Finally arriving at Madison Square Garden, the corps raced off the buses and rushed to get dressed and get equipment. There was no time to rehearse and no time to think.

The adrenaline was pumped so high from running around that before they knew it, they were lined up to start the show. And what a show! As loud as they were, the fans got louder. They went wild. They never sat down.

At the end of the show there was never such thunderous applause. Many members had tears in their eyes because they did one of the best

shows imaginable.

Coming off the floor, the Long Island Sunrisers and Reading Buccaneers applauded. That's sportsmanship. When the announcer read the Matadors in third place, fans went crazy booing the judges. The Hawthorne Caballeros won and the Sunrisers took second. Members of the Matadors felt they should have won that show.

The Rhode Island Matadors were invited to not only march in, but lead off the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade with host Ed McMahon. They were the only drum and bugle corps in the parade that day. The corps placed fourth that year and again in 1978 at the DCA Championships.

Many members left after 1978. The corps was going through some tough times, as were many others, and the Matadors placed 10th.

The Rhode Island Matadors reunion corps, 1999, in exhibition at DCA Championships in Allentown, PA (photo by Harry Heidelmark from the collection of Drum Corps World).



the neighborhood.

The power of the horn and drum line was extraordinary. The color guard was astonishing. The fans did not sit down much that year; they gave the corps a couple of standing ovations each show.

The most memorable performance was at Madison Square Garden in New York City. The buses had just started up to leave Providence when one crashed into the one in front. No one was hurt, but the bus could

not be used. Needless to say, the corps was going to be late for the show. After contacting the show sponsor, the appearance time was moved back to last in competition. All they could do was hope to



The Rhode Island Matadors, August 13, 1982, at Bloomfield, NJ (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).



The Rhode Island Matadors, 1987, in Bridgeport, CT (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).



The Rhode Island Matadors, 1986, in New Brunswick, NJ (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).

The 1980s brought in new members who worked hard and brought the corps up several places in DCA. They also had the most extraordinary color guard DCA had seen up to that point.

In 1999, the Matadors formed a reunion corps for one year. Most people had not marched in 20 years. It started off slow, but by spring the numbers increased. The horn players split their lips frequently to get them back in shape. The 1970s color guard had to learn 1980s-style flag work.

They had to learn a new way of marching. Those legs wanted to pump up when instructed to "mark time, march!"

That summer they rehearsed every weekend with

temperatures in the 90s, but it brought back wonderful memories. The first show was in their hometown.

Some feelings never go away. The adrenaline comes right back and members go out and do the best job they can. This was the best show all year. They also put on a show in Connecticut.

Then came time for the DCA alumni show. Horn players flew in from the East, West, North and South. The legendary duo soloists, Centorino and Price, were together again. They woke up all those poor old dogs, again! It was great show and everyone had fun. The best friends in life are those from drum corps, for it stays in your blood forever.



Michele Peloquin was born and raised in Marlboro, MA, a big drum and bugle corps city that had three drum corps -- the Junior Junior Dukes, ages 6-10; the Junior Dukes, ages 10-16; and the Senior Dukes, ages 16-21. The city was also home to two drill teams -- the Junior Duchess and the Senior Duchess.

Peloquin joined the Senior Duchess drill team in 1966 at age 12. From 1967 to 1972 she marched with the Dukes of Marlboro and from 1973 to 1978 she marched with the Rhode Island Matadors.

After 20 years of not marching, Peloquin joined the RI Matadors reunion corps. She goes to as many drum corps shows as she can, along with her 6-year-old nephew, Jeremy. He has been going to shows since age two and a half and has been playing the trumpet since age five.

Peloquin works with engineering change notices. Her hobbies are fixing up old photos and creating different crafts with photos.