

## Chapter 17: The Middle Years, Part 2 – 1966 to 1967

The almost total success enjoyed by the Toronto Optimists up till now was, from their viewpoint, a wonderful situation. They would have been content to see it continue forever, which seemed not only possible but also probable at this stage of the game. All the effort, planning, and work necessary to maintain this ever growing string of success was enjoyed, even relished, by those involved. In a nutshell, the people in the Corps would rather be where they were than anywhere else.

To other Corps in Canada, the Optimists must have seemed like an invincible machine that just kept on going. This was how others had once seen Scout House. This is not always a healthy situation, in this or any field, because, if the Optimists were at a show, the only question was who would place second.

This was all about to change and, in the process, produce years of far more intense and exciting competition in Canada than had ever been seen before.

In saying all this, it must be said that Canadian drum corps, any of them, were still nowhere near the equal of the best US Corps. However, the excitement and tension created in Canada, as the various Corps began to close the gap, would rival that of any American Legion or V.F.W. contest, including their Nationals.

The changes previously mentioned came not in or two great leaps forward, but in small, significant changes and improvements. Over time, these would add up to create the scene that we now approach.

### 1966

Let's start at the beginning of the 1966 Toronto Optimists.

It began, as so often, with change. Grantham, who had called it quits, rose yet again. Merging with Dennis Morris "Majestics" they became the "Chessmen" of St. Catharines, Ontario. They were now the only Corps in the Niagara Peninsula, which had once been a hotbed of activity. More in line with current trends, De La Salle acquired new uniforms. They really hit the right note this time, with very smart cadet-style uniforms in their school colours of green, red, and white. These would improve their image considerably. That they were the correct choice is proven by the fact that it was never found necessary to change them again.



1966: Chessmen from St Catharines

Opposition from the musicians union was overcome when it was announced that the Optimists would, this year, appear at professional football games. Also, De La Salle, Royallaires, Commanders, and Scout House would do the same.

Bigger news than this for the Optimists was the fact that the Corps got its own headquarters building. Situated at 385 Keele St., in west-end Toronto, this was the first place, ever, that the Optimists could call home. It was not large enough to accommodate rehearsals, but its uses were to be very practical. One of them was to store trophies and equipment. It had been acquired by, who else, Don Daber.



1966: Dave Johns & Ron Cooper outside the Clubhouse at 385 Keele

A spring concert in April was followed by a “Social Night”. The 1965 movie, a buffet and dancing was enjoyed by all. This was, of course, a very good money making enterprise.

Commanders, now an established Senior Corps, still had people in their organization that had been, or still were, part of the Optimists. Some of these were: Fred Lombard, Andy Henderson, Lorne Ferrazzutti, Vic Krukliis, Al Morrison, and Terry McKolskey.

Al Baggs was, yet again, re-elected as Chief Judge of the judges’ chapter of the C.D.C.A. This, among other things, was a vote of confidence. Also, it was now possible that many people in this year’s Corps would not know who Al Baggs was, outside of this position.



1966: Toronto Optimists Full Corps photo (by the Shrine Temple)

In a glimpse of things to come, it was reported that Blessed Sacrament would field a five and five drum line this year. This was still a novelty, in 1966, but would lead to the large lines of today.

In an unusual move for this Corps, the Drum Major changed again. Vern Johansson, who had been the assistant in that position under Andy Henderson, replaced Dave Johns.



1966: Toronto Optimists (Shriners International)

There had been reports that the Corps was not up to par this year, based on winter concerts. This was confirmed on May 14th, in St. Catharines, when the Corps was seen to need much work, mostly on marching and maneuvering. It was a late date to be like this, but not too late to clean it up. Ivor Bramley was being missed. Future scores, however, would confirm the new instructors as good choices.

### **Optimists Beat Reigning U.S. National Champions at Shriners International**

The US debut this year occurred against a field drawn from New York, Delaware, and New Jersey. No results are available<sup>12</sup>. The following week, on June 15th, was the 2nd Annual Shriners' Contest. This year it was both a senior and junior contest. In the senior division Hawthorne Caballeros finished first. Less than three points from the top, and less than three years old, were the Commanders.

If that was a shock, the junior division was even more so. The Optimist Drum Corps won it! They defeated the Chicago Royal Airs who were the reigning US champions, having won the 1965 American Legion, CYO and VFWs. Only one month previous, Optimists had been noted as rough. Now, in the process of winning this show, they had set a comfortable margin over local rivals. De La Salle, with their new uniforms, had made a good showing.

Another standout at this show was the size of the crowd, over 22,000, eclipsing the previous record.



1965: Chicago Royal Airs

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<sup>12</sup>. *Editor's note: The show was June 4th in Batavia and we came 4th, behind Magnificent Yankees, Blue Rock and Garfield.*

Commanders were winning a lot this year, as were the Casper Troopers, on their climb to super-corpsdom. Oh, yes, the Optimists were winning too, including a six point spread over the now familiar La Salle Cadets. July was an exciting month, leading into an even more exciting August.

### **Contests in the U.S.**

July 22nd, New Haven Connecticut, a big show, with a small crowd, and the Corps placed fifth. They were five points down from first, which was a respectable showing. St. Lucy's won the show, in a field that contained Blessed Sacrament and Garfield.

The next test for the Optimists was at Middleport, N.Y., against a mixed field from Canada and the United States. Second to St. Josephs of Batavia by a point, the Optimists again kept a solid five-point lead over any Canadian Corps in attendance. So, as far as Canada was concerned, it seemed that they were in a comfortable position. Nationals were only about six weeks away and they had yet to lose or even come close to losing to a Canadian Corps,

August, though, marked the beginning of events that would lead to the shattering of any illusions. Kingston, N.Y., was an invitational with an evening and an afternoon show. The evening show was set, the victor in the afternoon show would be allowed to enter it. An amazing thing happened when the afternoon victor, the P.A.L. Bridgeport Cadets, almost won the night show. The afternoon Corps were not supposed to be that good! The Optimists came fourth in the evening. They were much improved but still five points behind St. Lucy's, although managing to edge Garfield by tenths. The rest of the season was to be played out in Canada.

As far as Canada and the Optimists were concerned the season had been a repeat of previous years.

### **Back to Canada**

Now, in the short time left for competition, there were to be some surprises. Things would again never be quite the same.

La Salle Cadets, still not yet great in Canada, had gone to the World Open Contest in the United States. They had won eighth place in the preliminaries and seventh in the finals. This result was a sign of things to come.



1966: Toronto Optimists (Kingston, NY)

On August 27th, at Seagram Stadium, it was to happen. The show was the Ontario Championship, held by the Optimists for as long as anyone could remember. They managed to retain it yet again, by the skin of their teeth.

Continuing their surge, La Salle Cadets placed second by a mere 0.55. By doing this, they rearranged a pattern that had been in place for years, Optimists first, De La Salle second. Now De La Salle was in third place by three points. All this was a major change in the junior scene. Both the Optimists and De La Salle had had a major shock, but neither would take it lying down. It was only three weeks until the Nationals and, for the first time in a while, there was speculation about the outcome.

### The 1966 Nationals

The championships were to be held on September 17th, in Montreal, Quebec. What happened that afternoon had not happened for over five years. The Optimists lost a contest in Canada, to a Canadian Corps. It had not happened since 1961 and before that in 1958. It was a shock!

It had happened at the preliminaries of the championship contest. Continuing their surge, La Salle Cadets took first with a score of 81.80 to the Optimists 81.50. De La Salle posted a 78.95

for third. Still in contention were York Lions and Sertomanaires, just tenths behind. There had never before been such a crush at the top of the junior division and it laid the basis for top-notch finals. Four Corps would be in it.



1966: Toronto Optimists on Retreat (Nationals, Montreal)



1966: Vern receives trophy from Chief Judge, Al Baggs

As for the Optimists, they had not faced this situation since 1961, and now, as then, there was not really time for any major changes. What, then, to do?

Although from year to year the people in the Corps changed, its character, spirit, and traditions had not. Had the Corps done the best possible show? Probably, as the Nationals were never taken lightly. It was not that the Optimists were getting worse but that other Corps were getting better.

Now was the time to draw on the much-touted spirit of this Corps, to reach down and do a bit more, a bit better. And so it was. The

Corps knew what had to be done and went out and did it. Observers described the show as beautiful, super and outstanding, as the Optimists captured their ninth consecutive Canadian title. A convincing 86.0 to La Salle's 83.65 dashed the hopes of the Ottawa based Corps.

In the senior division, the Diplomates nipped Commanders for the title by one tenth of a point. Ten points back, in fourth place, was a Corps from Montreal named Les Metropolitains.

The Optimists were still and, once again, the Canadian champions. They had been challenged and had overcome their challenges. The major difference between now and the past was that, from now on, the challenges would increase, not fade. This result also set the agenda for the coming year – to win number ten and make it ten in a row. This, if it could be done, would surpass any record held by an American Corps.



1966: Toronto Optimists at pre-season camp

### C.D.C.A.

Around this time, something involving two solid ex-Optimists occurred. A dispute arose between the Ontario Chapter of the C.D.C.A. and the Judges Chapter. This had led to the suspension of



1966: Toronto Optimists Drum Major, Vern Johansson

Al Baggs and the members of the Judges Advisory Board from the Judges Association. The dispute concerned by-laws passed by the C.D.C.A. not being implemented by the judges in the time allotted. It had no reflection on the abilities or qualifications of the judges.

Bernie Beer was the Chairman of the Ontario Chapter of the C.D.C.A., the body responsible for the suspensions. Al Baggs and Bernie Beer had both, at one time, been with the Optimists. There had been friction. Al Baggs was at that time the Corps Director and, therefore, the boss. Now, in a different fashion, Bernie Beer was the boss. It would be easy to read personal

animosity into this, but that is unlikely. These were sensible men who no doubt had seen such situations before and resolved them. Mr. Beer himself stated publicly that the suspensions were only due to non-compliance with the by-laws passed by the C.D.C.A. It was, after all, the ruling body.

Mr. Ian Beacock was appointed acting Chief Judge of the Ontario Chapter, to maintain continuity. Mr. Baggs was named to a committee to advise on rules and by-laws that would attempt to prevent similar situations in the future. This was the idea of Mr. Beacock. So, something constructive did come from the affair, all of which was endorsed by the National Board of Directors of the C.D.C.A. Al Baggs, though, would never again be Chief Judge.

At the C.D.C.A. convention in Ottawa this year, the guest speaker was the Hon. Paul Martin, Canadian Minister of External Affairs, and the father of Canada's current Minister of Finance. Drum Corps kept good company.

### Optimists Corps Banquet

For the Optimists, the fifth annual banquet was held, again at the Royal York Hotel. They had all, so far, been victory banquets – a time to lighten up, sit back, savour the year just past, and hand out all awards and decorations.

Mr. Gord Robinson, from the Shriners, acted as emcee for this affair. He was to become a permanent part of the Optimist folklore. He introduced the guest speaker, Lord Athol Layton, himself, Imperial Potentate of the Shrine, The Boss.

Five-year rings were given to two members, Mike Thys and Joe Palanica, and then the Corps Director spoke. He reminded the Corps of its mistakes of 1966 and how to correct them for the coming Year. Barry Bell, the Music Director, then took the stand. This remarkable, self-effacing man presented each member of the bugle line with a membership certificate. A similar ritual took place for the drums, by Lorne Ferrazzutti and Ron Kaiser, and for the guard by Jack Roberts. This sort of thing had been customary for some years now and was one more of the growing number of traditions to be observed. Rookies got pins for completing their first year, and the "Rookie of the Year" was introduced. This year it was John "Scotty" McDonald. He was a snare drummer, originally from the York Lions Drum Corps. The "Rookie" business was to expand in the future, becoming almost akin to colleges on military academies.



Ron Kaiser and Lorne Ferrazzutti (1965)

Yet another tradition was created with the first "Corpsman of the Year" award. It was given to George Wright, section sergeant of the baritone horns. In later years he was to play a much

larger note in Corps affairs, but in less happier circumstances. This award was unique because it was decided by a vote of the Corps members themselves. Vern Johansson got a Drum Major award. He had been most successful, even earning praise from outside Optimist circles.

Not over yet, the “21” year mugs were presented to Joe Palanica, Orest Burak, Bill MacMillan, Ron Kaiser, Bob Christie, and Bill Fallows. These poor unfortunates were now overage and most would have to leave the Corps.

Finally, things came to a close with the Corps song, colour slides, and an 8mm film of the Nationals preliminaries, the one they had lost. As the Corps got older, these affairs became more complex, a reflection of its success.

### **Other news**

Elsewhere, Les Metropolitains, of Montreal, a Senior Corps, announced that they would become a Junior Corps in 1967.

Actually, the banquet signalled more than the end of a year. It also marked the beginning of the next, as activity was virtually ceaseless in this business. Santa Claus parades were done and it was learned that the 1967 Nationals would be held in Ottawa, Canada’s capital and the home of the La Salle Cadets. During the coming year, things were to become even more complex as the Optimists strove to maintain their position. The field of Canadian Junior Corps was becoming more crowded and, more importantly, much more competitive. Nothing could be taken for granted any more, and old patterns had been disrupted forever.

Filling another gap in their armament, De La Salle decided to allow people into the Drum Corps who did not attend the school. This had to have been a hindrance to their development, even if minor. The Optimists had never had such a restriction, anybody being allowed to join if they had proper releases. By doing this, De La Salle had opened a door that was to contribute to the exciting events that lay in the future.



1966: De La Salle

A less fortunate event, but one from which the Optimists were to benefit, was the disbanding of the York Lions Drum Corps. They

had been one of the finalists at last year’s Nationals. From the rubble of this fine Corps, the Optimists acquired the services of one Cliff Billington, who was to prove an asset.

Lord Athol Layton announced the line-up for this year’s Shrine Contest, and it was to be a top-notch affair. Featuring the Chicago Cavaliers, Boston Crusaders, Garfield Cadets, and Racine Kitties from the USA, it was now to become an all-junior show. From Canada, the top three would be the Optimists, La Salle Cadets, and De La Salle. This would provide a good

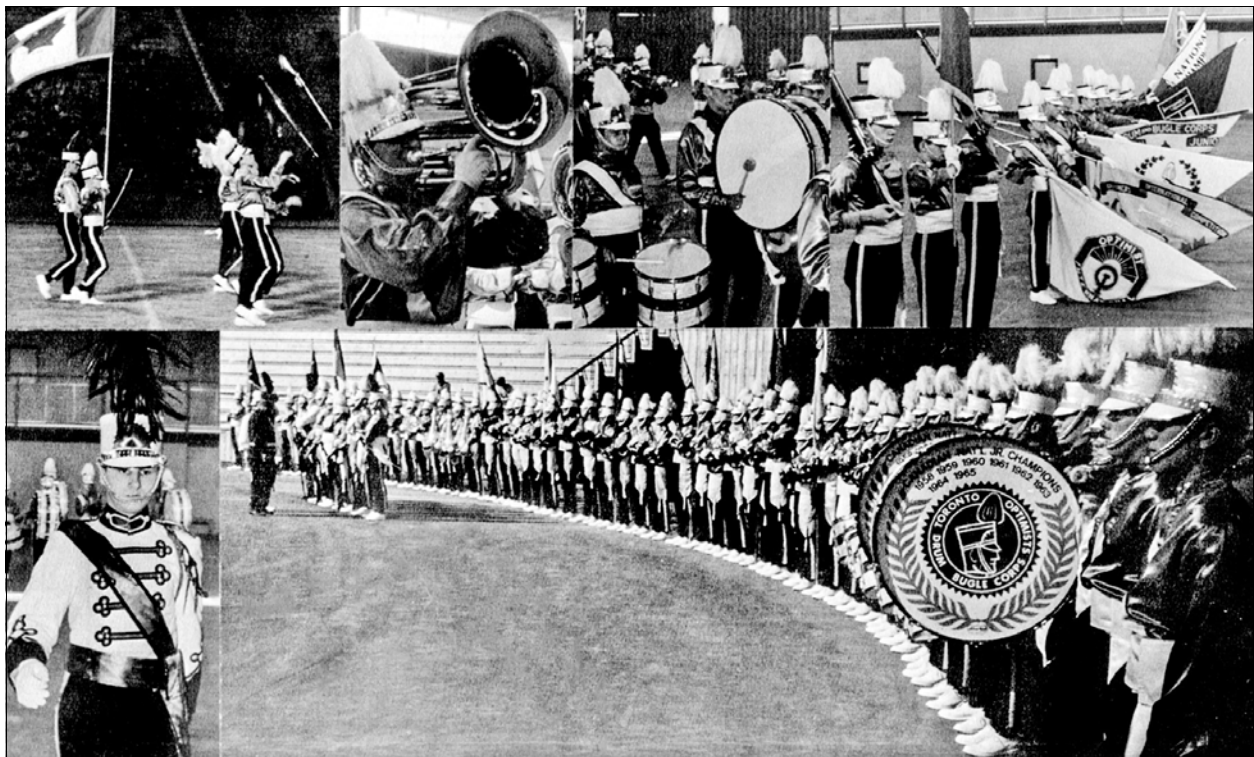


international competition, as well as a preview of the Canadian scene. Here, it should be noted, a lot of Corps had come and gone since 1958, but two that were still around were the Optimists and De La Salle. La Salle Cadets were a relative newcomer, though now firmly part of the act, and had done well during their short existence as a Drum Corps. Similar to the Danforth Crusaders, one of the founding Corps of the Optimists, they had been part of the Army Cadet Corps affiliated with a school. Like Danforth, they broke with the cadets to become a Drum Corps.

Mr. Maurice Legault, who would become a legendary figure in Canadian Drum Corps, led their staff. During their third year, they blossomed, almost winning the Ontario and Canadian Championships. From now on they would remain a major factor for a long time.

Mr. Baggs, suspended earlier as a judge, now saw fit to resign, as a result of the dispute that occurred in 1966. Others went with him, so it was not really a personal thing. Most of the current members of the Optimists were likely not aware of all this, unless they were well up on all aspects of Canadian Drum Corps. What is most important, of course, is that there are contests with judges to judge them. All were wished well and afforded recognition for all that they had done.

Now, Mr. Ian Beacock became real Chief Judge, rather than acting in that position, and any lingering suspensions were lifted. Thus vanished the remains of a messy affair, the likes of which are sometimes inevitable.



1966: Montage

## 1967

The first Ontario Individuals were held on February 4, 1967, and the Optimists did quite well with six firsts, four on bugles and the others on drums. Possibly, a good showing was to be expected from the top local Corps, although not sweeping the field showed they held supremacy only on the field, as a unit.

The field show was shaping up nicely, at an early date. This was a good thing because there were more contests lined up this year than ever before in the history of the Corps. This was one factor that made it seem less of a hobby, leaning more toward a way of life. These schedules bore little resemblance to those of the early days, and it was either go along with it or fade away. In keeping with current trends, the Corps, as planned, was to be the largest one fielded yet with forty-two horns<sup>13</sup>, five tenors and four snare drums, with bass, rudimental bass drums, and two cymbals. The guard would field sixteen members. As noted before, the new numbers and instrumentation, all over, were changing the face of Drum Corps.



1967: Toronto Optimists Promo photo

There were other changes taking place this year. As in other fields, so in Drum Corps, where, it seems, change itself is the only constant.

### Over the Winter

The Optimists revealed their new off the line number, “Born Free”, from the movie of the same name, at a concert in Stoney Creek, Ontario. On the basis of this show, they were again predicted to be the top Corps in 1967, despite the fact that the competition was expected to be the toughest in years. The Colour Guard was featured on the cover of Drum Corps International Magazine, no relation to the present D.C.I. organization.

On March 18, the Optimist Club hosted the first annual Colour Guard Championship won by the Aquinas guard of New York State, the Optimist guard placed sixth. Al Baggs was a judge at this affair, as he was still a member of the New York All-American Judges Chapter. In a move toward uniformity, the Canadian Judges Association adopted American Legion score sheets.

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<sup>13</sup>. *In the end we only fielded 37 horns with 3 snare and 4 tenor. While smaller than most of our competitors (often 42-50 horns) it was the largest horn line that Optimists had ever fielded.*

At another guard contest in Rochester, N.Y., the Optimists guard was again in sixth place, but only 3.7 points from first. These were the first Colour Guard shows that the Optimists had ever entered, and they were not experienced. Not a bad showing for beginners.

In a beneficial move, De La Salle had acquired the services of Al Morrison as a horn instructor and Vince Bruni on drill. Al Morrison had been a soloist, arranger and instructor for the Optimists and had a similar function in Commanders. Vince Bruni, of course, was one of the top drill men anywhere.

For all the good reports about this year's Optimists, one of those amazing things that can happen from time to time happened on February 25th. At the Rochester, N.Y. "Sound Off" contest, the Optimists placed second. What made this unusual was that it was to a Canadian Corps. This was big news, and Les Metropolitains, of Montreal, Quebec, did it by six tenths of a point. As mentioned before, they were a Senior Corps.



1967: Toronto Optimists at practise

In an effort to build a better Senior Corps for 1968, they became a Junior corps for this year. No matter, they were junior now and had beaten the Optimists, only the third Canadian Corps to do this in eight years. They were, of course, immediately expected to become this year's new Canadian Champions, but that contest was still over six months away.

Vern Johansson won the trophy as best Drum Major, being now a smooth old pro. He was, in fact, to get raves all year.

Regardless of the success of Les Metropolitains, the La Salle Cadets were nominated as the fastest rising star on the Canadian scene. They had come a long way and were not finished yet. Canada now had four Corps capable of contending for first place, with others not too far behind. This made for a far more exciting, and tense atmosphere.

The march of events continued. In February. One of the categories won by the Optimists at the individuals had been that of bugle quartet. That was the Provincial Contest, and in March, at the National Contest, they won it again. They were now the best in the country.



1967: Corps members on the bus

During March, a new association was formed called "A Junior C"

which stood for Associated Junior Corps. It consisted of three Canadian and three New York State Junior Corps. These were the Optimists, La Salle Cadets and Chessmen, from Canada, plus the Geneva Appleknockers, Magnificent Yankees of Utica and St. Josephs of Batavia from New York State. Cliff Billington, who had come from the York Lions to the Optimists, was now the Corps Business Manager. He was also appointed National Publicity Chairman of the C.D.C.A., by the directors of that organization.

All this, plus the number of Senior and Junior Corps now in Canada, points up the fact that we were now in what was likely the most concentrated period of Drum Corps activity ever in Canada. Add to this the current and future contests that were lined up and it becomes apparent that Canada was a major player in the Drum Corps world, certainly more so than in the past. The Drum Corps movement in Canada could, and would, claim many first, and bests.

Firsts for the Optimists in particular were: first look for an equipment truck in 1967, first added contras to the horn line in 1965, first to ever carry euphoniums on an M&M field in North America. Another, Green Capsule Comments, first published in 1960, and was now bigger and stronger than ever. It had been the first real, regular Corps publication of a specific Corps. It was also widely regarded as the best of its kind around. It was started by Don Daber and maintained by him and his ever-changing staff. He was still Director of the Optimists and his influence was paramount.

### Optimist Cadets, the Tierneys and the Knights of Columbus

Entering the scene this year, were two men who were to exert much influence on this Corps.



Optimists Cadets promo

These were Al and Greg Tierney, brothers. The Optimists, this season, realized that unless people could be recruited and trained, the Corps could run into difficulty in the future. The original “Peanut Squad” had, either through negligence or lack of interest or necessity, been allowed to lapse<sup>14</sup>. Now, it was decided that a feeder Corps was, again, needed and things were set in motion. Recruiting was tough and practice facilities almost non-existent. This was not good. In fact, the whole summer was spent looking for recruits and practice facilities. It was felt that the suburbs of the city were the best place to pursue this idea, and this led to a lucky break.

Scarborough Knights of Columbus were looking for another youth activity, with baseball and hockey already well covered in the community. Like everyone, they were short of money but did possess a practice facility.

Optimists Drum Corps + Property Owner – \$ = Cadet Corps

<sup>14</sup>. Optimists lost a great many horns at the end of 1963. In order to field the 1964 corps the Bantams Optimists were shut down and the members joined the Toronto Optimists.

A Grand Knight attended an Optimists practice and was impressed by the discipline. There was a meeting of the executive of the Optimists and the Knights of Columbus then, later, with the general membership of the Knights of Columbus. Slides of the Optimists and the 1965 movie were shown and all of the K of C men were in favour of this promotion. They could not contribute financially, but provided their clubhouse for practices and agreed to assist with the recruiting drive. On September 1st, a final decision was taken to accept this offer, and a program was developed to culminate in a recruiting day on Sept. 17th.

Handbills were distributed, much of the work being done, by the Knights as the Optimists, at this time of year, were busy with the Nationals. On the 17th, the Corps paraded from the K. of C. to a church and, there, on the steps, played to a crowd of a thousand. Slides were again shown and short speeches given by Mr. Daber and Mr. Greg Tierney, Chairman of Youth Activities for the Knights of Columbus. Applications were handed out, and by the end of the day forty-seven had been completed and returned. First rehearsal was set for September 23.

During that week a small article in the Toronto Star brought a sudden increase in phone calls, to all concerned. Suddenly, the recruiting drive became not only a success but in danger of being swamped. At the first rehearsal, the original forty-seven were there along with another ninety-five newcomers. Now, membership in the Optimist Cadets, as they were called, stood at 142, with the prospect of more to come as time passed. Thus, money notwithstanding, we now had "The Optimist Cadets Drum and Bugle Corps" with Mr. Al Tierney as Director and Mr. Greg Tierney as Manager. It would be a Parade Corps for boys 10-14. Both of the just mentioned men had played a large part in this activity. They would play even larger roles in the future, but this endeavour was most important for the future survival and success of the Corps. They even began their own newsletter, "Cadet Capsule", edited by Al Tierney.

### More on the Optimists

Back to the early months of 1967, a reflection of the continuing cold war between the Optimists and De La Salle was a report that the word "Optimist" was not to be used at De La Salle College. Whether true or not, this was, at the time, humorous, as relations between the two Corps had been good for some time. In the future, however, things would reach new lows. Right now, it was a normal rivalry caused by a ten-year side-by-side existence of two competing units. Also, This pattern had been interrupted by the rise of La Salle Cadets, who had usurped the position of De La Salle and threatened the Optimists.

What fun and games! And we must not forget the new junior, Les Metropolitains.

Let's get back to the Optimist Corps itself, which is what this



1967: Rehearsing at the "Shell" Tower (probably Bulova Tower then)

book is supposed to be about. The Chief Bugle Instructor was still Barry Bell. Lorne Ferrazzutti was still the Drum Instructor, and his chief assistant was Ron Kaiser, who had done this job for the previous two years while still drumming in the line. A superb drummer, he would have marched in the Corps until he was ninety if he could have. He had also done some of the music writing, the first to do this since Ronn Prokop in 1962. The 1962 drum line of Ronn Prokop, Ron Kaiser, and Vic Krukliis, along with the Corps, was still talked about and would be, for a long time. They had put in many hours of extra rehearsal and had been noted among the best in North America. They was now being challenged by other Corps in Canada, hungry for success, realizing that what one Corps can do so can another. The pressure to stay on top never let up.



1967: Siblings in the corps

Before we get into the season proper, it is interesting to take note of a report that appeared around this time. It stated that the Optimists had lost only four contests in Canada in nine years. This was very complimentary but not accurate. This dates back to the end of 1958.

The four were listed as:

- 1961 CNE. . . . . To De La Salle
- 1961 Nationals Prelims . . . . . To De La Salle
- 1961 St. Catharines . . . . . To De La Salle
- 1962 Varsity Stadium, Toronto . . . . . To Garfield

These were all true, what was missing was:

- 1964 East York Stadium. . . . . To St. Joseph's
- 1965 Sarnia. . . . . To Norwood Park Imperials
- 1966 Montreal, National Prelims. . . . . To La Salle Cadets

This shows that the Optimists had, in fact, lost seven, not four, contests in Canada in nine years. This, most likely, was due to someone's faulty memory, but it does not obscure the fact this was still a phenomenal achievement.

Now, after the subsidiary activities of winter and spring, the Corps arrived at the beginning of yet another season of competition. The days of preparation, change, and whatever else are now past. All depends on that thirteen minutes on the field. For the Optimists, this year had more significance in that it could bring a tenth National Championship. This, if achieved, would surpass any record, anywhere, in Drum Corps. This, of course, was to be more difficult due to other Corps, now much improved, who were just as eager to win titles. Mostly, this meant De La Salle and the La Salle Cadets, both genuine contenders. Others were not far behind and anything could happen this year. If the Optimists, in any one year, had not improved they would have gone down fast.

### Summer of '67

So, with this in mind, let's take a trip back to June 1967 and see just what did happen over the succeeding months.

They got off on the right foot at the first "A Junior C" Contest in Batavia, New York. Winning with a score of 78.95, good for an early show, they topped the Magnificent Yankees, if only by seven tenths. High general effect, colour guard trophies, and a standing ovation were theirs. An additional plus was the fact that this was the first time in three years that the Optimists had won in New York State. This was a good morale builder for their next outing, only one week later. It was none other than the 3rd Annual Shrine Contest, one of the biggest of the season. This year it was an all junior event and would remain so.

The contest, to a small degree, did contain some surprises. A predictable outcome was the victory of the Boston Crusaders, who were now in the realm of "super" corpsdom. There was some disagreement though, with their four-point spread over the Chicago Cavaliers. Chicago was always good, seldom losing by such a margin.



1967: Toronto Optimists (Sarnia)

Surprise number one was the third place finish of the Optimists. Not so much the third place, this was a good Corps, but a score that put them only 2.5 behind the Cavaliers. This also meant that they were only 6.5 behind Boston, but, more importantly, seven points up on their closest Canadian rival, La Salle Cadets, with De La Salle close behind. All of the Canadian entries were well received. La Salle was classed as outstanding, and De La Salle as having fielded the finest Corps in their history. The Optimists, it was said, were exactly what the fans wanted. More!

With this result, the Optimists again appeared to be in a comfortable position in Canada for another successful year. However, the other Corps would not have received such compliments had they not deserved them. Nothing could be taken for granted.

At first, though, it seemed otherwise. A week later, the Corps again topped their two main local rivals by seven points. These two were less than two points apart, but seven behind the Optimists. That is, until Port Hope, only one week later.

Although the Optimists still took first with 83.91, second was La Salle with 82.31, then De La Salle with 79.15. They had gone from a seven point deficit to just over a point and a half in two weeks. What an unpredictable business this was.



1967: Garfield Cadets (Shriners International)

Al Tierney, becoming more involved, was now writing an Optimist column in Drum Corps International magazine. In a note from the past, it was learned that St. Patrick's, the host Corps of the Optimists first visit to the New Jersey "Preview of Champions", had disbanded. This was mainly due to the fact that their moderator, Father Gaffney, was being transferred to San Francisco. Father Gaffney was well remembered in the Optimist Corps and still is among the alumnae. Never forgotten was his unflinching help and generosity when it was needed.

When Don Mountford, a well-known figure in Canada, resigned as Canadian Editor of Drum Corps News, a good magazine, Al Tierney picked up the reins. Al's name was appearing more and more in Drum Corps circles. The already familiar, Bernie Beer, was announced as the new Corps Coordinator for De La Salle. Although he had begun, and learned, the Corps business with the Optimists, Bern would help out anybody if he could. He would prove to be a valuable acquisition. Along with him, Del also got Dave Parker to help out Vince Bruni on drill. This



1967: Toronto Optimists in summer parade uniforms

Corps was really looking for success, no doubt having been stung by losses to the newcomer, La Salle Cadets. Indeed, they were humiliated even further in Rochester on July 15, being edged by the "Chessmen" of St. Catharines. This was at the prelims of the New York - Canadian Championships. It did not happen again, but must have been a low point for them. They would not stay there.



One of the major factors helping to keep the Optimists sharp was entry into top-notch contests in the United States. One of these was the 20th Annual Garfield Invitational Championship. On their second trip to Garfield this year, the Optimists ran into some of the best. Among them, St. Lucy's, Blessed Sacrament, St. Kevin's, Muchachos, Buccaneers, Kingsmen.

The Optimists gained a fifth place, just four points out of first. This was a far cry from earlier years in New Jersey, when the spread between first and the Optimists was seldom less than eight or nine points.

Back in Canada, things were also on the move. Les Metropolitains, of Montreal, who had beaten the Optimists in Rochester, began to appear at field shows in Ontario. Here, they were an unknown quantity and had to be regarded as a dark horse contender. A

difference was that the Rochester contest was a standstill affair. On the field, things were not going as well for them, but well enough that they were still in contention.

Lindsay, Ontario, on July 22, saw the La Salle Cadets with 82.06, De La Salle with 80.50, and Les Metropolitains with 79.36.

A week later, De La Salle upset La Salle Cadets and then took off for the Dream Contest. Other Canadian Corps were now getting American exposure. This, in turn, helped them in their pursuit of the Optimists. Things were getting interesting.

Next, in the U.S., for the Optimists, was the first "A Junior C" Championships. The Corps really wanted this one and came off in high gear, but it was not to be. The New York State powerhouse, St. Joseph's of Batavia won it, Magnificent Yankees were second with the Optimists, four points back, in third place. Only weeks earlier they had been closer than that to the Chicago Cavaliers.



1967: Toronto Optimists (Sarnia)



1967: Marty, Gord and Vince

East York Stadium saw them back in Canada, against the Chessmen of St. Catharines, and the Michael Power Knights, who were debuting in the Junior "A" Division. They scored well as did the Chessmen who were greatly improved. The Optimists, though technically good, were criticized because they seemed to lack their customary snap and enthusiasm.

After that interlude, it was off to New York City and Columbia University, for a first class contest. The Optimists put up a good show but still placed fifth in a field of five, seven points behind the winners Blessed Sacrament. At this time of year, August 18, this was a little unusual for this Corps; but as they always had, and always would, the Corps took its lumps, coming home a little wiser for the experience. Indeed, the very next day, in Kingston, New York, they again placed fifth, but this time 5.5 behind “Sac” and 1.5 behind St. Joseph’s. Still, at this time, the Canadian Champions were comparing well with their local rivals.

At the New Jersey Dream Contest, De La Salle and La Salle Cadets finished fourth and fifth, respectively, ten and twelve points out of first place. This is exactly what the Optimists had encountered seven or eight years before.

## THE LA SALLE CADETS, OTTAWA



**CADETS LASALLE** — The LaSalle Cadets are more than happy to participate, for the first time, at The Shriners' International . . . one of the truly great Canadian Drum Corps Contests.

Founded in 1963, The Cadets are affiliated with The LaSalle Academy, a Catholic High School in Canada's National Capital under the direction of The Christian Brothers.

In three short years The LaSalle Cadets have produced one of Canada's top bugle lines, a Champion Colour Guard and an award-winning Drum Major. All the members of the Corps are French-Canadian and bilingual, a true representative of Canada's culture and talent.

The Cadets' repertoire is: A City of Brass; Johnny One Note; How The West Was Won; Brazil; Funiculi, Funicula and Softly As I Leave You..



1967: La Salle Cadets advertise the Nationals in the Shriners program

These events were leading, of course, to the one show that, this year, was to be like no other Nationals Canada had ever seen. The Optimists had not yet lost a field show to a Canadian Corps, this year. Two rivals, however, were breathing down their neck. Pressure was building to what promised to be an explosive climax. One event paving the way toward this climax was the Ontario Provincial Championship, August 26, at Seagram Stadium, Waterloo. It was considered by all to be a preview of the Canadian Championships, which were only two weeks away.

Before we look and see what happened at this contest, some explanation of events beforehand is in order. La Salle Cadets had slowly closed the gap on the Optimists during the season, leaving De La Salle in third place. Optimists had scored a convincing victory over both Corps at the Shrine Contest, neither one coming within seven points. It was stated at the time that the Optimists should have no trouble winning the Nationals for the tenth year. That was then! This is now!

There had been a contest in Sarnia and the Optimists had won this one, as they had for the previous three years. A wide-open drill that made full use of the field, and an enthusiastic crowd, gave them a score of 83.10. In second, still under the direction of their resident genius, Maurice Legault, were the La Salle Cadets. Their score was 82.58, barely half a point difference. Adding spice to this situation was that, for the last two years, La Salle had defeated De La Salle frequently. This year, before and at the Dream Contest, De La Salle had picked up and defeated La Salle twice. Del had also beaten Les Metropolitains, as had La Salle, but the Metropolitains had defeated the Optimists. So now, at this late date, anything could happen. These four units were all on a collision course that would end at the 1967 Nationals. The race for the Junior Championship had tightened up and all eyes were now on the Provincial Championship. Of course, this was for Ontario so Les Metropolitains, being from Quebec, would not be at this one.

The Optimists, aware of all the factors, knew that just an ordinary show would not be good enough this time out. How much interest had been stirred by now was indicated by the size of the crowd. Ten thousand came out. Many of them possibly hoping to see the Optimists dethroned.

Rising to the occasion, the Toronto Optimists put on their best show of the year. Described as “sparkling” it earned them another Provincial title, winning with almost two and a half points over the Cadets, and more than four over De La Salle, who were now back in third place. For now, at least, the future looked a little more secure for the Optimists.

The Nationals were two weeks away and there was some heavy activity between now and then.

On August 29 was the 4th Annual C.Y.O. Invitational Championship. The Optimists had been at this one a few times before, because they were the



1967: Toronto Optimists Guard in summer uniforms with rifles in regular uniform

Canadian Champions, a title that opened a lot of doors. Because no results are readily available for this one, we shall have to pass on comment<sup>15</sup>. It is enough to say that the line-up included fourteen top Junior Corps. This was just fine as a warm-up for the coming Nationals. Now, only four days later, the next major event took place. The North American Invitational Championship was held at home in Toronto. This was a top-notch junior contest featuring both American and Canadian Corps. The results were to complicate, even further, an already complicated situation.

Let's have a look at placings and scores.

Boston Crusaders.....	87.200
Chicago Cavaliers.....	85.333
St. Joseph's.....	83.216
Optimists.....	83.000
La Salle Cadets.....	77.083
De La Salle.....	75.100
Muchachos.....	73.933



1967: Boston Crusaders

This scorecard shows some amazing things, in light of recent events. First, it was no surprise that Boston won. They had been the talk of the Drum Corps World and had reached "Super Corpsdom". Nor was it any surprise that Chicago was in second place, though they were not often in that position. St. Joseph's, backing up rumours of greatness, were only two points out of second.

Two tenths behind St. Joseph's were our Optimists, two points from Chicago and just over four points from Boston. The Canadian Champions received a standing ovation from the crowd. It had been one of their aims, at this show, to close the gap between them and Boston, and they had certainly done that. By doing this, they had generated the biggest surprise of the day and opened up, again, a six-point spread from their closest Canadian rivals, La Salle Cadets.

Not only had they maintained the winning streak over the Canadian Corps, but had opened it up to almost what it had been at the start of the season. Yet, only a week before, this gap had only been two and a half points, and earlier, at Sarnia, only half a point. To say that this business is unpredictable is an understatement.



1967: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (CNE)

<sup>15</sup> Editor's note: 1967 was the first year Optimists competed in the CYO Nationals. We finished in 11th place with 74.80, 13.18 behind Boston. The top corps were: Boston Crusaders, 88.080; Cavaliers, 84.830; Blessed Sacrament, 84.760; Garfield Cadets, 81.630. The week after CYOs we were only 4.2 behind Boston and 2.3 behind Cavaliers.

Now it was time for the Nationals. Unusually, this was the final event of any importance this year. Anything after this would be insignificant compared to the drama about to unfurl.

### **The 1967 Canadian National Junior Championship**

For the Optimists this was even more important than usual. If they could win this one, it would be the tenth consecutive National title. It was also the tenth anniversary of the winning of their first National title, in 1958. About the only Corps remaining from those days was De La Salle. Scout House was still around but were not competing. Finally, of course, the number ten has certain significance in our culture, as does seven, twelve, or thirteen. Ten is a sort of milestone used to gauge many things. If this was a milestone, of sorts, another was that this would be the most hotly contested Junior Championship in Canadian Drum Corps history. There were four genuine contenders for first place.



1967: Toronto Optimists in a company front

It had been decided, long before, that this year's Nationals would be held in Ottawa, Ontario. This was the hometown of the La Salle Cadets, and potentially hostile territory.

The preliminaries, held earlier in the day, displayed the finest performances of seven Junior Drum Corps. There were some upsets, and these were to contribute to the excitement of the evening finals. Four of these units would reach the finals. Les Metropolitains, who had, all year, been considered a dark horse contender and had done quite well, was the first casualty.

Placing fifth, they were eliminated from further participation by the Sarnia Sertomanaires, who had always been a threat to everybody. They were in fourth place, with a score of 79.33, just over three points out of third, held by De La Salle. Del's score was a respectable 82.466, behind second place by a mere 1.317. Defying the results of the last few contests, in second place, were the Optimists, bowing to the victors, La Salle Cadets, by a margin of 0.433. This was a repeat of last year's events and, once more, the Optimists had their back to the wall. Extra pressure was on this Corps, due to what was at stake. For the others, it was a chance to win their first National title and be the first to knock-off the Optimists, at National finals, in the process.

For the Optimists, the pressures were the greatest, and how they responded would reveal the spirit of this Corps. They had been there before and, now, as then, were fully aware of what had to be done.

As the time slipped away, towards the night show, tension rose. It was too late to make any effective changes, though in the past this had been done.



1967: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (Nationals, Ottawa)

There is really only one way to beat the odds in a situation like this. Everybody has to reach down and give a little more, do a bit better. The leeway is always there, but sometimes it takes an occasion like this to find it. At times like this, the Corps is, usually, more of a unit, united and determined, than at less dramatic times.

The feeling in the Corps that night could not be described. You had to be there, in it, to feel the tension. For thirteen minutes, the rest of the world ceased to exist for those in the Corps, as all attention was focussed on the business at hand. It was a good thing the Corps could concentrate, as it must have, in order to perform well. When they stepped off the line in this do or die effort, they were booed by the partisan crowd. They were booed all through their show, and booed when they finished. This confirmed that this was hostile territory. Ottawa was the hometown of the La Salle Cadets who, it was hoped by the crowd, would be the new champions. More than just the usual reaction of a crowd rooting for the underdog, this was also because the Optimists had won for so long. Also, some envy had to be in there, with a natural desire to see the top dog bite the dust. It happens all over. Such a display, rather than distracting its object, often has the opposite effect. It can serve to encourage the unit on the field to try harder.

### ***The Retreat***

The retreat ceremony is, of course, final, and nothing can be changed. In what was the toughest, but not the closest, National Championship yet, the Optimists overcame all the obstacles that day, capturing their tenth consecutive Canadian Championship.

This was a feat unprecedented in Drum Corps history and, as in 1958, it was followed by a display of uncontrolled emotion. For two years now, they had come from behind to win; this time leaving the local crowd very disappointed. It had ended up, really, as a two Corps contest.

The Optimists... . . . 86.316  
La Salle Cadets... . . . 86.100  
De La Salle... . . . . . 81.000  
Sertomanaires... . . . 77.416

The ultimate victory was by a mere 0.216, and it wrapped up what had been the busiest contest season ever for the Toronto Optimist Drum and Bugle Corps. They had entered nineteen contests, won nine and lost nine. What happened to the other one is unknown. Maybe it was rained out.

Most importantly, they were still the number one Junior Corps in Canada, no matter how narrow the margin.



1967: Toronto Optimists with hand-written 10 (Nationals retreat, Ottawa)

Winding down the year took the now familiar route of the banquet and awarding of honours. Rookie of the year was John Christie, Corpsman of the year, Ron Cooper, and a new one went to Robert Ledyards, Guardsman of the year. These follows were outstanding, in an outstanding Drum Corps that had pulled off an outstanding feat. It had required the utmost effort by all and all were to be congratulated.

End of the year notes and rumours contained the stuff that helped lay the basis for future events. De La Salle, the Corps that everyone expected to upset the applecart had, seemingly, been relegated to third place. They, of course, were not satisfied with this and hired Harry Clark to help out in this direction. Harry we have met before, as an original from the Optimist trumpet band. A snare drummer, he had played for three years in the Toronto Optimists and, after that, with the Jesters Senior Corps. A better person to instruct a drum line would be hard to find, bringing with him much knowledge and experience. Teamed with Eddy Jacko, a De La Salle graduate from their early days, this was to be a formidable combination.



1967: Toronto Optimists guard member (Sarnia)

A final comment was the report that De La Salle were to lose very few members this year and were expected to be strong next year. Two hundred and sixty-five miles away, La Salle Cadets were said to have over sixty horns. They had merged with the Troubadours from Hull, the city across the river.

For the Optimists, of course, all these developments meant that next year could be even tougher than this one. Though they were still supreme in their own backyard, the days when that supremacy was easily maintained were long gone. Forever!



1967: Toronto Optimists (East York)

# Version