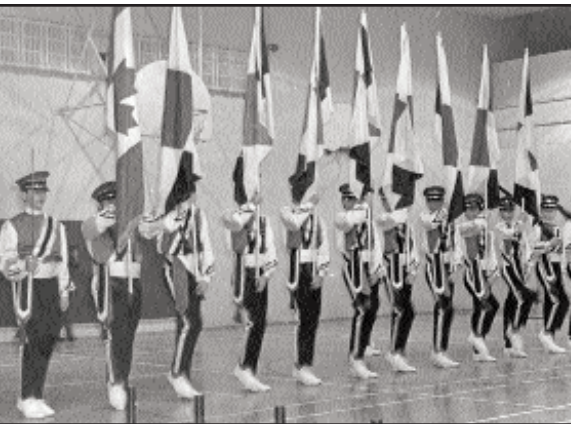



(Top to bottom) Cadets LaSalle in Boston at the 1967 World Open (photo from the collection of William Serson); a 1967 photo collage by Moe Knox, taken at the National Dream (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World); a 1972 performance in Hamilton, ONT; the 1970 winter guard (photos from the collection of William Serson); at Ajax, ONT, on July 1, 1972 (photo by Paul Stott from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Cadets LaSalle

by William B. Serson

In 1963, a drum corps emerged literally from the shadows of the magnificent granite "Peace Tower" of Parliament Hill in Canada's National Capital of Ottawa. This group would go on to set the drum corps world on fire, but unfortunately, the flame that was the Cadets LaSalle would burn out much too quickly, lasting for only one decade.

Born out of the original army cadet program started by the Christian Brothers in 1911 at the Academy De-La-Salle and under the direction of Director Claude Brisebois and in later years Rene Rockburne, the "Red Socks" was easily one of the most identifiable drum corps of its era and was well-known for its flamboyant visual and musical style.

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

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

Proulx's soprano solo in *Johnny One Note* from 1966 or the haunting baritone solo in the concert of *Summertime* played by Billy Cross in 1969. The great Jean Leblanc set a new standard for top note players with his spine-tingling solos in both the opening and closing fanfares of 1970. He was joined by the two Marcs (Chartier and Sarda) for the stirring soprano trio in the opener of *Jezebel*. Lablanc was followed by a succession

of young "up and comers" including the likes of Serge Mercier, Claude Scott (who later went on to some fame with his "Mr. Bud" sports fan routine) and Monty Kirkpatrick in 1972 and 1973.

The drum lines, under the instruction of Rockburne and later Roch St. Jean assisted by Fred Johnson, were consistently top-rated and featured some of the biggest lines of the time.

One of the great stories related about the big 1973 line (as told by a Toronto Optimists competitor) is about the south stands at the CNE Stadium in Toronto shaking as the Cadets LaSalle drum line marched out of the tunnel and onto the field. The corps always featured an exciting musical repertoire such as *Brazil* and *Softly As I Leave You* in 1967, *Jezebel*, *Summertime* and *Aquarius* in 1969, *My Kind of Girl* and *Traces* in 1970 and *One Fine Morning* (by Canadian jazz/rock fusion group Lighthouse) and the theme from "Shaft" (by Isaac Hayes) in 1973.

In an article written for the drum corps publication *The Ontarion* in the spring of 1970, Mike Bowman said this about the

Cadets LaSalle corps:

"One corps that been in the drum corps headlines recently is the Cadets LaSalle of Canada's capital, Ottawa. This junior corps is one of the fastest-rising in North America and 1970 should see the results of this growth.

"The 'Red Socks' have become one of the most noted corps on the continent. Known best for their unique French-Anglo style and well-disciplined members, the Cadets may knock a few noted junior corps' heads come contest time.

"Throughout 1964 and 1965, LaSalle was just another corps and who could tell that within three short years of existence they would become one of the most feared corps on Canadian soil! They lost out to the Toronto Optimists at the 1966 and 1967 (Canadian) Nationals by mere tenths.

"If any of you has the 1967 record LaSalle put out, you, too, will notice the appeal this corps had (you can hardly hear the corps for the fans).

"Yes, 1967 was a great year for LaSalle as they visited two provinces, seven states and logged over 22,000 miles. The 1968 season was a considerably poor year, yet the Cadets had the guts to stick it out and with sheer determination and hard work LaSalle was back in the forefront in 1969.

"All the work paid off, of course, as the Cadets defeated a strong St. Joseph's of Batavia in June. This was a feat that no other junior corps from Canada had matched since 1966. It's too bad that LaSalle did not take many trips across the border in 1969, but this will soon become a thing of the past.

"Plans are being made to take part in the CYO Nationals in Lowell, MA, in August. Look for the Cadets at the 6th Shriners International in Toronto, when they are given the chance to take on St. Joe's, 27th Lancers and the Kilties.

"They have won every guard contest this year as well as taking the Provincial Guard Championships held in Toronto. They did so by defeating the De LaSalle Oaklands 'D' guard and defending champion Optimists.

"Reports indicate they also won the nationals held in Ottawa on March 14. Right now I'd like to see them go up against the Aquinas color guard of Rochester and give them a good run for their money.

"Individually, LaSalle is the best in the country. At the Ontario Individual Championships on February 7, Cadets made a clean sweep by winning every caption they entered. Solo soprano, brass duet, trio, quartet and sextet as well as finishing 1-2-3 in both solo snare and solo tenor and taking drum duet and quartet. WOW!

Right now I am dying to see these guys on the contest field -- great colour guard, horn line and drum line -- what more could you ask for? Watch for these guys in Syracuse at the Cavalcade of Drums sporting new satin blouses and sashes. They may just surprise a few of you non-believers."

During that summer of 1970, the corps had the drum corps world talking after demolishing a strong field on August 15 in

Kingston, NY, by a full seven-point margin and the next weekend knocking off the 1969 VFW Champion Kilties in a tight battle at McArthur Stadium in Syracuse, NY.

Dave King wrote this in a late August edition of *Drum Corps News*:

"Amid speculation as to how they may have scored at the CYO Nationals last Wednesday, the LaSalle Cadets swept past four of the nation's better-known corps here this evening before a capacity crowd at Dietz Memorial Stadium. The event was the Kingston Indian's 6th Annual Pow-Wow of Champions and LaSalle's seven-point margin over Des Plaines Vanguard brought up the question of how good the Cadets really are.

"Had they been in competition at Boston, as originally scheduled, would they have held that 7-point margin, a spread that would have catapulted them into the top five."

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

"The LaSalle Cadets were definitely the most superior corps in the show. The horn section showed good control throughout the performance, never over playing or blasting, and the quality and intonation was excellent.

"The percussion section, 23 men strong, was clean and effective and the guard was as good as always, accented by a superb five-man rifle section that is nearly equal to that of the Casper Troopers. Concert of *Eloise* was well-liked and the exit of *Traces* was very good. Jean Leblanc and Bill Cross did some fine solo work for drum majors Gilles Longtin and Robert Nault, who were awarded the prize (a watch) for best drum major. The evening's only standing ovation went to the Cadets LaSalle!"

Unfortunately for the corps, the fine summer of work could not be translated into a national title as the Cadets lost to arch-rivals De LaSalle Oaklands by a mere tenth of a point in an exciting contest held at Toronto's Varsity Stadium. Also, by the summer of 1970, the corps that had once been comprised totally of students from the Academy had a membership that was now almost 60 percent comprised of members from eastern Ontario and western Quebec.

The corps was attracting the strongest players from the smaller neighboring junior B corps surrounding Ottawa -- Arnprior, Carleton Place, Smiths Falls and Kingston in



At Canadian Nationals, year unknown (photo by from the collection of William Serson).

Ontario and Gatineau, Buckingham, St. Jerome and Montreal in Quebec.

The following year of 1971 was somewhat of a rebuilding season and much of the momentum that the corps had gained in 1969 and 1970 was lost. There was a huge turnover in the horn line and especially the drum line, but to the great credit of the members, they hung tough during a summer of repeatedly getting their noses bloodied.

The summer of 1972 saw a much stronger Cadets LaSalle take the field, featuring five snares, five tenors and, for the first time in its history, a female banner section in the colour guard. The rifle line was still tossing full-weight British army issue Enfield rifles and continued as an all-male section.

The corps had a full summer of competitions, including another stop at the Manning Bowl in Lynn, MA, for the World Open where they were rewarded with the High Execution Drums trophy.

Unfortunately, a night of triumph soon degenerated into chaos as the bus driver on the drum line bus became disoriented by the "we're number one" chants from the back of the bus and took well over an hour to get back to the school accommodations, even though they could see the school high on a hill from the valley where the Bowl was situated.

Instead of returning to receive accolades from the horn line, they returned to an empty gymnasium long vacated by young men in search of food and refreshments.

This capped off a great weekend for the beloved driver, as he had missed the turn-off for the Massachusetts Turnpike the evening before and had driven the corps almost all the way to New York City.

The corps' final year was one of its best ever. Scores went up and down from weekend to weekend and from judging panel to judging panel. *Jezebel* was played when the corps won and *Shaft* was played when it lost. When the Cadets lost, their fans got to hear all of *Shaft* as the corps always seemed a little tardy leaving the field.

While winning its fair share of contests against the Toronto duo (DEL and Optimists) and respected upstate rival St. Joe's, the corps was always competitive and entertaining. The pressure of fielding a full-sized drum and horn line that final season meant bringing in an all-female colour guard (rifles included).

The corps fielded six experienced snares for the first time since 1970, but was forced to field five side tenors as the corps could not keep up with the new financial realities of modern drum corps and multi-tenors were just not an affordable option.

Still, the drum line made a name for itself

by playing a tough Roch St. Jean arrangement of the Don Ellis tune *Upstart* for its second feature.

The corps' bills were adding up and travel was becoming more difficult. Equipment was now being carried aboard the buses as the equipment truck had been sold the previous summer. The corps

had no steady source of income and was running on the credit cards and largesse of its directors, instructional staff and friends.

Cadets LaSalle, always being slightly isolated by geography, was now totally out of the Toronto loop and, with the inception of Drum Corps International, felt it further muddied the water.

A disappointing prelims at Canadian Nationals at Toronto's CNE Stadium in early September led to then-director Rockburne making a classic on-field speech to the corps at the evening finals.

In language that was sometimes less than flattering, he implored the corps to ignore the judges (who were by that time standing by with clipboards in hand) and to play to the strength, which was a legion of fans at lovely old CNE.

As the opening notes of *One Fine Morning* came back as an echo from that beautiful roof overhang of the old stadium, members knew it would be a special night. Not only would the corps tie De LaSalle for the title of national champions in their back yard, but it was arguably the most emotional performance of the corps' 10-year history.

One week later, the corps performed for the last time at a half time of the Ottawa Rough Riders. Back at the corps hall, after the uniforms were removed and instruments cased for the last time, Cadets LaSalle was no more.



Bill Serson joined his first drum corps, the Arnprior Lions, in the fall of 1963. Little did he know that this was to be the start of a long love affair with the activity that continues to this day! He first played

cymbals, later graduated to snare. He competed from 1964 to 1969. He then joined Cadets LaSalle where he played snare from 1970 until his age-out year of 1973.

During this period, he won solo snare titles at both the Provincial and National Individual Championships in 1972 and 1973, as well as numerous duet and quartet titles. Fifteen years later and after "a guys weekend" in Allentown for the 1987 DCA Championships with long-time duet partner Jim Udall, he made the decision to join the Empire Statesmen where he played snare for the 1988 season and came out of retirement for the last two weeks of 1989.

Serson and his very understanding partner, Nancy, live in the beautiful and historic village of Pakenham, ONT, and he is employed by the City of Ottawa as a cartographic illustrator in the Development Services Department.



Cadets LaSalle at the 1967 National Dream (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).