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**by Steve Hecklinger**

Suncoast Sound existed for 18 years from 1979 to 1997. The main activity for which the corps is known happened in the 1980s when the corps reached the pinnacle of its achievement. A lot happened in that span of time.

Suncoast Sound is an experience that captures the quest of a unique offering. Looking back at the decades of memories leaves a warm feeling from the coast of Florida.

The first year for Suncoast



Sound was 1979 and they performed *Mack the Knife*, *Birdland*, *Rule Britannia*, *1812 Overture* and Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 4*. They traveled to England to perform their first show for the Royal Court.

The corps competed in only one show before DCI -- August 14 in

# Suncoast Sound

The 1980 Suncoast Sound increased the quality and exposure. The corps director was Bob Cotter Sr., and Bob Cotter Jr. and Robert Smith were on the brass staff. The corps' repertoire included *Ramparts Fanfare*, Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 4*, *1812 Overture*, *Birdland*, *The First Noel* and *Hallelujah Chorus*.

Suncoast struggled through the summer, but at the DCI Championships, they managed to improve enough to finish in 30th place overall. The placement was ahead of such well-known corps such as the Bluecoats, Glassmen and Oakland Crusaders.

Suncoast kept rising in the ranks during 1981, playing *Butterfly*, *Lullaby of the Leaves*, *Music Magic*, *Another Star* and *The Greatest Love of All*, which later became the corps song.

No longer was the corps struggling at the lower ranks; it had become a competitive unit in the mid-ranks, easily topping the Colts and Imperial Guard throughout the year.

Greenville, SC, where they placed seventh. At the DCI Championships in Birmingham, AL, Suncoast Sound placed 40th setting a 1979 prelim record of 2.8 points in penalties. The horn line finished 25th.

eighth place at the World Open Prelims. The DCI Championship Prelims in Montreal saw the corps break into DCI's elite top 25 for the first time and finish in 21st place.

The Florida corps captured fans' hearts in 1982 with a smooth flowing show and a brilliant brass sound. The repertoire was *You are My Sunshine*, *Lullabye of the Leaves*, *Musicmajic*, *Rainmaker* and *The Greatest Love of All*.

They started the year scoring 14 points behind Spirit of Atlanta, who became the corps' nemesis in the 1980s. Suncoast experienced scoring bias from the judges due to not being a top 12 corps at that point. In the South, Suncoast was easily beating North Star by up to four points.

When Allentown came around, Suncoast finished four points below North Star. Suncoast Sound thought they were robbed. Their score jumped into the 70s mid-season, narrowing the gap on Spirit. July 29 had the



Suncoast Sound, approximately 1985 (photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World).

corps scoring almost in the 80s. DCI Midwest at Whitewater was the real test for Suncoast in a show that featured almost all the corps.

Suncoast finally shocked Spirit by knocking them out of the top 12 for the first time with a 12th-place finish and topping them by more than two points. It seemed that DCI had a new top 12 corps that year as the shows continued with improvement and success.

The day of prelims for that championship week was tough on the corps, with long hours and rainy conditions that led to a great score of 81.10. They were in 12th place with only Spirit of Atlanta standing in their way.

Spirit of Atlanta had revenge by scoring 84.40, knocking Suncoast out of the finals and ending their top-12 hopes. Suncoast finished 13th overall that year.

The 1983 season was the big step up for Suncoast Sound, becoming a major competitor. Improvement all across the organization led to great success. Their repertoire was *Time Out*, *Spanish Gypsy*, *Casino*, *Aquarius* from the Broadway show



(Top) Suncoast Sound, 1985, at DCI Finals in Madison, WI (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World); (middle) corps founder and first director Bob Cotter, who got involved with the drum corps activity after World War II (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World); (left) Suncoast Sound, 1979 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

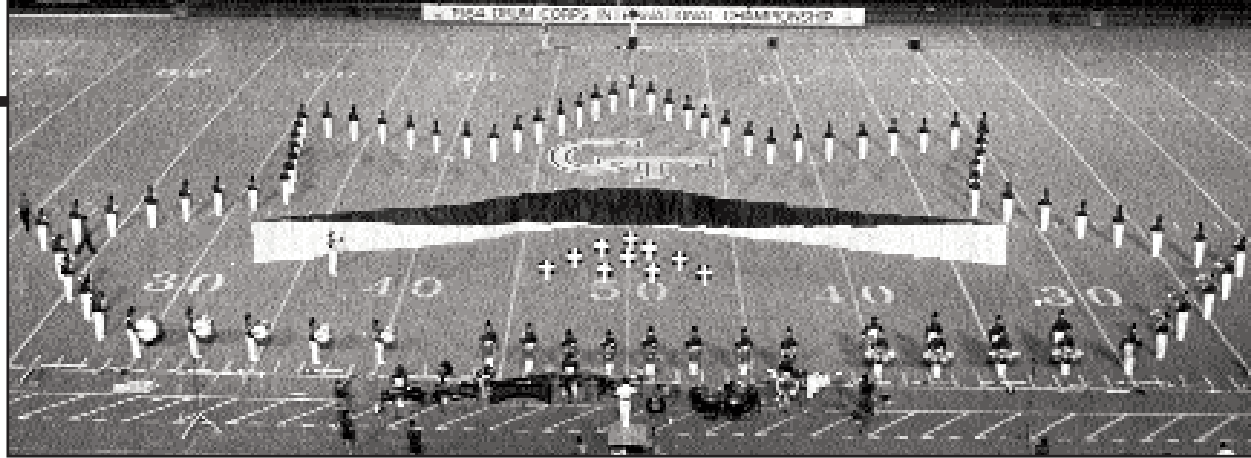
**“Hair” and *The Greatest Love of All*.**

The year started with the established Georgia/Florida rivalry on June 23 where Suncoast finished 1.5 points behind Spirit. Success was in the future, though.

Suncoast stunned many corps with their exciting brass and beat many noted corps. There were wins over the Bridgemen, 27th Lancers, Sky Ryders, Cavaliers and even Spirit. In mid-August, there was a showdown on the corps' home turf in Tampa. Suncoast was firmly in position as a leader, scoring 82.30 to put them firmly in contention for a top-12 finish.

Quarterfinals proved Suncoast was a top corps, scoring an easy win with 84.20. The corps was in fifth place and they eventually settled for sixth in finals to make their mark in history. Suncoast finally topped Spirit to avenge what happened in 1982.

The Florida corps stunned audiences in 1984



(Above and below) Suncoast Sound, 1984, at DCI in Atlanta, GA -- Viet Nam wall and the bomb (photo by Ed Ferguson from the collection of Drum Corps World).



show allowed the corps to move back up to a sixth-place finish. “Take ‘em to da beach, Suncoast” is what fans heard when listening to the 1985 show, and that’s exactly what they did. The bass drum line was featured near the end of the show with a cool drum lick up and down the line.

Their first major competition was



Suncoast Sound, 1982, *The Greatest Love of All* with sign language (photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World).

with its tribute to the Viet Nam era that was very popular. The staff was experienced and led to the continuation of the success for the organization. The corps played *Six O.S.*, *Aquarius*, *Requiem*, *Satisfaction* and *America the Beautiful*.

Finishing in seventh place that year at DCI in Atlanta, Suncoast produced one of the most thought-provoking and moving shows ever witnessed on the marching field. Members of the 1984 corps each wore a memorial bracelet engraved with the name of a member of the armed forces who perished during the Vietnam War.

Suncoast and Spirit traded blows once again all year long. This was a feature year for Suncoast. They were the headliner at shows and won many competitions. They finished in first place in field brass in DCI Prelims, proving their horn line quality.

The corps made history again in 1985 with an all-original program by Robert Smith called “Florida Suite.” The repertoire was *Overture*, *Simple Song at Sunrise*, *Beach Frolic*, *Cloudburst* and *Midnight in Miami*.

It was the first time in DCI history that a corps fielded a show based entirely on music composed expressly for a drum corps. The innovative

in late June. It produced the highest score for Suncoast to date in June at 73.8 and the corps quickly began scoring in the 80s in early July. Once again, the Spirit duel was on, with Suncoast scoring behind them most of the year, but finishing higher in the end. After the successful 1985 season, things would be changing for Suncoast Sound.

The 1986 season marked the pinnacle point for Suncoast Sound. This was the year the corps had several incidents that led to its eventual demise. In the past, Suncoast had been financially supported through fund-raisers, bingo and the other obvious sources of income. This was the year that a major corporate sponsorship developed between Suncoast Sound and the Circle K convenience store chain.

This led to increased spending and staff hiring to hopefully move Suncoast up to the next level. The summer of 1986 saw Suncoast going back to their traditional jazz style, “sunjazz,” with a musically demanding piece titled *Adventures in Time* by jazz musician Stan Kenton.

All summer the corps battled for position among the top corps, beating most of the corps at some point. The drum line was very competitive and even made it on the video “Top Scoring Drum Lines” produced by DCI.

During DCI Championship week, Suncoast really shined in quality, scoring many new highs. They finished fifth overall (the highest ever achieved), first place in the



Suncoast Sound, 1988 (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

field brass caption, fourth in percussion and a final record-high score of 94.8 to complete the best year in their history, and yes, edging ahead of Spirit.

During the summer, there was a falling-out between Suncoast Sound and Circle K which soured the relationship.

The pre-season leading up to 1987 had many major changes that forever affected the corps. The financial situation had erupted and led to instability. This caused a huge change in the organization. Many staff and marching members left under this cloud.

Kim Lloyd, former drum instructor, gathered what few people were left to try to field a corps that year. The staff was now being populated with former members and other diehard Suncoast support people. The corps did achieve some good results, playing *I've Grown Accustomed to Your Face*, *Get Me to the Church on Time* and *I Could Have Danced All Night*.

In 1987, Suncoast took their "sunjazz" one step further by performing excerpts from another Stan Kenton book, an adaptation of the Broadway all-time favorite, "My Fair Lady." The field production, "My Fair Lady . . . Our Way!" was one of the year's real crowd-pleasers.



Suncoast Sound, 1987 (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

of the season racked up even more debt, though, that would continue to eat away at the organization.

Kim Lloyd kept the group in what seemed a stable situation. Suncoast produced another original show titled "Symphonic Dances for the Contemporary Child -- written for Bugles, Percussion and Visual Ensemble," composed by Robert Smith. It was a conceptual show, depicting how children imitate adults and later, as adults, play children's games.

The repertoire was *Red and Yellow*, *Black and White*; *This is the Way We . . .*; *Wait 'Til Your Father Gets Home*; *WAR* and *For Yesterday's Child*.

The scores were down that year, though. Their dominance had slipped, allowing Spirit to have higher scores that summer. Up and coming competitors such as the Bluecoats and Velvet Knights beat them as well.

DCI championship week proved what a quality group Suncoast Sound was when they finished ahead of those corps. They finished in ninth place with a score of 88.8, once again with their brass leading the way. The end

The scores were again decent, but the corps was scoring in the 60s in early July, which was 20 points lower than at that time in 1986. By August, the resolve led them back toward the top 12, scoring well into the 80s leading up to finals week. The guard had a remarkable year, finishing in second place at DCI Finals.

Suncoast easily made finals once again and scored well with 89.1, which was a slight improvement over the previous year.

The 1989 season was the most challenging year yet. Financial burdens were high and member interest was at an all-time low. They had very weak winter camps, causing gaps in all areas and uncertainty of the corps' ability to compete.

Many leaders of the corps left as well. Then toward the summer, a California corps folded and the kids joined Suncoast for a dramatic year.

"Florida Suite," the original show from 1985, got a facelift and made a re-appearance in 1989. There were several new selections, updated music and a "jazz-modern barefoot" color guard. The repertoire was *Overture*, *Beach Frolic*, *Native Rites*, *Simple Song at Sunrise* and *Midnight in Miami*.

The troubles of the winter showed in the early season. Although a determined group, the quality slipped to 1982 levels. The scores were just into the 50s in early July. The competition was greater as well, as Suncoast watched former lower level corps topping them. Even in-state rival Florida Wave beat Suncoast.



Suncoast Sound, 1985, at DCI in Madison, WI (photo by Donald Mathis from the collection of Drum Corps World).

But this was the making of an incredible comeback. By DCI Mid-America July 29, the scores were in the 70s. Still fragile, the corps finished July at Evansville, IN, getting beat by Florida Wave and Blue Knights. The huge, beautiful sea gulls at that performance were quite a sight to see.

But fans at Evansville were expressing fears that Suncoast was down and out and wouldn't make finals. A week later, the corps finished ahead of many corps at DCI South in Birmingham and had a respectable score in the 80s.

Spirit had been beating Suncoast all



Suncoast Sound, August 17, 1993, at DCI in Jackson, MS (photo by Dan Scafidi from the collection of Drum Corps World).

year, but now Suncoast was on top for good. When quarterfinals came, they easily made the top 12, finishing in 10th place and moving up to a solid ninth place at finals. This ended one of the greatest comebacks for a corps in DCI history.

the corps began. Two organizations -- the Suncoast Sound Cadets and Suncoast Gold -- were formed under the Suncoast "umbrella" to ensure the organization lived on.



Suncoast Sound, June 29, 1995 (photo by David Rice from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Suncoast Sound, 1988 (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

This was the year it seemed that Suncoast Sound spent the last of their energy and money, leading to the end. Unfortunately, the history of Suncoast Sound as an open class drum corps would end with the 1989 season.

Due to financial and administrative difficulties, the corps was disbanded. Many of the staff and corps members headed up the road to Orlando to start Magic of Orlando in 1990.

During 1990 and 1991, efforts to revive

Although these groups limited themselves to local performances, the kids that marched with the Suncoast Sound Cadets and age-outs who played with Suncoast Gold kept the name and spirit alive for two years and helped raise funds to get Suncoast Sound back on the field in 1992.

In 1992, a core group of committed individuals -- Dino Riccio, Scot Brownell and Mike Long -- revived the corps back to a competitive level. Although the organization was smaller, it did well, placing fifth in the

Suncoast alumni all cherished dearly.

There was a generation of kids that marched and kept the Suncoast name alive and in front of the fans with much dignity and they did it without the financial opportunities that were offered during the corps' open class years.

In 1997, several staff members from the post-1989 years attempted to field a division III corps under the name "Synergy Sound." Their only performance was at the regional contest "Bugles on the Suncoast." The event was rained out and the corps never resurfaced.



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*He has been on the DCW staff since 1994 as a photographer, but he started watching the drum and bugle corps activity during the early 1970s when he attended rehearsals of the Toledo Glassmen.*

*The first DCI show he attended was in 1982 when he saw the Bridgemen perform their famous Black Market Juggler drum solo. He joined the Evansville, IN, Imperial Guard in 1983, but the corps folded before the summer season got underway.*