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by Michael Boo

It's hard to believe that Star of Indiana was with us for only nine years. During its brief ascent as a DCI powerhouse, the corps created a center of gravity that belied its relative youth.

Director Jim Mason referred to Star of Indiana as "a chameleon on plaid," (referring to a chameleon changing its color while moving across a piece of plaid), reflecting the unit's continual change in artistic expression and thematic direction.

As rapidly as the corps seemed to appear on the competitive scene, it was gone, at least from the striped field. But the corps lived on in unexpected and untested incarnations; first as "Brass Theater" and then as the artistic nucleus for "BLAST!" and "Blast II-Shockwave."

### Origins of the corps

*Note: Much of the following is based on the extensive memoirs of Bill Cook, posted on the Star of Indiana Web site.*

Star, as it was simply known to most fans, would never have come to be had it not been for Carl Cook, son of Bill and Gayle Cook of Bloomington, IN. The Cooks had started up a company that grew to be a major supplier of coronary catheters for angioplasty procedures.

In 1979, Carl wanted to watch the DCI Championship Finals on PBS. His father had never seen drum corps until that fateful night from Birmingham, AL. The broadcast hooked them both on the activity.

The following year, having never before seen a live show, father and son attended several competitions around the Midwest. Bill "couldn't believe 15- to 21-year-olds could make such wonderful music."

Though Carl played saxophone, he wanted to try out for Colts during his sophomore year in college. To his surprise, he was given a flugel horn and told to go home and learn how to play it. He persevered and marched the 1983 and 1984 seasons, then stayed on for two years as an instructor.

Phantom Regiment's former director, Bob Lendman, came to Bloomington in 1982 for a competition with his corps, the La Crosse, WI, Blue Stars. Bill Cook met him after getting a call from the police chief about some "drum guy" parking his equipment

truck in a "No Parking" zone. (With Carl in a corps, the chief thought Bill would have an idea how to deal with drum corps folk.)

In 1984, Lendman and Bill Cook were crossing a street in Atlanta during the DCI World Championships, when Cook said his son had just aged out of Colts. He asked Lendman what he thought of the two of them starting a drum corps. Lendman blurted out, "You're nuts!"

However, Cook was serious and he asked Lendman whom he would pick as a director. Lendman mentioned Jim Mason, director of the Colts for eight years and a former member of the Madison Scouts.

Cook and Lendman went searching for Mason and found him standing by a Colts bus near Georgia Tech's Grant Field. After some pleasantries, Cook asked Mason if he would consider being director of a new corps in Bloomington. Mason didn't say yes or no, but agreed to think about it and talk with his wife.

The following Monday, Cook called Mason and set up a visit to Bloomington. After seeing Cook's commitment to the project, Mason agreed to become the new director, without even discussing his salary.

The corps did not yet have a name. It also did not have a place to rehearse, nor did it have any equipment, buses, trucks, uniforms,

# Star of Indiana



Star of Indiana, 1986, at DCI Finals in Madison, WI (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

staff or members.

During that first visit to Bloomington, Mason told Cook it might not be possible to put a corps on the field by the summer of 1985, as so much was needed in infrastructure and personnel. A full corps would require four buses and two trucks, plus all the other goodies such as uniforms.

He also told Cook, "The staff is the key to success and, if we can hire the right people, we may be able to teach the corps how to get on and off the bus the first year."



Star of Indiana at one of their first performances, 1985 (photo by Ellis Loughner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

### 1985 pre-season

The corps was soon to have a rehearsal site and a hall all to itself, a surplus grade school in the countryside near Bloomington. Cook took Mason to see the building and two weeks later the school was purchased. Bulldozers soon leveled an area for the practice field.

Mason introduced Cook to uniform designer Michael Cesario, who would design the corps' distinctive star-on-the-front uniforms. Everything was shaping up except for bringing in bodies.

Mason knew that to recruit marchers, he would have to have an impressive teaching staff on board. Before long, he had brought in some notable instructors and designers, including Michael Cesario, Dennis DeLucia, Bob Dubinski, Larry Kerchner, John Simpson, Steve Suslik, Marc Sylvester and George Zingali. Each asked, "Will we get paid?" as they had experienced such problems with other corps and wondered how a new corps could meet its obligations.

While the instructional and design staff would impress potential members, Mason also felt that the support staff was equally important. Among those he brought in was Moe Latour, who had extensive experience as a tour director. Eric Lund came from Blue Stars to drive the equipment truck and maintain and repair the instruments and Dave Crouch came out of Phantom Regiment to become the head bus driver.

Lendman found three buses for sale and a semi-trailer was soon added to the corps' growing inventory. Lund gave floor plans of the Blue Stars' equipment truck to carpenters, who prepared it for instruments and uniforms yet to be purchased. A truck tractor was also purchased.

In October 1984, the corps was incorporated as a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation. The original name on the State of Indiana charter was Hoosier Assembly, a temporary moniker that would suffice until the "Name the Corps" contest.

Hundreds of suggestions came in via advertisements in the local paper and publications within the various Cook companies. Kerchner's wife submitted the name we all came to know.

When it was time to start recruiting, Mason knew all he had to offer the kids was infrastructure and ideas, saying to Cook, "All

I've got to sell is hot air!" And thus, Mason became one of the most successful hot air salesmen in history.

The Cook graphics department created advertisements and a membership brochure, and Mason sent out hundreds of packets to band directors in four states, asking them to loan Star their students, but only if they didn't have a summer music program.

Some of the directors had "lost" their best students to drum and bugle corps in the past and were initially distrustful of Mason's motives.

Mason got a call from an Indiana band director who had six non-senior students attend the first open house. He told Mason he had been counting on these students to be in his summer program and asked him, "What are you going to do about it?" Mason called all the kids and encouraged them to do their own summer program instead of Star. The director was incredulous, so much so that he sent Mason his graduation list from which the corps picked up eight experienced players.



Star of Indiana, 1988, during the "Porgy and Bess" show (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

it took about \$1 million to put the corps on the field. Due to the resources and insight of Cook Group, various corporations were set up to serve as funding for the corps, including a bus charter service and a travel service. The corps had a revenue stream that allowed it to enjoy freedom from financial worries.

Cook let the public

know how and why he was putting a corps on the field, hoping that other corporations would seize the opportunity to get involved in the activity and fund corps of their own.

Despite Cook's wishes, Star of Indiana remained the only corporate-sponsored corps when it left competition after the 1993 season.

Star's efficiency was something to behold. The equipment was well-maintained and members were fed well and cared for by professionals, from a nurse and fitness director to the head cook and drivers.

Star had an unprecedented infrastructure, a "name" staff and a full corps, yet had a difficult time lining up shows. Since it was not yet a DCI member corps, Star had to line up its own tour, practically begging to get in to shows.

It was a good thing the corps had good vehicles, as they sometimes had to travel hundreds of miles from one show to another, with only fuel stops in between. Cook remembers, "We were nomads migrating to any sponsor who would have us."

The first show, "Walt Disney Salute," was designed to be loveable and cuddly, with bright pink-fuchsia uniforms emblazoned with a giant star. Music was a collection of Disney classics, including *When You Wish Upon A Star*, *Zip-A-Dee-Do-Dah*, *A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes*, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?* (complete with a running stick figure of a wolf), *Mickey Mouse March* and *It's a Small World*.

The corps' first show was on June 16, 1985, at the Illinois State University stadium in Normal. Mason insisted the corps arrive a day early so members could practice getting off the bus, unloading, warming up and marching in to the entrance gate -- things most corps would take for granted.

On the trip to Normal, Mason (at Lendman's suggestion) had one bus "fake" a breakdown, putting the members of that bus on the remaining buses, just to give the kids an idea of what touring was like. (The driver of the "crippled" bus arrived in Normal five minutes after the corps.)

No one outside the corps knew quite what to expect, but it turned out Star was for real, scoring 73.6 to Phantom Regiment's 74.4 and The Cavaliers' 76.9 and winning its first high brass award.

In Allentown for the DCI East

number of Bridgemen instructors and members came out to Bloomington, believing their corps was not going to make the field in 1985. Among this group was Star's first drum major, Karen Ruschman.

By May, the corps still needed members. Pride of Cincinnati had just announced that its corps would not make it to the field and director Ron Poole called Mason to ask if he still had any openings. A Star bus went to Cincinnati and picked up some former Pride members.

Despite bringing in the members from Bridgemen and Pride, only 14 members of Star that first year had prior drum corps experience. But those experienced members are credited with teaching the others how a corps got "on and off the bus."

#### 1985 -- 'Walt Disney Salute'

Cook admits to entering the activity with a naiveté that wasn't prepared for the rumor mill.

As he recounts, "Rumors mixed with fact began circulating that Star raided other corps of staff and members. Some corps alumni and members alleged that Star ruined their corps or stole their staff. And even before the

corps performed its first show in Normal, IL, drum corps pundits were calling Star the 'Mickey Money Corps.' Star was born to be disliked!"

The reference to Mickey Mouse was due to the corps' first show being a "Walt Disney Salute," comprised of several selections from Disney films. The *Mickey Mouse Theme* was also in the show and the corps sang the famous "M-I-C-K-E-Y-M-O-U-S-E" refrain in the show.

It is true that

The first camp saw more than 150 hopefuls audition. But ultimately, it was the misfortune of two other corps that provided Star with its experienced nucleus.

In September, a



Star of Indiana during the 1987 circus show (photos by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Star of Indiana, 1989, at DCI Finals in Kansas City, MO (top and bottom photos by Orlin Wagner, middle photo by Art Luebke, all from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Championship, Star placed 13th in prelims, out of finals by one position. (This was the only time the corps would not advance into a finals competition.) It appeared the corps' momentum had stalled. On August 6, Star was seven points behind Freelancers, a corps it might have to beat to make the DCI World Championship Finals.

The August 12 "Pride of Indiana" show was held in Bloomington just a week before the DCI World Championships in Madison, WI. It was the corps' last chance to revive itself before heading to Madison.

When the corps arrived in its hometown, Mason sent his bus drivers toward Pennsylvania to pick up the 27th Lancers, who had two broken buses. They arrived in Bloomington in time for their performance.

Such acts of generosity didn't generate much, if any, publicity. Unfortunately, other things did. During DCI Championships week, one reporter asked Cook, "I heard that you are called the Mickey Money corps." Cook, probably with a wry smile, attempted to defuse the question with humor, responding, "Yeah, we're the best corps money can buy."

That one short comment traveled through the drum corps pipeline with remarkable speed and kept coming back to haunt Cook for years.

Since it wasn't a DCI member corps, Star would have to advance through prelims, quarterfinals and semifinals in order to march on Saturday night. A top prelims score of 84.1 and top quarterfinals score of 86.7 led many to believe the corps could make it out of semifinals.

About 11:00 at night, Mason walked over to a table during the corps' banquet and read off some scores. Those who heard him thought the corps placed 13th. But Star had

placed in finals, in 10th place, with a little room to spare.

The night was bittersweet for Mason, however. He knew what his close friend George Bonfiglio, director of the 27th Lancers, must have been thinking. The 27th Lancers, the corps that knocked Star out of finals at DCI East, was now knocked out of the DCI World Championship Finals by the upstart corps.

Star maintained its 10th-place finish by scoring 85.80 in finals.

At the end, it was heard among some fans that "Cook bought the finals." That was easier for some to believe than the fact that the corps had laid some solid groundwork pre-season and picked up some marchers who were willing to listen and work hard for a good staff, and believed enough in themselves that they never gave up.

With Star, fact was often less fun than fiction.

### 1986 -- The outer space show

Some fans expected Star's resources and initial accomplishments



would allow the corps to rapidly move up the competitive ladder.

While the corps ended the 1986 season scoring 90.50, it would advance just two positions to earn eighth place at the DCI Finals.

Notable brass arranger Jim Prime and brass technician Donny VanDoren became staff members and permanent fixtures in the organization, allowing the show to be musically more demanding than the 1985 offering. All the music was composed by John Williams, including *Adventures on Earth* from "E.T.," *The Conversation* from "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," *The Throne Room* from "Star Wars" and *Finale* from "Star Wars."

During *The Conversation*, 18 contras re-created the booming tuba part from the "E.T." score; the extra contras were borrowed from other corps.

The most noticeable visual element was unintended. Zingali proposed an

otherworldly look for the guard that in preliminary sketches was quite fetching. By the time the design made it to the field, the guard was in huge white hideous fright wigs that made the members look like Halloween trick-or-treaters.

He also conceived giant rolling wheels for the end of the show, when guard members would get inside and roll around. These became affectionately known as the "squirrel cages" and were literally trashed after two shows and much audience derision. The wheels were unceremoniously ditched in a large sinkhole near the corps hall.

### 1987 -- The circus show

This show didn't really have a title. Music was Karl King's *Barnum and Bailey's Favorite, Circus Suite* (a medley of Manuel de Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance* and Aram Khachaturian's *Sabre Dance*) and J.S. Sereby's *Thunder and Blazes*.

The Steve Suslik drill appeared hampered by the massive circus train sets that spread across the back of the field. The sets were always in the way, were hard to work around, detracted from the rest of the show and were difficult and dangerous to load and unload from the truck. The show was loaded with other visual gimmicks as well, including jugglers, a magician, pink elephants and all sorts of silliness. It was all meant to be fun, but it came off to many as forced.

Cook remembers that much of the summer was spent trying to make the sets and props work, while time would have been better spent perfecting drill. At the end of the season, he and others took out their frustration by beating the circus sets into toothpicks.

At the end of the season, the corps tied for seventh place with Velvet Knights and a score of 90.00.

### 1988 -- 'Porgy and Bess'

The 1987 show proved to Mason that he needed to take the corps in a different direction. He told Cook that the corps had enough maturity to start planning to be champions by tackling a far more difficult musical and visual program.

Cook liked the idea, as the corps would have a real challenge with which to measure its success.

Star needed stronger visual technicians and found them in Todd Ryan and Len Kruscecki. Ryan had worked his magic with the Madison Scouts, proving he knew how to fix drill and visual execution without destroying the design.

Steve Brubaker of the Cavaliers was brought in to write the drill (while still working with his home corps) and Suslik, already on board, fit more into an analysis capacity. Carl Ruocco became assistant director and brought along much experience from several organizations.



Star of Indiana, 1986 (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Music was from George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" and included *Oh, I Can't Sit Down*; *Summertime*; *The Fugue/The Hurricane*; *Bess, You Is My Woman Now*; and *O Lawd, I'm on My Way*. There were no large sets and the southern belle guard used very few props.

The corps took a trip to California and early-on demonstrated a renewed seriousness, working more within the confines of expectations of a higher caliber corps. Despite staying in seventh place with a score of 92.80 at DCI, the corps showed it was moving forward artistically and content-wise.

### 1989 -- The British show

This show, not really named, became simply known as "the British show."

Music included William Walton's *Henry V*, Gustav Holst's *Song Without Words* and *Fantasia on "The Dargason,"* and Walton's *Crown Imperial*.

While the corps' DCI finals score of 95.30 was an improvement (putting the corps within three-tenths of the Cadets of Bergen County and six-tenths of the Blue Devils), placement advancement was only one position, to sixth place.

Caption marks were good throughout, but the corps was frustrated by not being able to make a big dent in the upper echelon of corps. In reflecting on this, Cook feels the show didn't have the difficulty built into it to win, though the members had the stamina to do so and they now realized their potential.

### 1990 -- 'Belshazzar's Feast'

With William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, the corps set out to redefine "spectacle." The music had a British symphonic elegance, but it wasn't overtly British. The simple addition of a purple sash and sequined over-the-shoulder cover totally changed the visual look from the year before. Everything sparkled.

Zingali was back and he dedicated himself to making the show shimmer. Prime's arrangement was seamless and vibrant, chock full of difficulty. The corps was sounding more like a brass orchestra than a traditional drum corps and coordination was spectacular, like a Cecil B. DeMille production.

A long banner reading "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN" (a biblical reference to the warning on the wall in King Belshazzar's palace, as referred to in the Book of Daniel, Chapter 5) made some people scratch their heads. But overall, the production soared and it wouldn't have shocked many people had the corps won it all.

The horn line took high brass honors at the DCI World Championship Finals for the first of four years in a row and the third place score of 96.50 showed that the corps was finally a major player among the big boys.

### 1991 -- 'Roman Images'

In 1991, Star of Indiana put it all together. "Roman Images" took the corps to the top in stunning fashion, with a mesmerizing Zingali



Star of Indiana, 1990, at DCI Finals in Buffalo, NY (top photo by Orlin Wagner, bottom photo by Donald Mathis, from the collection of Drum Corps World).

drill and a Prime horn book that blistered the lips.

All music was by Ottorino Respighi, built around themes from *Pines of Rome* and *Roman Festivals*. Much of the show was a finger and lip buster for the mellophone line, which executed a lethal series of fast runs throughout.

The show was regal to the "nth" degree. The music sounded it and the visuals screamed glamour, although much of that was skillful sleight of hand. Rumors had spread that the golden chalices used as a major focal point had been custom-made in Germany and were quite expensive. An inquiry of the guard designer revealed the chalices were simply two Styrofoam planters from Kmart placed top-to-top and covered with gold contact paper. Total cost: about \$14.00 apiece.

Zingali's final drill had a number of memorable images, such as the "Scud" that rotated while the guard twirled massive golden "coins." But throughout the summer, Zingali was not well and everyone knew it. He seemed to be coming to grips with his own mortality and his own faith. Symbols and images of Christianity were woven throughout the drill, a point not lost on the members or the audience.

The final series of drill maneuvers will never be forgotten by anyone who witnessed the remarkable culmination of talent reaching for immortality.

Throughout the preparation for the season, the members believed this could be

their year to grab the title. But the show needed something special to push it over the edge. Just 11 days before the corps' first prelims performance at the DCI World Championships in Dallas, TX, Zingali dropped in on the corps in Boston.

Late in the afternoon, Mason told him, "The new closer is not right." The single cross Zingali had designed for the end of the show wasn't working. Zingali went back to his house in Revere, a suburb of Boston, where the inspiration hit for the new ending.

When he came back, he stated, "We are going to have two crosses at the finish instead of one." He then went to work with the members for a solid five hours.

The final evolution was only in Zingali's head, but he knew exactly what he wanted to do. He ran from one section to another, with all his strength and energy, moving members around to where he wanted them.

The corps formed the outline of a tilted cross on one side of the 50. A flurry of marchers going every which way quickly culminated in the cross magically reappearing on the other side of the 50. Even after seeing it and knowing it was approaching, it was impossible to see it coming until it appeared.

There were a few collisions at the end of the show the first time the new ending was put in, but the corps had succeeded in pulling off Zingali's vision.

In Dallas, the corps knew what was needed and set about doing it with confidence, determination and focus. They held off a strong challenge by the Cavaliers, who were also out to win their first DCI title, winning with a 97.00 to the Cavaliers' 96.30. Phantom Regiment's third-place finish with a 95.40 gave the Midwest region the top three spots.

Cook remembers the season as being "a truly magical year for a corps that once wore a pink uniform and was branded as a rich man's toy."

The following winter, Zingali passed away. In the hospital, he spoke of the championship night as being the most wonderful night of his life.

### 1992 -- 'American Variations'

After winning the DCI World Championship, fans wondered what Star would do for an encore. "American Variations" was an audience-accessible show that was sometimes referred to as Star's "patriotic show."

Mason and his staff were concerned that Star was at risk of getting too sophisticated, a complaint heard from some fans. So they designed a show to pull at the heartstrings. A few beautifully painted transparent scrimms of American icons appeared, such as the Statue of Liberty and scenes of natural beauty. Sections of the corps stood behind the scrimms to quite an effect.

Body sculpting was introduced, with members freezing their bodies in intriguing positions or moving in fluid ways not generally seen before.

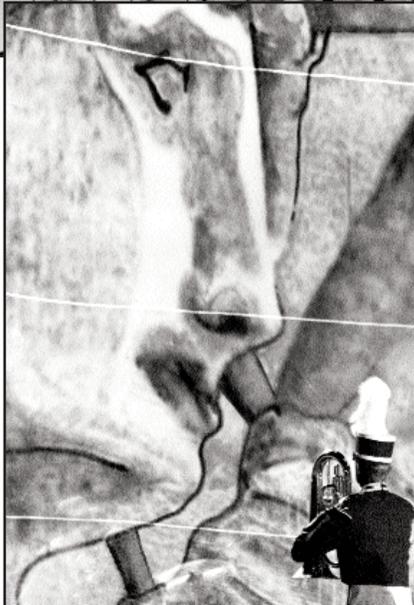
Music was Morton Gould's *Star-Spangled Overture*, William Schuman's *Chester*, Gould's *Amber Waves* and Gordon Jacobs' *Flag of Stars*.

Some people expressed criticism that the corps was pandering to the public. This wasn't helped when a giant 40- by 60-foot scrim of the Statue of Liberty and fireworks were unveiled the final week of the season. The entire corps fit behind the scrim and was visible behind it.

For some reason, the scrim tended to mute audience response instead of heightening it.

Star went undefeated going into DCI World Championship quarterfinals, won that show, placed second in semifinals and finished third in finals with a score of 96.70, bested by Cadets of Bergen County and the Cavaliers, who won their first DCI title.

The slide down the placements the final week and the tepid audience reaction to what was constructed as an audience-friendly show had an impact on Mason. According to Cook, "For Jim, 1992 was a pivotal year because the show was designed for broad audience appeal and the result was a



Star of Indiana, 1992, at DCI Finals in Madison, WI (top to bottom photos by Karen Sunmark, Ed Ferguson, Sid Unser and Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

hostile crowd. At that time, he decided to explore different directions."

He explored a different direction with a vengeance.

### 1993 -- 'Medea'

Rarely has a corps changed its stripes as quickly and as dramatically as Star did for 1993. Gone was any hint at being warm and cuddly, and there were no apologies for what was to come.

Star took the angry, cataclysmic violence of Samuel Barber's *Medea* and the calculating intellectualism of Bela Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste* and force-fed the result to an audience that was at times openly hostile. Often, there were audible proclamations of booing that greeted the corps upon the conclusion of its show.

In retrospect, time has softened the impact of the presentation, but in 1993 it was so radical that large segments of the fan base felt uncomfortable, if not antagonistic.

The corps had a new look, with cream-colored uniforms and a substantial amount of angular body sculpting and interpretive movement. The drill was hard-edged and the

props were long, straight poles and triangular contraptions that appeared more like building trusses than guard equipment.

Substantial amounts of quiet permeated the show, as if saying, "Think!" However, the seamlessness of the program didn't allow

the audience much of a chance to respond until the show was over.

The production was as controversial as it was innovative. Star won show after show after show, yet audiences never did warm up to the presentation. At DCI's Preview of Champions in Ypsilanti, MI, when the corps was announced as having won, a portion of the audience booed and was chastised by the announcer.

In Jackson, MS, the Cadets of Bergen County, the only corps to best Star earlier in the season (at one show) nipped Star at the DCI World Championship finals by just one-tenth, 97.40 to 97.30.

When the corps left the field during finale, it's doubtful that anyone in the stands suspected that would be the last time they would ever see Star of Indiana in



Star of Indiana, 1993, at DCI Finals in Jackson, MS, the corps' last performance in competition (photo by Sid Unser from the collection of Drum Corps World).

competition. The corps that won more titles than any other during the past four seasons was about to undergo a stunning metamorphosis.

### Contributions to the activity

During Star's time in DCI, Cook, Mason and the corps itself made substantial contributions to the drum corps activity.

From 1986 through 1993, Cook Group co-sponsored or sponsored the DCI PBS broadcast and Cook served as executive producer through 1992. The broadcast cost between \$150,000 and \$200,000 to produce each of those years. Cook also served as an advisor to the DCI board of directors from 1987 through 1992.

Before Star left DCI competition, more than \$1.5 million was contributed to DCI and 19 other corps. Star sponsored all three Drum Corps Midwest All-Star appearances at various New Year's parades around the country and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade appearance of the Drum Corps Midwest/Drum Corps East All-Stars, as well as a name trumpet soloist and a senior corps for the DCI World Championships.

Mason organized the first two DCI All-Star drum corps performances of the *Star-Spangled Banner* at the DCI World Championships.

Cook and his computer manager wrote the financial, sales order and championship ticketing programs for the DCI office and donated a number of computers to use the programs. Cook Group Companies also sponsored and produced the DCI World Championships for five years.

Star of Indiana founded the DCI Foundation helps administer the funds and the scholarships. Employees of Cook Group helped staff the hospitality tables at a number of hotels in various DCI Championship cities.

Cook says drum corps for him and Cook Group did not just mean Star of Indiana; it meant the entire activity. That is why it hurt so much when some fans booed the corps and why the unfounded rumors hit so hard.

He says if there must be an epitaph for Star, for Mason and for himself and Cook Group, it should be, "We tried!"

### 'Brass Theater'

When word spread through the drum corps community that Star was not going to field a corps in 1994, some wondered if the corps was stomping off in a huff due to not winning the 1993 title.

As it turned out, the decision was made in July of that summer.

In the spring of 1993, Star hosted a standstill concert with three other corps. The night before, all four corps attended a Canadian Brass performance at Indiana University. Mason and Cook were invited to a post-concert reception for the quintet, where members of Canadian Brass said they had heard about the next day's standstill and wished to attend.

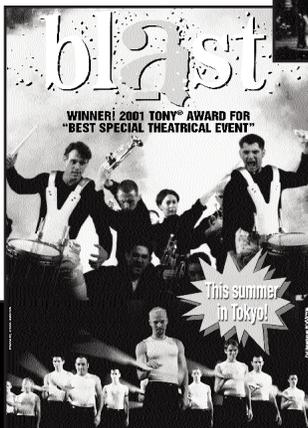
After the standstill concert, the members of the quintet brought up the subject of them and Star doing a collaborative project and also asked if they could use a couple of Star percussionists on their upcoming CD collection of Broadway hits. After much communication, Star signed a letter of intent in June 1993 that resulted in the July contract.

Mason said the limit to what the group could accomplish would only be restricted by the imagination. Despite the excitement of the possibilities, leaving DCI was a traumatic experience for just about everyone associated with the corps.

"Brass Theater" was a big gamble. It was anything but certain that anyone would show up to see the show. The vast majority of Star members did stay and they took drum corps to audiences in arenas and auditoriums during a 10-city tour that first season.

The show featured drum corps classics, selections from musicals and show tunes. Some selections were performed as standstills with the Canadian Brass and others featured extensive marching. Some shows were performed on small stages and some on basketball floors. The brass musicians played on both G bugles and B-flat horns.

(Below) "Brass Theater" with the Canadian Brass, 1994 (photo by Michael Fath from the collection of Drum Corps World); "BLAST!" On Tour poster, 2002 (from the collection of Drum Corps World); a scene from "Shockwave" (photo courtesy of tcpstudios.com).



In time, it became apparent that the shows on stages (usually part of a subscription concert series) were better attended than the shows in arenas, so the corps was downsized through attrition to better fit on stages.

Three CDs were released from 1994-1996 and a PBS special gave the production additional cachet.

The concept of "Brass Theater" seemed to be fully realized in 1996 with a 23-minute production of "West Side Story." All the elements came together -- the music and the sound, the drill and the dance, the electronics and the stage lighting.

In 1997 and 1998, "Brass Theater" took up residence in Branson, MO, a center for vaudeville and music theaters, with more than 50 theaters and 30,000 hotel rooms. Staying in one place for the entire summer allowed the corps to polish and redefine the show and take time to figure out the next step.

### 'BLAST!'

There was no "Brass Theater" tour in 1999. During the winter, it was announced that it would be replaced by a new and far more daring enterprise called "BLAST!"

Cast interviews and auditions were held during the summer of 1999, with more than 500 musicians and color guard performers applying for 70 positions. Members would have to perform at the level of professionals for more than two hours straight and the musicians would have to become comfortable with movement and dance.

Jim Moore, Jon Vanderkoff and George Pinney put together the choreography and staging to brass arrangements by Jim Prime and Wayne Downey and percussion arrangements by Thom Hannum and Jeff Lee.

The cast members moved into Star's hall in July 1999 and spent the next few months putting together the new production.



In November, everyone packed up to go to England for an extended performance at the Apollo Hammersmith Theater, one of the largest in London.

This was a scary time for all, and logistics (theater contract, immigration work permits, housing, rehearsal site) were oppressive. The show opened in mid-December, just as costumes came in and sound levels and light equipment were still being set.

Audiences and critics responded enthusiastically. Music ranged from the hypnotic opening of *Bolero*, through the

intensity of *Medea* and the closing thrills of *Malagueña*, with drum and guard features sprinkled throughout.

Financial losses were mounting and advertising funds had run out. After the corps performed on two popular BBC shows, attendance spiked dramatically, just in time to keep the production afloat.

A special for PBS was taped and 22 weeks after the opening, the show closed in late April 2000.

The show was retooled and hit a number of U.S. cities in the fall of 2000. Then, in April 2001, the show opened in the Broadway Theater, near Times Square in New York City.

The show went on to win both an Emmy (for outstanding choreography in the PBS broadcast) and a Tony Award for "Special Theatrical Event."

After Broadway, "BLAST!" continued to perform across the country and also had a troupe that took up residence at California Adventure in the Disneyland complex during the summer of 2002.

"Blast II-Shockwave" premiered in September 2002. A totally new production, it was quite different from the original "BLAST!" "Shockwave" uses saxophones and has a much more hip demeanor based around more of a pop-flavored repertoire.

It now appears that "BLAST!" is a franchise that will live on in multiple incarnations for the foreseeable future.

It is amazing to consider that everything Star of Indiana, "Brass Theater," "BLAST!" and "Shockwave" have become is due to a high school student watching the DCI Finals on PBS with his dad.

*Michael Boo has been involved with drum and bugle corps since 1975, when he marched his first of three seasons with The Cavaliers.*

*He has a bachelor's degree in music education and a masters degree in music theory and composition. He has written about the drum corps activity for over a quarter century for publications such as Drum Corps World and presently is involved in a variety of projects for Drum Corps International, including souvenir program books, CD liner notes, DCI Update, Web articles and other endeavors.*

*Boo currently writes music for a variety of idioms, is a church handbell and vocal choir director, assistant director of a community band and a licensed Realtor in the state of Indiana. His other writing projects are for numerous publications and he has published an honors-winning book on the history of figure skating.*

*His hobbies include TaeKwonDo and hiking the Indiana Dunes.*

*But more than anything, Michael is proud to love drum corps and to be a part of the activity in some small way, chronicling various facets of each season for the enjoyment of others.*

