
by Daniel Buteau

Corps from the province of Québec have been no strangers to United States competition in the past 30 years. In fact, U.S.-based competitive circuits such as Drum Corps Associates, Eastern-Massachusetts, Red Carpet, Girls Corps International and Upstate New York Circuit have all been visited regularly by French-speaking corps from north of the border.

Independent contests such as the World Open, U.S. Open and American International Open have also been favorites of ambitious Québec corps for many years. Numerous Québec corps have also been able to claim DCI titles in class A, A-60 and all-girl, and later in divisions II and III.



Les Chatelaine de Laval, 1978 (photo by Dick Deihl from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Even though American crowds have expressed considerable surprise with the talent and flair exhibited by these largely unknown visitors, most fans would have been just awestruck with the quality and sheer number of Québec corps that never traveled outside the province.

For many years, most Québec corps did not need to leave their immediate surroundings to find exciting, and sometimes dramatic, competition.

In 1977, when L'Offensive Lions, Les Chatelaines and Les Ambassadeurs d'Arvida first made their marks on the DCI and DCA scenes, most Québec fans were busy speculating about who would emerge as champion in class B bugles at the Québec Provincial Championships.

It was a fight to the finish between Troubadours of Victoriaville and Matadors of Marieville, one that would only be settled at Provincial Finals.

Both corps held distinct advantages in the race for first place. Troubadours had shocked the FAMQ scene with one of the most unusual uniforms ever. The dark mauve and yellow tunics, complemented by a rather inelegant beret, were often labeled as just plain ugly when examined individually.

When the 128 members painted the field

Québec

with mass maneuvers, though, this created a most stunning visual effect that marked the memories of all those who witnessed the heydays of 1977-1979.

Director André Capistran also became one of the driving forces in the Québec circuit. His organization fielded corps of more than 120 local members for three years in a row. Also most stunning during that time period was the high degree of



Matadors, 1978 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

creativity displayed by the corps.

In both 1977 and 1978, Troubadours played highly original arrangements of *New World Symphony* and *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*, masterminded by designer André Campeau. The corps did venture outside of Québec for the class B World Open Championships, but spent most of the 1977 season keeping a close eye on its home-front rival.

Matadors of Marieville were the crowd favorite all year, with a Muchachos-inspired uniform and

(Below) L'Offensive Lions, 1977 (photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World); (right) Les Ambassadeurs d'Arvida, 1977 at DCA (photo by Elinn Cefaratti from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Troubadours, 1977 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

repertoire. Even though they were smaller than their Victoriaville rivals, the Matadors were more experienced, having won

the class A trumpets provincial title the previous year. Drum Major Jackie Ellis sent most female participants from rival corps into a state of frenzy with his flashy style.

Even though Matadors were keen to flaunt their obvious Caballeros and Muchachos obsession, the corps was highly original. Their repertoires combined Spanish selections that were not heard on any DCI Finals albums with made-in-Québec pop music selections.

The two arch-rivals exchanged victories all summer, with the season ending with a Matadors' victory at prelims and Troubadours coming from behind to wrestle the title away at finals.

In 1977, class B prelims also settled another season-long battle as three corps -- Renaissance of Saint-Georges, their next-door neighbors



Abénakis of Saint-Prosper and Étoiles of Rimouski, battled for the third and last available spot for finals.

Renaissance sported one of the most stylish uniforms worn in Québec drum corps history, with American Revolution-era breeches complemented with a French Renaissance long jacket topped with a tri-corner hat. They

emerged as the leader of the three, playing a classical music repertoire that combined selections from Verdi's *Haida* opera with safer drum corps staples such as *Farandole*, *Hallelujah Chorus* and *Greensleeves*.

These three 1977 class B finalists were all representative of a major mid-1970s Québec drum corps trend. Hoping to alleviate the high unemployment rates that were affecting many regions of the province, the Canadian government had established a local job creation scheme called Projets d'initiatives locales (PIL).

Many corps obtained funding with projects that would provide seamstresses with temporary employment by designing new uniforms.



Renaissance, 1977 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Up to the mid-1970s, a vast majority of Québec's marching music organizations were local all-girl twirling groups known as majorettes. Many of these groups tried to reorient their activities toward North American-style drum and bugle corps. As it had also become more fashionable for boys to join these groups, there was a dire need for new uniforms. The short skirts worn by majorette groups simply would not do.

The two trends combined to create the most fashionable Québec Provincial

Championships. The 1977 edition showcased *Mariniers et Marinières* of Lac Mégantic sporting pirate-inspired uniforms, as well as *Boucliers* of Saint-Laurent in flashy yellow tunics that rivaled Seneca Optimists' version of a similar visual theme.

Métropolitains of Chicoutimi remained one of the boldest when the topic of uniforms was mentioned. For three years in a row, they appeared with new versions of crusader-style tunics and capes, even changing the corps' colors in the process.

Métropolitains, who graduated to class A in 1977 after winning the class B bugles provincial title the previous year, are also remembered for a streak of bad luck that kept putting them as an "also-ran" for numerous distinctions, just behind more successful organizations. Or maybe their rivals had more luck.

The corps' hometown of Chicoutimi was within striking distance of Jonquière, home to *L'Offensive Lions*, one of the most successful corps in Québec history. Also lurking close were the senior *Ambassadeurs d'Arvida*, a DCA finalist in 1977 and 1978.

Métropolitains just missed class A finals at the 1977 Québec Provincials. They did emerge as class A champion in 1978, a season when *Offensive Lions* had been kicked out of the FAMQ circuit. The *Métropolitains'* victory was somewhat stained when class B champion *Troubadours* achieved a score that

contingent. Even though the corps did not even feature a snare line that season, their bugle line was graced with the presence of soprano soloist André Lévis, fresh from a



Abenakis, 1977 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World)

two-year stint with DCI Champion *Blue Devils*. The corps struggled all season and even stayed away from Provincials in Rimouski.

Finding themselves behind a class B contender was another slap in the face for the *Métropolitains*, which had also

finished in ninth place at the class B World Open Prelims, missing finals by two points. In the meantime, *Troubadours* had gained the distinction of becoming the first Québec corps to become a finalist in the illustrious contest's history.

The Chicoutimi corps also fielded an impressive color guard and had vowed that it would, one day, win the best color guard award at DCI. *Troubadours* again grabbed bragging rights by winning the top guard award at the 1978 World Open Class B Championships. The *Victoriaville* corps never missed a chance to flaunt that victory around the province.

By 1979, the two corps' rivalry had taken on epic proportions. *Troubadours* had moved to class A, with *Métropolitains* fully intent on defending their 1978 trophy. The 1979 FAMQ competitive scene became memorable for the sheer competition featured in both class A and B bugles.

The summer-long contest for class A honors was also joined by a relative newcomer, *Éclipses* of Verdun. The corps had become co-ed in 1978 after a long string as an all-girl bugles contender. For that maiden season in a new identity, *Éclipses* were mostly active in the Upstate Circuit and appeared at only three contests in Québec.

At the annual show held by *Troubadours* in *Victoriaville*, they were not even allowed to compete with their Québec counterparts and

appeared in the CAN-AM category along with U.S. visitors such as the *Heightsmen* of Arlington, MA, and *St. Peter's Royales* of Bridgeport, CT. They also stayed away from the Provincial Championships.

In 1979, a nearly full *Éclipses* corps joined similar-size *Métropolitains* and *Troubadours* for another competitive roller coaster settled only at Provincials.

The rivalry was so strong that corps directors could be seen overseeing the annual FAMQ ID card check just before Provincials. Every member of each of the championships' competitive units had to line up at the Lachute High School gymnasium to have their official FAMQ-issued ID card checked.

This had become even more necessary for the 1978 and 1979 seasons, as numerous corps had complained about a few competitors' recruiting practices. *Offensive Lions* and *Les Chatelaines* were even kicked out of the FAMQ-sanctioned circuit for alleged illegal recruiting practices.

Rumors also abounded of corps illegally marching over-age members, of judges favoring certain corps with whom their girlfriends marched, or of biased judges who had been instructors of competitive units at some point during the off-season. One of the hallmarks of the 1979 season was a non-stop series of gossip mills that kept producing outrageous claims.

On the competitive front, three superb class A corps presented crowd-appealing shows. *Métropolitains* played a memorable Verdi opener and *Troubadours* took the field with a Liszt selection. *Éclipses'* superb horn line expertly played a crowd-pleasing repertoire of recycled DCI favorite charts such as *Malaga* and *La Fiesta*.

Éclipses' brass strength was partly a result of the involvement of Denis Plouffe, who had moved to the corps after a few years at the helm of *Quatrième Brigade* of St-Jérôme. He would eventually become the driving force behind the rise of *Les Éclipses* of Longueuil to DCI top-12 contention in the mid-1980s.

The three corps exchanged victories all summer, with *Métropolitains* gaining an edge one week before Provincials. They nevertheless were relegated to third place when *Éclipses* peaked at the exact right time, pumping-up the volume for unforgettable displays of brass power at provincial finals. *Métropolitains* again fell on hard luck and finished in third place.

Provincials may have put an end to the season, but the controversies kept showing up in *Marche et Manoeuvres*, the FAMQ monthly publication, which was often used by members trying to vent their frustrations.

The 1979 class B bugles championships had also promised to be a fight to the finish between *Arcs-en-Ciel* of Montréal-Nord and *Deuxième Décade* of Montmagny. *Arcs-en-Ciel* were just starting a climb that would see them challenging *Offensive Lions* in 1980 and making a credible run for a top-25 spot at the 1981 DCI Championships.

The 1979 *Deuxième Décade* served as some sort of a swan song for the nationally



Alliance, 1974 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World)

famous organization from Montmagny that, under the name of Les Marionnettes, had been the Canadian All-Girl National Champions in 1975.

Arcs-en-Ciel displayed a killer horn line with a memorable "Annie" medley opening a show that culminated with *Over the Rainbow*, featuring a Sky Ryders-inspired large rainbow prop. The recycled stunt nevertheless was appropriate, as Arcs-en-Ciel is the French translation for rainbow.

Deuxième Décade was an all-around contender, playing a solid repertoire of French pop music. There also was an unexpected challenge from the overachieving Alliance of Bois-des-Filions/Terrebonne, who beat Deuxième Décade one week before Provincial Championships.

By Provincials, Arcs-en-Ciel not only outdistanced its rivals, but also came dangerously close to Métropolitains by a 0.85 margin, further fueling the fires of irate *Marche et Manoeuvres* articles.

In fact, the Métropolitains' fortunes remain one of the best barometers for the state of the Québec drum corps activity in the early 1980s. During the 1979-1980 off-season, the corps grew highly disappointed when their recruitment efforts could only gather 40 bugle players.

Even though the organization was on a sound financial basis, the corps folded and the brass players became the backbone of Offensive Lions' ultimate season as a DCI

Éclipses All-Girl, Verdun, 1972 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World)



contender.

The mighty Troubadours also suffered lower membership numbers in 1980. The 1981 season was even more disastrous. The corps, fielding fewer than 60 members, placed last at all of its 1981 contests, behind many recently formed corps. Éclipses of Verdun folded, with a large portion of its membership moving to Les Éclipses of Longueuil.

In fact, out of the 30 field units that competed at the 1977 Québec Provincials, only five were still in existence by the 1981 season.

Provincials still featured exciting battles in both classes A and B. Arcs-en-Ciel surprised Éclipses of Longueuil, who had been undefeated all season for the class A title, while Étoiles of Dorion confirmed its season-long dominance over the hungry Aventuriers.

Étoiles had also appeared at the DCI Class A Finals with an original show built on selections from the Beatles.

Aventuriers were less proficient musically, but painted the field with a strong visual program displaying a series of wide-expanding forms.

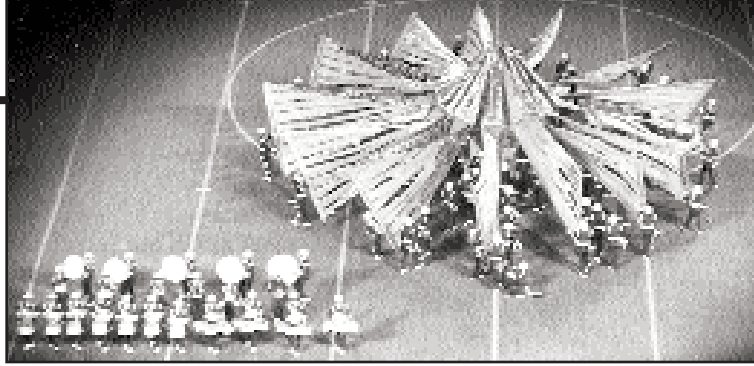
The 1982 Provincials were held in Drummondville and marked what then seemed to be a definite low point in the history of the activity in the province, as only two corps competed in classes A and B.

Troubadours, experiencing a painful rebuilding phase, were the sole class B competitor, but could not even claim a championship trophy. A new rule had been adopted to prevent any corps scoring less than 60 percent from being declared provincial champion in any class.

Even though the situation looked dismal to many Québec drum corps fans used to long line-ups in classes A and B, there was a silver lining in the sheer number of class C

competitors. Competition in that category was not only fierce, but also featured much increased quality. Nineteen class C corps competed in prelims at the 1982 Provincials.

In fact, class C corps such as Crescendos of St-Bruno, Étoiles d'Or of Laval, Sénateurs of Ancienne-Lorette, Patriotes of



L'Odysée senior corps, 1983 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World)

Port-Cartier and Royalistes of Québec City all appeared stronger than many of the declining class B corps that had competed at the 1980 and 1981 Provincial Championships. A new generation of Québec corps had fully emerged.



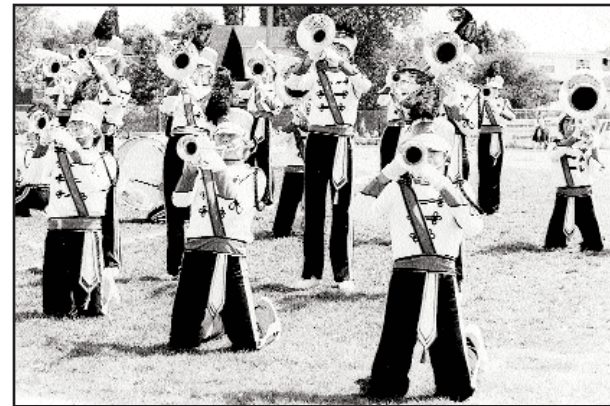
Aventuriers, 1981 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World)

The early 1980s were the years when Québec produced two DCI top-25 corps: Les Éclipses of Longueuil and Connexion-Québec of Laval, an offspring of the former DCI All-Girl Champion Les Chatelaines. These also were the years when the senior L'Odysée of Montréal, formed through a merger of

Arcs-en-Ciel and Alliance of Bois-des-Filions/Terrebonne, amazed DCA crowds with a spaceship prop that covered the whole corps.

While these three FAMQ flagships challenged for prominence on the international scene, a new generation of community corps kept the drum corps flame alive all over the province.

The 1982 Class C Provincial Finals staged the same kind of fight to the finish that had



Étoiles d'Or, approximately 1978 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World)

graced the 1977 and 1979 seasons in classes A and B. The top contenders had exchanged victories all summer. They all exhibited strong identities that helped them dominate provincial competition throughout the early 1980s. The 1982 season also was the first one in Québec history not to feature trumpet units. All of the province's contenders had switched to bugles.

Crescendos won the 1982 class C crown

through the strength of a superb horn line, one they turned into a DCI top-25 contender by 1984. Runner-up Étoiles d'Or stood out with flashy visuals and a remarkable guard.

High energy was the hallmark of Sénateurs, a fierce and hungry competitor that tended to peak too early in the season.

Royalistes, the 1980 and 1981 provincial trumpet champion, remained in the hunt while taking the 1982 season to get used to their new bugles. They still featured one of the most memorable visual gimmicks in Québec drum corps history.

During the spring of 1982, *Le Soleil*, a daily newspaper published in Québec City, had seen it as newsworthy to publish a picture of the bass drum line of a U.S. marching band playing while upside down, standing on their heads. The corps repeated the gimmick in their 1982 Provincial Finals performance.

Sénateurs, Royalistes and Étoiles d'Or had all embarked on the FAMQ competitive circuit in 1979. Crescendos joined them in 1980 under the name of Québécois of St-Bruno, changing the corps' name in 1981.

All four had patiently built their organizations and were reaping the benefits of careful community growth. Joining the four emerging contenders in the top five was Patriotes of Port-Cartier, in their last year of existence. The corps had been the class A trumpets provincial champion in 1977, but had folded the year after. They had re-emerged as a bugle corps in 1980.

Fans attending the 1982 Québec Provincials were again treated to a highly competitive finals contest. Even though Crescendos repeated its prelims victory, Étoiles d'Or jumped two spots to finish second, upsetting Sénateurs, who found themselves in fourth behind Patriotes. Royalistes remained in the fifth spot.

Four of the top five formed the backbone of the resurging class B 1983 contingent. In fact, in that year, the two competing class A units, Étoiles de Dorion and Clique Alouette of Sainte-Foy, could not even keep pace with the graduating former class C units.

The 1983 Provincials featured an open class prelims contests that combined all class A and B units. The 1979 and 1980 DCA finalist *Le Clique Alouette*, in their only year as a junior corps after more than 25 years as a senior distinguished unit, could not even crack finals.

Crescendos, Sénateurs and Étoiles d'Or all fielded high quality shows as they vied for class B honors throughout the season. The three heralded a superb revival of the community-based activity in Québec by fielding large corps.

Crescendos remained undefeated all season and also won the class B World Open title. The hungry Sénateurs hoped to use a hometown advantage by hosting Provincials in Ancienne-Lorette.

Their show, featuring drum corps staples such as *Tiger of San Pedro* and *Lullaby of the Leaves*, provided them with dark-horse

contender status all season, but they could not go beyond a third-place finish by the end of the season. Étoiles d'Or continued their way to a three-year string as a runner-up.

Even though the top three featured exciting enough competition, the fight for the five spots available in the combined open finals provided even more goose-bumps, as re-emerging corps such as Aventuriers of

Charlesbourg and Troubadours joined Étoiles of Dorion-Vaudreuil and Royalistes in the race for the last two available spots in finals.

Royalistes managed the season's most stunning upset by finally performing a difficult show featuring excerpts from "Superman" and a popular rendition of *Bohemian Rhapsody* to the standards required for placing fourth.

Class C competition continued to be the most active in the province. Nineteen corps appeared at prelims, a mix of former majorette groups such as Cendrillons of Ste-Agathe turned into les Incorruptibles du Nord, new contenders Sonnor of Laprairie and Académie Musicale of Sherbrooke, as well as revitalized corps from rural regions such as Abénakis of Saint-Prosper, Renaissance of Saint-Georges de Beauce and Avant-Gardistes of Saint-Pascal de Kamouraska. A high degree of creativity and originality also marked the 1983 class C field.

Sonnor dominated the category all season with a remarkable horn line playing a nine-minute medley of favorite selections from popular DCI finalists.

Incorruptibles were the crowd favorite, with a corps sporting uniforms reminiscent of 1930s Chicago gangsters playing "West Side Story" selections. Despite the obviously disjointed musical and visual concepts, the corps' originality shone throughout.

Dynamiques of Saint-Jean Chrysostome, who believed they had second place firmly under their belts, could not take a show of favorite big band selections beyond a third-place finish.

One of the highlights of class C finals was the appearance of first year Académie Musicale of Sherbrooke, whose uniform of black pants and red T-shirts had led many spectators to dismiss the corps as a one-year



L'Insolite, August 11, 1990, at DCI East in Allentown, PA (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).

aberration. The high technicality of their repertoire of excerpts from "Pictures at an Exhibition" had also proven to be as challenging for the audience as it painfully was for the young performers during their few competitive appearances of the season.

By Provincials, the corps had performed the first of a string of season-long miracles and became one of the crowd's favorites with a highly musical rendition that led

them to fifth place.

Another prophetic appearance at the 1983 Provincials was the second place achieved by Les Jérômiennes of St-Jérôme in concert class. The group was in the middle of a transformation that culminated in the emergence of future DCI Class A champion and top-25 contender L'Insolite in 1984.

Many longtime fans could not help comparing the 1983 Provincial Championships in Ancienne-Lorette to the 1977 extravaganza hosted by Les Chatelaines in Laval. Both events required the building of a makeshift stadium out of scaffolding and wooden planks. The two events were hosted by well-oiled organizations that had achieved highly visible community presence.

Both championships featured impressive lineups, exciting competition in numerous classes, as well as exhibitions by Québec corps destined for highly noticed DCA Finals appearances.

The 1984 Provincials marked a coming-of-age for the whole Québec drum corps movement in many ways. The era of



Académie Musicale, 1993, at DCI in Jackson, MS (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Provincials held at makeshift stadiums came to an end when FAMQ vowed to make Montreal a permanent home for the championships.

The contest was held for a few years at the Verdun Municipal Stadium, which was also

the home of the DCI-sanctioned "Invitation-Québec" contest. The stadium was destroyed to make way for riverside condominiums in 1987.

Provincials then found a new home at the University of Montreal for a few years, until residents of the upscale Outremont neighborhood complained about noise disturbances. The contest was then moved to the Centre Claude Robillard Stadium until the year 2000.

Even though holding the championships event in the province's main urban center provided increased visibility in that region, the move seriously decreased the activity's exposure elsewhere.

On the positive side, nobody would have to perform in inappropriate venues such as the Lachute High School field that hosted the 1979 event. There had been a powerful rainstorm the night before prelims. As the field could not get properly drained, two masses of water remained up front and many members had no choice but to get wet by stepping -- and even lying in Aventuriers' case -- right in them.

On the flip side of the coin, smaller towns such as Rimouski, Lachute, Jonquière and Drummondville had warmly welcomed the Provincial event, with nobody complaining

The coming-of-age also marked a loss of innocence. Many corps had reached quality levels that made it hard to continue improving without switching to a more international focus. *Sénateurs* and *Dynamiques* were forced into a temporary merger when their ranks were depleted by the recruiting practices of *Les Cascadeurs de Beauport*, who placed seventh at DCA Finals in their first and only year of existence. *Aventuriers*, also falling to the ambitious senior corps, elected to move down to class C.

Provincial champion *Les Éclipses*, who had placed 15th at DCI Prelims, would also put considerable pressure on corps from the whole province as they attempted to further their rise in international rankings.

The 1984 Provincials marked a high peak of the Québec drum corps movement, of the type that would never again be seen in the province. Some would even label it as the last hurrah for the community-based drum

and bugle corps movement in the province. Tension points should have been obvious to all. A smaller *Crescendos* corps had a slow start to that season and often found themselves behind nearly full *Étoiles d'Or*. The *St-Bruno* corps nevertheless took their classy, jazzy repertoire, spearheaded by a stunning version of *Wind Machine*, on a DCI tour, picking up members along the way.

By Provincials, the corps relegated *Étoiles d'Or* to another runner-up finish in class A. That was too much for the *Laval* corps, who had *Crescendos* eliminated for marching members who had not been on their official FAMQ membership list at the start of the season.

Third-place *Royalistes* featured the strongest corps in their history at the 1984 Provincials, but folded the following season. The corps could not afford taking the DCI touring step that was, in the members' minds, the next logical step in their evolution. Many moved to *Les Éclipses* for 1985.

On the positive side, *Troubadours* had fully re-emerged from their long rebuilding process and again cracked provincial finals with a popular show that featured jazz and blues selections. *Académie Musicale*, who had finally acquired a bona fide uniform, won the first championships in their illustrious history with a class C title.

One of the most memorable corps of 1984 was *Mousquetaires de La Baie*, who featured a high-energy repertoire of big band and pop music selections.

The following off-season witnessed the

disappearance of three of the province's most prominent units of the early 1980s: *Crescendos*, *Royalistes* and *Sénateurs*. The 1985 season would nevertheless feature another interesting epic three-corps race for the class A and B titles, as well as a dogfight for the class C title.

It was also the last season to see more than one or two corps competing on the FAMQ circuit with more than 70 members. The summer of 1985 was also the last one where

prelims truly mattered. From 1986 on, most corps would be much smaller and Provincial Prelims would become a rarity.

By the early 1990s, the Provincials' field competition portion had become a one-night,

single-contest event, a far cry from the three- to four-day extravaganzas of the late 1970s.

Also, 1985's summer-long provincial competition will be remembered for the *Étoiles d'Or*, *Aventuriers* and *Académie Musicale* rivalry and fight for the class A title.

The three corps all showed strong identities with highly divergent styles.

Étoiles d'Or again featured a well-balanced, large corps opening a show built around drum corps staples with "Annie and CO" medleys. The corps used a large guard in a wide-expanding drill that featured numerous large forms. *Aventuriers*, fielding the strongest junior corps ever to come out of Québec City, left strong musical impressions all over with well-arranged selections such as *If You Could Read My Mind* and *Smooth Operator*.

Académie Musicale had a smaller and younger corps that proficiently mastered a difficult offering of classical selections such as *Poet and Peasant Overture* and selections from "Rodeo." Their visuals featuring blocks that kept all musicians tightly together contrasted widely with the vast, expanding offerings presented by their two rivals.



L'Impact, 1996 (photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World).



(Above) *Connexion-Québec*, 1987 (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World); (below) *Les Éclipses*, 1986 (photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World).

about having to suffer noise disturbances for one night of the year.

The 1984 Provincials marked a new peak for the activity in the province. Twenty-seven corps competed in prelims. Corps such as *Les Éclipses*, *Connexion-Québec*, *Crescendos* and *Étoiles d'Or* reached standards of quality seldom met in the province's history.

Corps such as *Arcs-en-Ciel* and *Royalistes*

surpassed previously held expectations about the quality of class B corps.

Class C corps such as *L'Insolite* and *Renaissance*, who placed respectively fifth and sixth at prelims and could not crack finals, featured quality shows that would have won the category's first-place honors in numerous years.



La Clique *Alouette* senior corps, July 12, 1980, at Giants Stadium (photo by Joseph Zepko from the collection of Drum Corps World).

The first weeks of the season had established a rather predictable pattern that saw Étoiles d'Or in first place, Aventuriers lurking closely behind and Académie Musicale trying to catch-up with the two leaders. Such comfortable expectations were totally shattered at the Drum Corps East Championship Prelims held in Lynn, MA, when Académie shocked its rivals by defeating both of them.

The biggest surprise still did not merge until Provincial Finals. Prelims had appeared remarkably predictable, with Étoile d'Or in first place, Aventuriers lurking seven-tenths of a point behind in second place and Académie in third.

Aventuriers refused to give up their quest for the title and peaked at the last minute to snatch the class A trophy from Étoiles d'Or, who were forced in the runner-up spot for the fourth year in a row. This was also their last year of existence as a drum and bugle corps.

Class C ranks had shrunk considerably from the previous year, featuring only nine contenders in preliminary competition. The category nevertheless featured fiercely fought competition, as L'Insolite and Mousquetaires made strong claims for first-place honors. The St-Jérôme corps gained the first of many provincial and international titles.

Also noticeable was fourth-place Pionniers of Fleurimont, whose excellent musical components compensated for the total absence of a guard section.

The 1985 season was also the last one to witness season-long competition in the province of Québec. Even though the FAMQ continued to sponsor contests in various communities around the province, line-ups were short from then on. The days when large community-based units could compete locally all summer had become a thing



Les Étoiles, July 8, 1995, at DCI East in Allentown, PA (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).

of the past. Les Éclipses vanished in 1986 and Connexion-Québec folded after the 1987 season.

The 1986 and 1987 seasons featured dogfights between Académie Musicale, Transit and L'Insolite for the provincial Class A title. Classes B and C featured, from then on, relaxed rules in terms of length of show and visual requirements. The FAMQ attempted to compensate for the decline in the number of competitive drum and bugle corps by attracting youth

bands, majorette groups, gardes paroissiales and parade units to its events. The nature of the Québec drum corps activity had been changed forever.

The 1987 contest established some of the features that could be expected for many years to come in the province. Only three corps competed in class A all summer.

Académie Musicale,

who had started the season 13 points behind Transit of Sainte-Julie, came from behind in spectacular fashion to tie them for the provincial title. The two champions were also much smaller in size than third-place L'Insolite, starting a long line of giant-killer small Québec corps that surprised groups from all over North America in the 1990s.

Transit had appeared on the FAMQ circuit in 1985 with a spectacular brass line, the result of efforts by brass instructor Gilbert Lamothe. The corps folded after claiming its shared 1987 title, with many members following Lamothe to L'Insolite, who would claim the 1988 DCI Class A title and crack the DCI top-25 for the first time that year.

Instead of providing summer-long competitive venues for community-based



Multi-Visions, 1996 (photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World).

corps, the FAMQ summer season had become a period of about eight weeks when most units appeared with unfinished shows in early July and then scrambled to finish the show and peak at Provincials.

It had become nearly impossible to speculate who would emerge as provincial champions, as nobody could see most of the corps' real competitive shows until the last contest of the season. Most of the province's units had also stopped appearing in local parades and festivals, as all energies were concentrated toward finishing the competitive product.

Such functioning had a negative effect on the size of Québec drum corps crowds. The large units of the late 1970s had strong followings as they presented crowd-pleasing

repertoires and staged edge-of-the-seat competitive battles all over the province.

By the late 1980s, many fans concluded it was not worth attending FAMQ contests before the last weeks of the season. The shrinking interest for the community-based side of the activity further exacerbated the recruiting difficulties of most of the remaining units.

Instead of providing a musical leisure activity to local youth, the drum and bugle corps of the late 1980s attempted to

recruit driven, experienced members who would attempt to present a nearly perfect show.

The most successful Québec corps were also not content anymore to vie for provincial honors. Only those who could afford traveling to major DCI Class A or Division II/III contests were able to recruit enough members to field competitive units.

Signs of a much more modest Québec drum corps activity abounded all around. Corps such as Étoiles of Dorion-Vaudreuil,



Metropolitains, September 5, 1992, at DCA Prelims in Scranton, PA (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).



3rd Regiment, 1997 (photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Aventuriers, Sénateurs and Royalistes would appear only in intermittent years, taking years off when failing to recruit enough members.

Aventuriers' last hurrah came in 1988 with a credible appearance at the DCI World Championship in Kansas City. They attempted to survive in 1989 by becoming the first marching band in the province's history, a transformation that met definitely mixed results and was not repeated after that season.

Even the *Marche et Manoeuvre* publication had to undergo considerable downsizing and appeared only intermittently in the late 1980s. Gone were the articles written by marching members, replaced with philosophical musings about the future of the activity in Québec.

The late 1980s was also a time period when even the attempts of a wealthy Québec City businessman to jumpstart a DCA finalist failed when Ambassadeurs of Québec City could not place higher than 14th in 1986 and 1987. The organization had a solid financial footing and had even established a short-lived partnership with the Québec Nordiques National Hockey League team.

They were known as Les Ambassadeurs des Nordiques in 1987. Despite a few appearances at local games, the increased visibility did not help the corps' recruiting efforts.

Les Ambassadeurs' 1986 and 1987 late-season DCA surges were based on a quick integration of members from Les Éclipses and Connexion-Québec after these corps had finished their DCI tours.

The corps folded in 1989 when late-season recruiting could not gather enough members for a credible showing at the DCA Championships. The corps nevertheless formed the nucleus necessary for the emergence of the newly formed Les Métropolitains of Montreal, a DCA finalist from 1990 to 1994 that would climb the organization's ranks throughout the early 1990s, culminating with a fourth place in their last year of existence.

For both 1989 and 1990, the main drum corps contest in Québec was not Provincials, but the "DCQ Challenge," a Drum Corps East-sponsored contest held by Académie Musicale in Sherbrooke in early July.

These were the years when Académie stunned DCI crowds with a killer class A-60 corps that achieved near perfection at DCI Championships with their 1990 edition

remaining firmly remembered by all those who were privileged to witness it. Early 1990s corps such as L'Insolite and Dimension also left strong marks in DCI competition.

Québec corps also became known for their



(Top to bottom) Les Sénateurs, August 12, 1997, at DCI Division III/III Prelims (photo by Dan Scaffidi); Arcs-en-Ciel, August 20, 1995 (Roland Doré); Melomanes, July 17, 1999 (Ron Da Silva); Sentinelles, July 20, 1997 (Doré, photos from the collection of Drum Corps World).

stunning originality. The 1989 Académie Musicale presented a well-crafted theme show around a "Crystal" visual theme.

In their formative years from 1989 to

1993, Dimension of Lévis, an offspring of the Sénateurs/Dynamiques merger that was known as Crystallins from 1985 to 1987, produced a string of classical shows featuring music from composers as varied as Strauss and Rimsky-Korsakov.

These helped the corps' instructors in honing the design skills that would lead them to create the "Sunset Boulevard," "Yanni at the Acropolis" and "Magnificat" productions that fueled the corps' DCI Division II prominence from 1994 to 1996.

Chapdelaines of Dolbeau and Sénateurs were famous for presentations built around popular made-in-Québec musicals. The Chapdelaines organization, which had switched names to Impact in the early 1990s, even took the next logical step of its musical orientation by switching its operations to musical theater following the 1998 season.

The days when Québec corps tried to emulate DCI finalists by playing recycled selections were definitely gone. Organizations such as Multi-Visions of Trois-Rivières, Chevaliers de Rivière-du-Loup and Stentors of Fleurimont also presented highly original, credible regional corps in the mid-1990s.

Multi-Visions offered highly noticed "Cirque du Soleil" shows in the mid-1990s. Stentors, who shared a local recruiting pool with famed Académie Musicale, built their productions around classical music selections.

Even though L'Insolite, Les Étoiles and Académie Musicale staged hard-fought battles at a few Provincial Championships in the mid-1990s, these were by products of their season-long DCI tours.

Until the mid-1980s, most Québec corps saw their single appearance in the United States as an oddity in seasons devoted almost solely to FAMQ competition. The situation had been reversed by the mid-1990s, as the shrunk ranks of the Québec drum corps circuit offered few local competitive

opportunities.

The province could still produce impressive contenders such as the 1995 Académie Musicale and 1996 Les Étoiles, corps of around 60 members that placed 19th and 15th, respectively, in division I at DCI. These corps were testimonies to the transformed Québec drum corps activity, one that featured driven members searching for the ultimate drum corps experience.

The 1997 season was the last one to feature truly exciting local competition in the province. Académie Musicale and Les Étoiles fought for division I honors, with 3rd Regiment and Les Sénateurs of Joliette exchanging victories in division II.

By that year, the FAMQ season appeared somewhat restructured in order to accommodate its leaders' DCI tours. Early-season contests were staged in the first weeks of July. The season then paused until the corps were back from their DCI tours in



Royalists, approximately 1979 (photo by Christa Ferguson from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Les Dynamiques senior corps, 1994, at the DCA Championships (photo by David Rice from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Les Stentors, 2002 (photo by Ron Walloch from the collection of Drum Corps World).

mid-August.

The most exciting competitive events of the 1997 season happened, in fact, at the very first contests, as a late blooming Les Étoiles

they felt unsatisfied by their corps' final rankings. The 1998 season witnessed the same type of bickering over member ownership and FAMQ ID cards that had been

so prevalent in the late 1990s when a 3rd Regiment brass player that moved to Les Étoiles in June.

That season was also the last time to witness a Québec corps fielding more than 100 members. Stentors of Fleurimont, who did not venture outside of the province that summer, provided many members with

the opportunity to march in a community-based corps that did not require sacrificing the whole summer to a grueling DCI tour.

Even though the corps struggled with a difficult contemporary classical book, they surprised 3rd Regiment, back from a division III DCI tour, by coming less than one point away from an upset for the Québec Provincial

Division II title.

In 1999, the corps embarked on its first DCI Championship participation, a move that led to a steady decline in membership numbers and forced the corps to switch from division II to division III in 2001.

From 1999 to 2003, the FAMQ had to contemplate the demise of the Québec drum

corps movement. The organization attempted to reach out to the few remaining youth bands, gardes paroissiales and parade corps in existence.

These groups had grown to view the provincial agency suspiciously, believing that a competitive focus would eventually become too onerous.

Until 2001, Sentiennes of Varennes and Stentors of Fleurimont attempted to maintain a community focus, but the prospect of summer-long competition between only two units forced them to further explore the DCI Division III route.

By the fall of 2001, membership ranks had grown so thin that Sentiennes attempted a merger with Sénateurs of Joliette to form the Québec Alliance. The merger proved to be a one-year-only venture, with Sentiennes leaving the combined corps and folding its organization the following fall.

At the dawn of the 2003 season, it appeared likely that no Québec Provincial Championships will be held, something that would be a first in the organization's 30 years of existence.

Regardless of what ultimately happens, numerous drum corps fans will continue reminiscing about the great battles of the late 1970s. Middle-aged former members will remember a youth spent watching epic battles between Troubadours and Matadors, Éclipses and Métropolitains.

They will remember the days when they were the stars of numerous community festivals and when each summer weekend brought a new FAMQ contest. They will relish memories of traveling to Boston for the World Open or to Hamilton for DCI Canada.

Others, energized by the rise to international prominence of Les Éclipses, Connexion-Québec, Les Étoiles and Académie Musicale, will dream of jump-starting new organizations that could again regroup the best of the province and take the drum corps world by surprise.

In the meantime, most members of marching age still interested in drum corps participation will get ready for a summer spent touring with top DCI organizations. Such is the generation gap that leads the destiny of the Québec drum corps movement in the first years of the new century.

For a photo and bio of Daniel Buteau, turn to page 217.



Les Cascadeurs, 1984 (photo by Bill Dixon from the collection of Drum Corps World).

appeared with a very rough show. They had to fend off challenges by overachieving 3rd Regiment and Sénateurs, being overcome by the first in percussion and the second in brass.

These units not only fought for honors on the competitive field. The activity's ranks had shrunk so dramatically that members would move from one organization to the other if

Dimension, 1995 (photo by David Rice from the collection of Drum Corps World).

