

Drum and bugle corps in Quebec

by Daniel Buteau

The United States has always maintained a rather complete domination of all aspects of the drum and bugle corps activity. Up to the late 1990s, Canada retained its position as the activity's non-American leader by providing a healthy drum corps scene and producing fierce competitors at the DCA and DCI levels.

The dawn of the 21st Century has set the stage for a struggle that could potentially lead to the disappearance of the activity north of the border.

Canadian drum corps has been mostly prominent in two of the country's 10 provinces, Quebec and Ontario. Quebec corps have always exhibited a distinct flair. American spectators have been intrigued by their use of French field commands. PA announcers have struggled with names like Eclipses, Insolite, Étoiles or Clique Alouette.

The roots of the activity in Quebec also differ from those of its North American counterparts. Drum corps' military tradition is definitely thin in La Belle province.

The shape the activity took in Quebec has been the result of church and community activism in the 1960s, state intervention in the 1970s and individual initiative from the mid-1980s.

What started out as a community youth activity had become obsessed with competitive considerations by the late 1970s. A visible and accessible drum and bugle corps community had been replaced by an elitist activity open only to those who could adapt to a nearly full-time schedule by the mid-1990s.

Remarkable efforts by passionate individuals have not prevented the Quebec drum corps movement to contemplate near extinction by the early 2000s.

The Province of Quebec, distinct from its Canadian counterparts in that an overwhelming majority of its population is French-speaking, remained dominated by the cultural influence of the Roman Catholic Church well into the 1960s.

The church controlled the education and

health-care systems. It also sponsored forms of leisure groups deemed appropriate by its leaders.

Patro institutions, community centres directly controlled by parishes, sponsored marching music groups. Most famous among these was La Clique Alouette, founded in the 1950s by Patro Laval in Quebec City. Patro Laval still sponsored La Clique Alouette when the corps emerged as a DCA Finalist in 1979.

Other parishes sponsored marching music units with a religious orientation named Gardes paroissiales. Such groups existed all the way to the late-1980s, when a group from Kenogami appeared in exhibition at a few drum corps contests.

This is more than a mere footnote, as Kenogami is a suburb of Jonquiere, hometown to Offensive Lions, arguably the best corps ever to come out of Quebec.

These groups compensated for the non-existence of U.S.-style marching bands in the schools and communities of the Province.



OFFENSIVE LIONS, Jonquiere, QUE (1976).
Photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World.



CHATELAINE ALL-GIRL, Laval, QUE (1972).
Photo by Paul Stott from the collection of Drum Corps World.



DIMENSION, Levis, QUE (1995).
Photo by Ron Walloch from the collection of Drum Corps World.

The church-run education system, which prevailed until 1962, offered no basis for music education. The next 10 to 15 years witnessed major Provincial government efforts at bringing Quebec's public education system on par with North American standards, a process through which musical education played second fiddle to core subjects.

The 1960s witnessed a timid emergence of the drum corps activity in the Province. By the early 1970s, it had turned into a fast-spreading firestorm. Drum corps came to be viewed as a cultural youth leisure activity, a channel for the expression of the French-Canadian culture.

The first groups to switch to North American drum and bugle corps standards had been first influenced by their Ontario counterparts. The famous Preston Scout House from Preston, ONT, appeared in Shawinigan, QUE, in 1959. They were such a sensation that a few marching music groups vowed they would become drum and bugle corps.

By 1962, a Quebec chapter of the Canadian Drum Corps Association had been established. By 1967, the senior Les Diplomates of Quebec City had become Canada's National Champion.

Les Diplomates shocked staid Ontario audiences by featuring a merry-go-round in their drill, introducing the now well-established reputation of Quebec drum corps as creative innovators.

The first CDA-Quebec Championships took place in Lachine in 1963, adding a new yearly event to a marching music calendar that also featured contests held by the Association des majorettes du Québec (AMQ) and the Association des corps de trompettes du Québec (ACTQ).

These parallel events were held until 1973, when the Fédération des Associations Musicales du Québec (FAMQ) held a combined Provincial Championships.

1960's CDA-Quebec Chapter events would feature fierce competition among crowd-favorites such as the senior Quebec City Diplomates, Verdun Métropolitains and Hull Troubadours, as well as the junior Shawinigan Grenadiers, Drummondville Cavaliers, Sphinx of Sainte-Thérèse, Mousquetaires of St-Jérôme, first-generation Sénateurs of Joliette and Montreal Vicountes de la Palestre Nationale.

Some of these early competitors ventured outside of Quebec for Canadian Drum Corps Association contests in Ontario, as well as for

limited appearances in the United States.

Les Diplomates remained prominent on the DCA scene, cracking DCA Finals yearly from 1970 to 1973, when they finished fourth before folding.

Junior corps from Canada could not compete in the main U.S. drum corps championship-title events as long as these remained controlled by the American Legion and VFW.

The emergence of DCI as the elite drum corps association in 1972 would, of course, expand the competitive opportunities provided to Canadian corps.

It was also in 1972 that the CDA-Quebec Chapter merged with the AMQ and ACTQ to form the FAMQ, Fédération des Associations Musicales du Québec.

As the Church's influence vanished, the Quebec Provincial government encouraged the formation of associations that would promote leisure activities for the youth of the Province.

The FAMQ, with a widespread mandate of providing services for all types of musical youth groups, became one of such agencies.

From then on, the Quebec drum corps activity benefitted from the services of a tax-funded agency. The FAMQ established circuits of competition for both bugles and trumpets corps.

The agency would advertise appearance opportunities for its member groups, as well as provide advice to volunteers intending to start youth musical activity groups.

In the mid-1970s, the FAMQ published a monthly drum corps publication called *Marche et Manoeuvres*, which created a sense of community among all drum corps participants until its slow and gradual disappearance in the late 1980s.

Positive demographic trends also contributed to the coming drum corps explosion. A baby boom that lasted from the immediate post-World War II years to the early 1960s resulted in positive demographics for the youth activities of the 1970s.

The size of the activity continued to grow. A number of Quebec groups had become symbols of what could be achieved in the drum corps milieu. Les Diplomates and Les Métropolitains had both been DCA Finalists.

Les Chatelaines de Laval competed at the Canadian National level in the late-1960s, becoming all-girl champions from 1967 to

1969.

The first FAMQ Provincial Championships led many groups to an awakening of the possibilities offered by active drum corps competition. Competitive ambitions led many to restructure their activities around new schedules.

The competitive drive would also lead majorette and trumpet corps to gradually transform themselves into drum and bugle corps. These community organizations provided a year-round activity to their members. Teenagers would join them as an alternative to sport activities.

These organizations would provide them with a social life that would span the whole year. It would have been unthinkable for members to switch to a neighbouring organization. Corps dissatisfied with their competitive results would work harder to get back at their rivals, often the corps next door, the following year.

The first Provincial Championships were highly elaborate affairs. The activity was split between bugles and trumpets corps. Both categories were divided in A, B, C, all-girl and eventually senior classes. Until 1977, the event featured not only field competition, but also a competitive parade and stand-still contest, reflecting the various activities corps used to maintain visibility in their home regions.

A new class of leaders had emerged by 1976, a year when 33 corps appeared at Provincials, a rather spectacular growth from the 22 contenders of 1973. The FAMQ provided a well-organized and widely spread competitive scene. Most July and August weekends featured contests held simultaneously in different regions of the province.

Most corps restricted their competitive appearances to Quebec, except for an appearance by Les Chatelaines at DCI in 1974 and isolated ventures by a few corps, such as St. Jérôme's La Quatrième Brigade, at the World Open Championships.

Such functioning could partly be explained by financial considerations. These community groups could only afford local traveling.

Another factor was linguistic. Quebec corps were French-speaking, which added another adventurous dimension to competing outside the province.

The location of Provincials moved every year from 1976 to 1980. The 1976 event was in



MULTI-VISIONS, Troise Rivières, QUE (1996).
Photo by Pat Chagnon from the collection of Drum Corps World.



PRELUDES, Breakeville, QUE (1996).
Photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World.



ECLIPSES ALL-GIRL, Verdun, QUE (approx. 1972).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.

Jonquiere, 1977 in Laval, 1978 in Rimouski, and 1979 was in Lachute. It was back to Jonquiere in 1980.

Every corner of the inhabited portion of Quebec could be exposed to the drum corps activity.

Until 1976, the Province would send its best to compete at the Canadian National Championships, an event that was nearly always held in the Toronto area. The 1975 Canadian all-girl champions was Marionnettes from Montmagny, a town of less than 10,000 people. The corps was sponsored by a community club established by local lumberjacks.

Marionnettes were a true Quebec drum corps pioneer, the little corps that came out of nowhere to become a giant killer.

Very few Quebec corps competed at the Canadian National level after 1976, the year when Quebec politics became dominated by the ever-recurring issue of Quebec's secession from Canada. That idea flourished especially well around cultural circles, from which many drum corps enthusiasts were drawn.

By the late 1970s, two homegrown leaders suddenly emerged on the international scene. The 1977 season saw Offensive Lions of Jonquiere, a town of about 55,000, competing in a small-scale tour to the World Open, U.S. Open and American International Open contests. They made open class finals at all three events.

Their drum line also topped DCI finalists Crossmen, Seneca Optimists and Garfield Cadets in that caption. The corps had previously appeared at the 1975 and 1976 DCI Championships, where they had nearly made class A finals for both years.

Les Chatelaines achieved notoriety on the 1977 all-girl tour by providing strong competition to corps such as the Fire-ettes and Jeanettes. They also came close to the mighty St. Ignatius, undefeated as DCI all-girl champion up to then.

Contributing to the awakening of the relatively isolated Quebec drum corps community to the North American scene was the appearance of the Invitation Québec DCI-sponsored contest, established by a group of Montreal drum corps enthusiasts led by Claude Cartier in 1975.

Whole corps would buy blocks of tickets and fill Verdun's Municipal Stadium, an excellent drum corps venue. They witnessed corps of a

quality that none could have ever imagined. The contest, held annually until the 1999 season, would even become the longest-lasting event on the DCI tour.

The 1977 Provincials in Laval remains the high point of that early age of Quebec drum corps. Twenty-nine corps competed in eight classes, spearheaded by powerhouses such as Offensive Lions, Chatelaines and the senior Ambassadeurs d'Arvida. All three of these ultimate community drum corps were on the verge of greatness.

Class B competition featured rising star Troubadours of Victoriaville, arguably the best class A corps never to have appeared at DCI. It is a shame that their infamous guard, flamboyant female drum major, Lucie Roy, and trademark *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy* have remained unknown to most drum corps fans.

The 1977 Provincials saw a whole generation of Quebec teenagers celebrating their achievements. The faraway Gaspésie region dominated the class B trumpet class. The rural Beauce fielded two class B bugle corps, Renaissance and Abénakis.

The Patriotes of Port-Cartier from the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River won A trumpets prelims. All of Montréal was proud of Les Chatelaines, who scored a healthy 75 in the all-girl class.

The proudest region remained the Saguenay, with Offensive Lions breaking the 80 mark and crosstown rivals Ambassadeurs d'Arvida amazing the crowd with one of the most crowd-pleasing senior show ever fielded.

Their world-class color guard danced the best can-can in drum corps history to the strains of *Gaieté Parisienne*. They would go on to shock the DCA world by placing seventh, ahead of the renowned Connecticut Hurricanes, and achieving a perfect color guard caption score in the process.

The CQJA, Circuit Québec Junior A, the FAMQ's bugle competitive circuit, could truly boast to be North America's fastest-growing drum corps activity.

The 1977 Provincial Championships in Laval marked the coming of age of the Quebec drum corps movement. Never again could such powerful corps be content to just be the best in their own backyard. Quebec's drum corps had lost their innocence.

Other factors would affect the growth of the Quebec drum corps activity after 1977. There

still were 13 drum and trumpet corps competing at the 1977 Provincials. Most were eager to become drum and bugle corps. Nothing would stop them from a transition that would make them fully-fledged drum and bugle corps. They were also joined in that race to acquire the new two-valves instruments, just approved by DCI, by a rather high number of bugle corps.

Such desires created gigantic problems. Many trumpet corps came from smaller, more isolated communities. The huge financial resources required to effect such changes were not always readily available. Many would not survive the desired transition.

Nine trumpet corps had appeared at the 1977 Quebec Provincials. Just one, the ever-evolving Étoiles de Dorion-Vaudreuil, had successfully made the switch from trumpets to bugles from 1977 to 1978. Both class A trumpet finalists from the 1977 Provincials, Mariniers du Lac-Mégantic and Patriotes de Port-Cartier, folded.

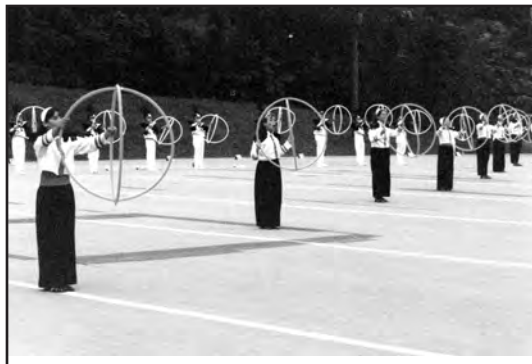
The 1979 season would see two 1978 class B trumpet corps successfully making the switch, with the third folding. One of the two successful corps, Oasis of Chandler, would fold in 1980. Colibris of Lachute survived until 1981.

In 1978, a benchmark in the history of the Quebec drum corps activity was achieved for rather dramatic reasons. The entrance of Offensive Lions in the DCI top-25 and the crowning of Chatelaines as DCI all-girl champion brought to the fore a new dilemma in Quebec drum corps circles. How do you reconcile a flourishing community drum corps scene with a hungry organizations' desires to maximize their DCI potential?

The FAMQ protected its community groups' membership rosters through an ownership clause, which stated that no transfer of members could occur after a set date. Members desiring to move to another corps would then need their corps management's written permission before being allowed to make the switch.

Intense regional rivalries made such letters difficult to obtain for members eager to travel the DCI tour.

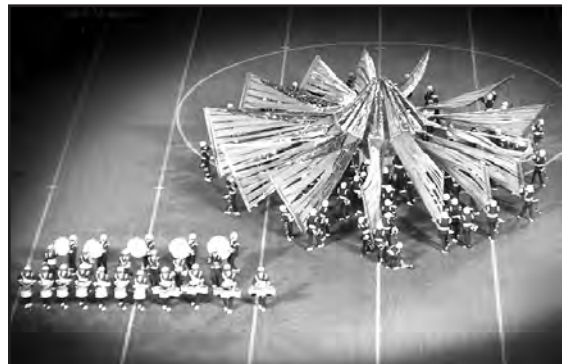
In 1978, both Offensive Lions and Chatelaines were expelled for two years from the FAMQ ranks as a penalty for recruiting members who had not received written



CHEVALIERS, Rivière du Loup, QUE (1995).
Photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World.



AVENTURIERS, Charlesburg, QUE (approx. 1978).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.



L'ODYSSEE, Montreal, QUE (1983).
Photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World.

approval from their previous corps' management.

Most Quebec drum corps members had previously preferred direct competition with corps from the town next door rather than defeating unknown quantities from the obscure suburbs of Boston, Rochester or Toronto. DCI success had now apparently appeared within the reach of numerous Quebec youths, changing the shape of their activity forever.

Laval, hometown to Chatelaines, is a suburb of Montreal. There were three all-girl corps in the Montreal area in 1977. The 1978 season saw Éclipses de Verdun become co-ed, Jouvencelles of Pointes-aux-Trembles folding and Chatelaines becoming DCI All-Girl champion.

There were four corps in the Saguenay region in 1977, three of which were among the very best in the Province. All of them had folded by the end of the 1980 season.

Offensive Lions placed eighteenth at the 1978 DCI Championships and 1979 saw them closing down their feeder corps to boost their numbers, swallowing the remnants of the folding 1978 DCA finalist Ambassadeurs du Saguenay and knocking hard on the top-12 door all season. They finished fifteenth.

1980 saw them smaller, finishing twenty-seventh at DCI. They folded the following fall.

Offensive Lions and Chatelaines reacted to their expulsion from FAMQ ranks by forming a new drum corps association, the FCCQ, Fédération de corps de clairons du Québec. The alternate circuit would stage contests in June and July, with a championship event that took place in mid-July to accommodate the two leaders' DCI tours.

Both corps, barred from appearing at Provincials, also traveled to the Canadian National Championships, where Offensive Lions wrestled the title away from perennial champions Oakland Crusaders and Seneca Optimists.

The FAMQ established a new circuit of competition, the Circuit des Compétitions Musicales Québécois. Offensive Lions and Chatelaines would come back to the FAMQ scene in 1980, after their two-year penalty had passed. The FCCQ was folded the minute they were reintegrated into the mainstream association.

They found a drum corps scene that had been affected by major transformations, many

of which both corps had directly influenced.

Many corps had disappeared by 1980, while new names were emerging as powerhouses. Troubadours, who had peaked in 1979, competed in class A all summer, only to find themselves consistently beaten by Arcs-en-Ciel of Montréal-Nord. This newest Québec power roared its presence by coming as close as 3.1 points to Offensive Lions on June 29.

This was the closest any Quebec corps could come to the mighty Jonquiere power in four years. The amazing thing was that Arcs-en-Ciel was a class B corps. Their only competition in that class came from Éclipses de Longueuil, who had placed last at the previous year's Provincials, when they had displayed Mickey Mouse characters on the field.

The corps had just started a rise that would prove to all that their Mickey Mouse days were indeed over.

Other corps had just stalled. Deuxième Décade and Alliance Bois des-Filions-Terrebonne were consistently surpassed by Étoiles de Dorion-Vaudreuil. Alliance would eventually merge with then-vanishing Arcs-en-Ciel to form the senior L'Odyssée from Montreal, DCA finalists in 1982 and 1983.

Offensive Lions and Chatelaines had a difficult 1980 season. Chatelaines even elected not to compete at the DCI Championships. They would be topped by Arcs-en-Ciel at Provincials. Other corps had just disappeared.

Demographic trends contributed to these major changes. Quebec corps had relied on a strong nucleus of members with deeply attached loyalty. Most corps had failed to attract sizeable membership numbers outside that core nucleus. Many suffered from a high-school graduation syndrome. Hard-core die-hards would also eventually age-out.

Corps from predominantly rural areas were especially hit hard. No corps from the Beauce or the Gaspésie regions competed at the 1980 Provincials.

The situation had become acute by 1981 and 1982. Only seven corps competed in class A or B in 1981. These two categories were merged into an open class. Twenty corps competed in class C prelims which, until 1982, regrouped bugle corps with the few remaining trumpets corps. There had never been more than seven class C corps competing at Provincials until 1979.

Nine out of the 10 1981 class C finalists had

never appeared at Provincials before 1979.

Quebec drum corps had seemed to reach rock-bottom by 1982. Only Étoiles de Dorion-Vaudreuil and Troubadours competed in class A or B at that year's Provincials. The Province's top two corps for that season, new DCI Associate member Les Éclipses and all-girl World Champions Les Chatelaines, stayed away from the contest that year, showing that their true loyalty belonged elsewhere from then on.

Many class C corps were of a higher quality than many A or B corps from previous years. The Quebec drum corps community was experiencing a generational transition. It brought about a changed environment. The activity no longer was dominated by strong community organizations.

Drum corps members preferred belonging to a powerful competitor rather than defending their community's image. Both Offensive Lions and Chatelaines had proven that Quebec corps could become strong international contenders. Members were now ready to switch loyalties in order to achieve the DCI dream.

Corps would fold, sometimes with healthy bank accounts, after achieving less than satisfying competitive results.

Éclipses de Longueuil were the main Montreal's beneficiaries of such mercenary tendencies. They became a strong class B contender in 1980, thanks to the folding of 1979 Provincial Class A Champion Éclipses de Verdun.

Members and instructors, following the lead of Corps Director Denis Plouffe, moved the Longueuil corps. They then benefitted from the disappearance of many organizations and had grown to DCI Associate member status in 1982.

Éclipses de Longueuil would then start their quest to make DCI Finals. They placed twenty-second in 1982 and nineteenth in 1983. The corps would not shy away from ruthless tactics in pursuing its objectives.

The 1982 Étoiles from Dorion-Vaudreuil had placed second at the 1982 DCI Class A Finals. Éclipses started a new recruiting trend the following off-season by operating a bus that would drive potential members from Dorion-Vaudreuil to Longueuil to attend camps.

The dramatically improved 1984 Éclipses, fielding a virtual Quebec all-star corps, placed fifteenth at the DCI Championships, but were disqualified for marching what was rumored to be a hair-raising number of overage members.



CLIQUE ALOUETTE, Montreal, QUE (approx. 1980).
Photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World.



ACADEMIE MUSICALE, Sherbrooke, QUE (1990).
Photo by Alan Winslow from the collection of Drum Corps World.

The 1985 and 1986 Éclipses achieved notoriety in DCI circles. They fielded one of the most innovative guards in DCI's history. They also became a world-renowned innovator that would take the total show concept to new heights.

They complimented their famous "An American in Paris" production with the use of French Gendarmes uniforms. Their main area of fame remained the amazing rise they made from June to August.

Camp turnouts had been low during the 1985 winter and even worse in 1986, despite the continued use of a bus that would tour many regions of the Province to gather members eager to travel to the corps' camps. They actively recruited all through the first tour. This led them from scoring a dismal 44.40 in June, 1985, not even marching a full visual show at their first contest, to making a run for the top-12 by mid-August, finishing fourteenth at DCI with an 84.10.

The 1986 season saw them starting with 26 horns and a score of 37.70. The Éclipses horn line had grown to 48 members by DCI, where the corps scored 83.10 to again finish fourteenth. The corps folded during the off-season, but did not disappear.

The Longueil corps repeated its 1980 recipe to quick success by moving to Connexion Québec, another good representative of the tumultuous mid-1980s.

Les Chatelaines, who had bounced back from a dismal 1980 season by winning the DCI All-Girl crown in both 1981 and 1982, became co-ed in 1983. They won the DCI class A title and then switched to the name of Connexion Québec in 1984.

The corps featured a very creative uniform, played contemporary pop-music and presented many novel visual moves. Their 1985 interpretation of Lionel Ritchie's *You Are* went a long way to disprove the theory that 1980's style dance music could not translate well to the drum corps idiom.

The corps also aggressively pursued the DCI dream, finishing twenty-fifth at both the 1985 and 1986 DCI Championships. Two corps from their immediate neighbourhood, Étoiles d'Or and the re-emerging Arcs-en-Ciel, folded during their rise. Étoiles d'Or had been in contention for the 1985 class A Provincial title, while Arcs-en-Ciel had been class B champion in 1984.

The two had vanished by 1986, even though Étoiles d'Or had fielded a corps of more than 100 members in 1985.

The 1987 Connexion Québec, boosted by the disappearance of Les Éclipses, even discarded their uniforms, turning the Longueil corps' Gendarmes uniforms Indian for an Indiana Jones theme show. They displayed an excellent guard, much reminiscent of Les Éclipses.

They also had a dramatically slow early-season, being smashed by DCI Class A Champion Ventures in July. They eventually finished twenty-first at DCI. It would be their last year on the field.

The 1987 season marked the last hurrah for an entire generation of ambitious Montreal drum corps.

Quebec City corps also fell victims to the destructive ambitions of the 1980s. The 1981 Aventuriers de Charlesbourg fielded a high quality corps after gaining a sizeable number of members of junior age from temporarily defunct 1980 DCA Finalist La Clique Alouette.

Their score at Provincials was 18 points higher than the previous year's.

Aventuriers folded the following year when La Clique Alouette came back, fielding many members from the defunct Charlesbourg corps.

La Clique finished a disappointing thirteenth at DCA, folded the following fall, only to re-emerge as a junior class B corps in the suburb of Ste-Foy. And guess what, Aventuriers fielded a corps in 1983.

It was in 1983 that the best year ever for the Quebec City drum corps community occurred. Provincials were hosted by one of its fastest-growing corps, Sénateurs de l'Ancienne Lorette. They made class B finals along with neighbouring Royalistes de Neufchatel. The two corps had been slowly growing since 1980.

The Quebec City region was also home to class C contender Dynamiques de St-Jean Chrysostome. The 1984 season would see a completely changed picture. A new senior corps, Cascadeurs de Beauport, was established, generously financed by a wealthy businessman.

The corps built from scratch and aggressively recruited in a bid for a successful DCA season. Members from the city's corps flocked to the new power.

Depleted junior corps faced many changed situations. Aventuriers became a class C corps, Sénateurs and Dynamiques joined forces for a

temporary merger, and La Clique Alouette folded.

Only Royalistes enjoyed a rewarding year, to then fold in 1985, a year when the Éclipses bus service made fruitful stops at Quebec City's Laval University.

Cascadeurs shocked the DCA world by fielding 11 mallet instruments and seven concert timpani in the pit. They also used electrical amplification, for which they were assessed a 2.0 penalty.

They tied the Steel City Ambassadors for seventh place at the 1984 DCA Finals. The ephemeral character of such international ventures was proven when Cascadeurs folded in 1985.

The disappearance of both Royalistes and Cascadeurs boosted Aventuriers, who won the 1985 Class A Provincial Championships, after having finished fourth in class C the previous year.

The early 1980s will nevertheless be remembered as the highest point for drum corps visibility in Quebec. The 1980 Étoiles de Dorion-Vaudreuil appeared in a television ad for the Canada Dry soft-drink corporation. A Quebec City advertising company released albums of the 1980 Provincial Championships, a one-time only venture.

The FAMQ staged aggressive projects to promote the activity's visibility. The 1981 season featured a Quebec tour that led corps to compete in cities that had become foreign drum corps territory, including the hosting of the 1981 and 1982 Provincials in Drummondville.

The definite highlight of early 1980s in the Quebec drum corps milieu was the staging of the 1981 and 1982 DCI Championships in Montreal, organized by a committee established by Maurice Corey of Les Chatelaines de Laval.

Co-sponsoring the event was the O'Keefe beer corporation. Beer companies have always been deeply involved in sponsoring professional sports events in the Province. Such a sponsor gave the activity a seemingly increased legitimacy.

The crowd attending the 1981 DCI Finals in Montreal, rumoured to have been around the 36,000-40,000 number, remains among the top three crowds ever assembled for a DCI event. The flip side of hosting such successful DCI Championships was the reinforced appeal of International drum corps success instilled



CONNEXION QUÉBEC, Laval, QUE (1987).
Photo by Bill Dixon from the collection of Drum Corps World.



MELOMANES, Trois Rivières, QUE (1995).
Photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World.



ÉTOILE, Dorion, QUE (approx. 1978).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.

among the youth of the Province.

The high degree of creativity of Quebec corps also gained international recognition. Who could forget Les Chatelaines' use of folding chairs in 1981 and 1982?

The most elaborate prop ever used by any corps was L'Odyssee's spaceship of 1983 and 1984, which was large enough to cover the whole corps.

Other corps left their mark on the early 1980s Quebec drum corps scene. Many were started by nostalgic former drum corps members who wanted to provide a new generation of kids with all that the activity has to offer.

The 1983 Provincials again featured corps from various regions. These offsprings of an older generation would provide huge line-ups for the 1984 and 1985 Provincials. Most would have short life spans.

Recruiting was hard, as it had become fashionable for teenagers to hold jobs at a much younger age. This trend, a result of yuppie-driven consumeristic values, combined with the leading corps' desires to escalate the DCI ladder to make life difficult for community organizations.

The Quebec birth-rate had also dramatically fallen since the end of the baby boom era. There simply were not that many teenagers around.

Another factor contributing to the difficulties faced by many Quebec corps was the FAMQ decision to declare Montreal as the permanent host of the Provincial Championships starting in 1984. This considerably reduced the exposure the activity could enjoy around the Province.

A few corps from the early 1980s have gained well-deserved memorability. Crescendos from St-Bruno achieved remarkable results despite coming from the town next door to Longueuil. Their 1983 guard featured one of the classiest uniforms ever seen. Their 1984 opener of *Wind Machine* remains one of the best adaptations of that chart to the drum and bugle corps idiom.

They won the 1983 DCE Class A Championships and nearly cracked the DCI top 25 at the 1984 DCI Open Class quarter-finals. Crescendos' demise in 1985 contributed to the emergence of Transit from Ste-Julie, the town next to St-Bruno, who fielded a most amazing first-year brass line.

The early-1980s also saw the appearance of future DCI members Académie Musicale and L'Insolite. L'Insolite was founded in 1984 from the remnants of a majorette corps. Their hometown of St. Jérôme had been a drum corps hotbed in the early 1970s.

The corps' rapid growth, from being the 1985 provincial class C champions to DCI class A champion status in 1988, was proof of visionary leadership.

Académie Musicale was founded in 1983 in Sherbrooke, previously a drum corps desert. They established superior musical standards right from the beginning. They fielded their biggest corps ever in 1985. Their subsequent drop in membership defied logic by being combined with a sudden rise in quality.

Who would have believed that the modest first-year class C corps playing "Pictures at an Exhibition" and wearing red t-shirts for a uniform in 1983 would eventually finish sixteenth at DCI?

The end of the 1987 season was proof that the ambitious early 1980s had taken their toll on the Québec drum corps community. Only 15 fully-fledged field corps competed at the 1988 Provincials. Such a small number remained in sharp contrast with the unprecedented number of Quebec corps that visited DCE and E-Mass contests.

Corps had to increase their traveling schedule in order to offer satisfying seasons to their members. DCI in faraway Kansas City saw the first appearance of Aventuriers at DCI since 1982, as well as Académie Musicale's maiden DCI appearance.

It proved to be the Charlesbourg's corps' swansong. They folded in 1989, after unsuccessfully trying to turn themselves into a marching band.

The name Aventuriers, along with Éclipses and Sonnor, then became prominent in winter guard circles. Quebec youth interested in marching music activities had discovered that winter guards provided a free summer that permitted working. That activity was also convenient for still-hooked corps management and staffs.

Winter-guards require smaller memberships and lower financial investment. Quebec's most successful winter guard, Sonnor, gained world-class status overnight when they were boosted by members and instructors from the vanished Les Éclipses.

By the late 1980s, there were more winter guards than drum and bugle corps in the Province of Quebec. More also achieved success on the international level.

The Quebec corps of the late-1980s were much smaller than their predecessors. The 1988 L'Insolite cracked the top 25 at DCI with a corps of barely 60 members. Académie Musicale accomplished the same feat in 1990 with 47 members.

Such numbers marked a clear break from the days when the 1980 Chicoutimi Métropolitains folded because they deemed that a 40-player brass line was insufficient to meet their competitive objectives.

The 1985 Crescendos used a similar reasoning to fold a corps of 75 members.

One of the most shocking reasons that Quebec drum corps had entered a definitely more modest age occurred when the 1989 DCI Championships, planned to be held in Montreal, had to be moved in a hurry to Kansas City less than 10 months before the events' starting date.

The Montreal Expos baseball team simply claimed the Province-funded Olympic Stadium as their own, refusing to change their schedule to accommodate the drum corps activity.

The Quebec corps of the early 1990s would not only be smaller, but also very inconsistent. Sénateurs from Ancienne-Lorette, Mousquetaires from La Baie and Chapdelaines of Dolbeau would field corps in intermittent years, taking seasons off from competition.

Corps did not seem to be the result of a strong desire from teenagers to participate in the activity. They clearly were the result of desperate attempts by staff and management to keep their beloved activity alive.

Contributing to these corps difficulties were efforts by the Province's top two corps to consolidate their newly-gained DCI status.

L'Insolite of St-Jérôme, a DCI-Associate member from 1988 to 1991, used recipes similar to Les Éclipses to stage late-season miracles. The very creative corps featured impressive visual moves, most noticeably with an intriguing use of large mirrors in 1991.

The organization also overextended its financial abilities in an attempt to rise on the DCI ladder. They took a year-off in 1992, came back for two years and finally folded a corps that still had 70 members in the spring of 1995.

Académie Musicale became the first DCI class A/60 champion to place in the DCI top 25



DIPLOMATES, Montreal, QUE (1971).
Photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World.



MAJESTICS, Sorel, QUE (1995).
Photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World.



FEUX FOLLETS, Berthier, QUE (1996).
Photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World.

in 1990. They fielded what would become one of the most memorable drum corps show in history.

Their first attempted rise quickly became thwarted in 1991, when they failed to crack the top 25 despite fielding a much larger corps than the previous year. They would patiently rebuild for another claim to DCI fame in the mid-1990s.

Junior corps faced major challenges from 1990 to 1994, to the extent that the Quebec drum corps scene became completely dominated by a senior corps, Les Métropolitains de Montréal.

There had been efforts to field a successful senior corps in the Province ever since the demise of Les Cascadeurs. Les Ambassadeurs of Quebec City folded after a few unsuccessful tries at gaining DCA finalist status.

Efforts were then made to turn Tradition of Jonquiere from a parade corps to a field competitor. The senior hopefuls then turned to Les Métropolitains, founded in 1991.

The corps made DCA finals in its first year thanks to province-wide recruiting. Members from all across the province would travel to weekly rehearsals. The corps competed until 1994, providing nostalgic former junior corps members with a vehicle to express their passion for the activity.

The corps was widely noticed for a major stylistic change in its last year of competition, switching from a popular jazzy style to the esoteric "Interstellar Suite."

The Mets used the chart to present one of the most fascinating senior shows ever fielded, featuring a sophisticated auxiliary that stood out of its DCA competitors with much complex and innovative equipment handling.

The corps rose to fourth place at the 1994 DCA Finals, threatening the Bushwackers in the process. These results were achieved thanks to a junior-like schedule, tightly managed by a passionate staff.

Senior corps members found themselves rehearsing intensely on early Sunday mornings, often after having traveled all-night from DCA shows. Low recruiting turnouts contributed to the corps' demise the following season.

A much different approach was used by another senior competitor from the 1990s Quebec drum corps community, Les Dynamiques de Buckingham.

The corps, renowned for its early 1970s style

spearheaded by charts such as *España, à la* 1973 Les Diplomates, seemed light years away from Les Métropolitains.

Les Dynamiques' more relaxed approach helped them to survive four more years than Les Métropolitains, but they never made DCA Finals. The corps folded after the 1998 season, with a good chunk of its membership moving to the rising Kingston, ONT, Grenadiers.

The junior side of Quebec's drum corps activity struggled throughout the early 1990s. The few surviving corps relied on a core membership that compensated for hugely disappointing recruiting results.

Hotly contested competition was witnessed in some years, with a few season-long battles in class A-60, the only provincial class with more than one corps for most of the years between 1989 and 1994.

Battling for honours would be Sénateurs of l'Ancienne Lorette, Mousquetaires of La Baie, Dimension of Lévis and Illuzion of St. Hubert, an offspring of Transit, which had itself been an offspring of Crescendos.

The Quebec drum corps community had also changed its very definition of the nature of the drum corps season. Most corps saw the August Provincials as the only contest requiring a finished production. Late-July contests often featured line-ups of corps fielding incomplete productions.

This was quite a contrast to the late 1970s, when it was frequent for corps to cancel late-June appearances for lack of preparation. Such lack of preparation did not help in boosting dangerously low attendance numbers.

Previously hooked drum corps fans just walked away from the activity.

Many staff members were former members of corps such as Les Éclipses and L'Insolite, who had made late-season miracles their trademark. Such functioning required complete dedication from marching members, for whom drum corps participation meant devoting 12 hours a day, seven days a week to rehearsals during the summer.

These full-time rehearsal schedules also reduced the ability of many corps to take part in parades and local festivals, further restricting the scope of their local visibility.

The recipe would indeed work for many corps. Many may have learned from a case that had clearly proven how it could lead to disaster if pushed too far.

The 1989 senior Ambassadeurs of Quebec City appeared at an early August contest in Lévis with less than 20 members, with no colour guard or drum major. They claimed to be building a corps that would make DCA finals one month later.

They actively recruited anybody interested in such a venture, an overly ambitious task they would not accomplish. Les Ambassadeurs did not even show up at the DCA Championships that year.

Such functioning introduced a new elitist element to drum corps circles. Corps could only cater to the needs of youth with time on their hands during the summer season. These members would need to devote their whole summer vacation to intense rehearsal schedules.

Such commendable dedication effectively restricted the number of prospective drum corps members. It also dramatically increased the quality of these drum corps products, as corps mostly attracted disciplined, talented musicians.

These corps would field amazingly innovative presentations. Most popular would be theme shows based on popular French-Canadian selections, such as Sénateurs' 1989 "Starmania" and Dimension's 1993 "Agaguk."

The kind of passion and dedication required by members in such an atmosphere mirrored the efforts of dedicated staff and management that operated corps out of a sheer passion for the drum corps activity.

Local contests had reduced line-ups. From 1992 to 1994, only Sénateurs, Mousquetaires and Dimension continued to exist as North American standard field corps. L'Insolite and Académie Musicale toured outside of the Province for most of these seasons.

A contest that took place in Chambly in 1991 had a line-up of only three corps. The 1993 Provincials even welcomed a corps from Ontario, Ottawa's Contemporary Youth Ensemble, disguised as Ensemble Contemporains des Jeunes from nearby Hull, QUE, to add to a very short line-up.

The FAMQ attempted to boost the activity's fortunes by making accommodations that would permit less experienced organizations to appear in friendlier competitive environments. Regulations were altered for classes B and C, with lower time requirement for an actual visual field show. Drum corps contests were



PRINCESSES, Valleyfield, QUE (1997).
Photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World.



L'INSOLITE, St. Jerome, QUE (1941).
Photo by Sid Unser from the collection of Drum Corps World.



ECLIPSES, Longueuil, QUE (1986).
Photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World.

expanded to feature what were, essentially, concert bands playing drum corps instruments.

Judging regulations were also altered to add a colour guard caption that would figure in the corps' overall score, a made-in-Quebec innovation that would later be adopted by DCI.

It was hoped that classes B and C would become the training grounds for very young corps started in regions that used to field sizeable drum corps. Enthusiasm for the activity continued to run high among former drum corps participants.

The extremely young age of these corps' members seemed to indicate a continued lack of interest on the part of the teenagers of the Province. The few older members still interested in drum corps participation after a few years with these organizations would move to the more experienced corps, most of which were willing to go to extreme measures in order to attract them.

Classes B and C did increase the line-ups for the 1994 Provincials, which featured only three fully-fledged field drum and bugle corps, l'Insolite, Dimension and Les Étoiles. Académie Musicale had even elected to stay out of FAMQ-sponsored events for that season.

Eleven class B or C corps nevertheless competed at the 1994 Provincials. Hope for revival ran high in formerly successful drum corps regions.

L'Impact of Dolbeau represented the Saguenay, Voltigeurs came from Rimouski, Majestics kept the activity alive in the Richelieu area. Chevaliers from Rivière-du-Loup and Multi-Visions from Trois-Rivières represented areas new to the activity.

Also contributing to the more upbeat atmosphere that prevailed around the Quebec drum corps community were the positive results achieved by its four leaders at the 1994 DCI Championships in Boston.

L'Insolite stayed in the run for the division II title all summer, eventually settling for third place. They also finished a mere 0.1 points away from the top 21 at division I quarterfinals.

Dimension, finishing seventh at prelims, nearly landed in division II finals. Les Étoiles, in their first DCI appearance since 1982 and first full visual show since 1984, also achieved credible division II results.

Académie Musicale fielded a large young corps that would form the basis of their

ultimate rise in DCI ranks the following years.

The 1995 season built on these impressive growth signs. The number of corps competing in classes B and C kept diminishing as corps gradually moved to classes reserved for corps presenting full visual shows.

Most noticeable among these was Multi-Visions of Trois-Rivières, who had elected to move from class C to class A/60 for the 1995 season. The corps accomplished such a jump by working around 12-hour days, seven days a week rehearsal schedule.

Corps members were willing to devote themselves to such efforts even though they competed all by themselves in class A/60 all summer and did not travel outside the Province even once that year.

The case of Multi-Visions goes a long way to proving that a new trend had emerged in the Quebec drum corps community. It had become fashionable to define the activity not by the type of performance it featured, but by the level of dedication it required from its participants.

Another expression of this new vision for the activity were the old yellow or red school buses used by Insolite, Étoiles and Académie Musicale to tour North America's highways in pursuit of their DCI objective.

The brand of drum corps practiced in the Quebec of the mid-1990s was not for the faint-hearted. The youth of the Province responded through an accelerating decline in drum corps participation from 1995 to 2001.

The three leaders of 1995 created hope for the dawn of a new golden age for the activity in Quebec. Les Étoiles de Dorion-Vaudreuil fielded a 105-member corps after merging with the remnants of l'Insolite, which had finally gone bankrupt in the spring of 1995.

Combining the two corps' memberships had actually produced a corps of more than 130 members. Switching to the more complex l'Insolite show proved too hard a challenge for many of Les Étoiles' younger members.

Despite a season fraught with organizational and financial challenges, the corps placed third at the DCI Division II Finals and nearly cracked the DCI top 21.

Académie Musicale, fielding a corps of exactly 60 members, not only won the 1995 DCI Division III title, they also topped all division II finalists at DCI. They also finished nineteenth in division I, becoming the first Quebec corps to gain DCI membership since 1991.

Dimension of Lévis became a DCI Division II finalist, placing fifth after a successful season that saw them win the DCE Class A title.

For the first time since the mid-1980s, the Quebec drum corps milieu seemed to have regained a healthy pattern of growth. A good number of corps were again spread throughout the Province. The Province's leaders also achieved commendable levels of accomplishments in international competition despite spending the biggest chunk of their season in FAMQ-sponsored events.

Quebec drum corps had again reached forked roads. Organizations had to decide on whether they would be the leaders of a healthy local drum corps scene or if they would concentrate all resources on a climb up the DCI ladder. The latter choice again proved to be far too tempting.

For the first time since 1990, two corps from Quebec cracked the top 21 in 1996. Les Étoiles, fielding a corps one-third smaller than its 1995 contingent, had actually put together one of the most talented groups of individuals to ever share a drum corps field.

They unexpectedly won the DCI Division II Championships by surprising the 128-member Pioneer, a corps that had remained undefeated all season-long, and placed fifteenth in division I. Their use of a rotating set of drums became one of the activity's better-known icons of the mid-1990s.

Académie Musicale, who had elected to become a fully-fledged division I touring corps, placed eighteenth at DCI Quarterfinals, a mere two-tenths away from cracking the top 17.

Dimension confirmed their status as an international contender by again placing fifth at the DCI Division II Finals.

Such accomplishments confirmed Les Étoiles' and Académie Musicale's determination to climb up the DCI ladder. Comparisons between the 1984 Éclipses and 1996 Les Étoiles abounded around the Province.

What should follow was even clearer in the mind of passionate corps staff and management. Les Éclipses had almost cracked the top 12 in 1985. The dream appeared achievable again.

What was missing from these rosy predictions was the type of cold analysis that would have revealed that the 1996 DCI season had been one of the weakest in recent history, a clear factor in pushing a division II corps of barely 65 members to such high levels of



PERS-CLAIRS, St. Hyacinthe, QUE (1998).
Photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World.



RANCHEROS, Laval, QUE (1974)
Photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World.



JEUNES DYNAMIQUES, Rimouski, QUE (1997).
Photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World.

achievement.

The 1996-1997 off-season saw not only Les Étoiles running a bus service, taking members from all over the Province to their monthly camps.

Académie Musicale and Third Regiment of St. Eustache joined the Dorion corps in the bus service circle when two corps full of talented experienced members, Multi-Visions and Dimension, folded. The stage was set for a full-blown recruiting war.

The 1997 season would prove to be some sort of swansong for the Quebec drum corps movement. Académie Musicale and Les Étoiles both repeated as DCI members. The Sherbrooke corps used one of the best guards in the history of the activity in Quebec to complement an intellectually challenging, contemporary liturgical musical book, placing sixteenth in the process.

Their Dorion-Vaudreuil arch-rivals again mesmerized crowds with the most innovative percussion gimmick ever fielded, even surpassing their 1996 creative efforts, and barely missed semi-finals by placing eighteenth.

The resurging Third Regiment, with Denis Plouffe of Les Éclipses fame at the helm, placed fourth in division I finals, claiming the Spirit of Disney Entertainment award in the process. They were also joined in division III finals by Sénateurs of Joliette.

What looked like a new golden age for the Quebec drum corps community actually was a movement fraught with cracks that would lead to its near demise by the early 2000s. Académie Musicale was even forced to take a year-off in 1998 after being unable to recruit enough members to field a credible division I contender.

There simply were not enough folding corps full of experienced members around the Province to keep fueling corps that defined themselves as elite and that could not waste resources or time in teaching inexperienced members.

The 1998 Stentors of Fleurimont, a suburb of Sherbrooke, fielded a corps of nearly 100 young and inexperienced members during that season.

Les Étoiles regained semi-finalist status by placing seventeenth at the 1998 DCI Championships. They nevertheless fielded one of their smallest corps in memory.

As further proof that the Quebec

membership pool had grown dangerously thin, a dispute emerged when a Third Regiment member moved to Les Étoiles early during the 1998 season, as the old FAMQ membership protection clause still existed.

The limitations of province-wide recruiting became obvious when even Third Regiment, a corps that had used a bus service to gather members to its camps, could not place higher than tenth place at the DCI Division III Prelims. The corps would fold the following off-season, crippled by a large debt.

The painfully achieved growth of the mid-1990s vanished in a rather spectacular fashion. Six division I and II corps appeared at the 1998 Provincial Championships, but only three division III units competed in that class with less stringent time rules for the visual component.

Only one of the nine corps, Stentors of Fleurimont, fielded more than 65 members. The 1999 off-season saw Impact of Dolbeau switching its operation from drum corps to musical theatre.

Another major disruption to the activity's operations in Quebec occurred during the 1998-1999 off-season, when the wealthy senior Syracuse Brigadiers established a bus service taking any interested Quebec member to their camps.

The appealing prospect of joining a world class DCA corps attracted many junior-age members from an already reduced recruiting pool.

The 1999 season was one of major disappointments. Les Étoiles competed as a division I touring corps with less than 60 members.

Their original musical production, titled "Ice Storm," failed to generate the excitement elicited by their creative 1996, 1997 and 1998 productions. They would not survive placing a disheartening twenty-fourth at DCI Quarterfinals.

Académie Musicale came back as a division III corps, placed seventeenth at DCI Prelims and were forced to finally fold the following off-season as a result of financial difficulties dating from their ambitious 1997 division I season.

Only seven corps appeared at the 1999 Provincial Championships. It became clear that the Quebec drum corps community had failed to expand the scope of its membership. Corps

had been too busy consolidating their memberships around a limited number of experienced individuals.

Too little had been done to increase the activity's appeal and make it open to newer members.

Les Étoiles had even attempted a switch to division II in the spring of 2000, promising prospective members that their rehearsal schedules would be limited to weekends, except for a late season mini-tour to the DCI Championships.

This was not enough to attract teenagers now focused on avoiding crippling student debt by managing long nights and weekends working shifts.

Les Sénateurs of Joliette attempted to boost interest in the activity by embarking on an innovative association with their local high school. Students were able to gain credits toward their high school diploma through their membership in the corps.

This did not prevent the corps from shrinking every year, going from a unit of 48 members in 1998 to fielding a corps of less than 30 from 1999 to 2001.

Les Sénateurs' new association nevertheless proved fruitful, as they became a regular division III finalist noticed for the amazing levels of talent displayed by their very young members.

By the 2000 season, only four field drum and bugle corps were in existence in the Province -- Sénateurs of Joliette, Stentors of Fleurimont, Sentinelles of Varennes and Mélomanes of Trois-Rivières Ouest. The number was reduced to three when Mélomanes folded the following off-season.

All three remaining corps had reduced membership numbers for the 2001 season. Stentors even had to switch from division II to division III.

The situation had become so acute by the fall of 2002 that Sénateurs and Sentinelles attempted to merge into a new corps named Alliance.

Also contributing to the activity's difficulties was the shocking disappearance of the Invitation Québec contest. As DCI increased the number of its sanctioned-contests held in the Southern United States, Quebec and Ontario became increasingly viewed as remote drum corps regions.

Only the Madison Scouts and Southwind



DECIBELS, Laurentides, QUE (1995).
Photo by Roland Doré from the collection of Drum Corps World.



DOLPHINS, Montreal, QUE (1989).
Photo by Christopher Lewis from the collection of Drum Corps World.



ARC-EN-CIEL, Montreal Nord, QUE (approx. 1978).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.

expressed any interest in traveling to Montreal for the 2001 edition of Invitation-Québec. The contest was transformed into an exhibition. The DCI division I tour lost its international stature by presenting contests in a single country, the United States.

The Quebec drum corps community lost its most prominent source of visibility when Invitation Québec was completely taken out of the DCI 2002 competitive schedule.

A contest that had become the virtual yearly reunion for numerous Quebec drum corps fans disappeared the year it would have celebrated its 30th consecutive edition.

The loss of appetite of the youth of Quebec of the late 1990s for an activity such as drum corps was by no means an isolated phenomenon. Drum corps participation statistics were also on a steep decline all over North America.

DCI attempted to thwart such a threat to the activity's very survival by establishing closer links between drum corps and the marching band activity. Many DCI division I corps essentially became a new brand of elite marching bands, building their competitive tours around a series of clinics for high school marching band members.

They would not only benefit from an increased exposure to many talented prospective members, but would also gain sponsorship from instruments manufacturers, who would be more than willing to use corps as a live advertising tool for their products.

While there were enough similarities between drum corps and marching bands to help DCI in keeping the activity afloat in the

United States, such a change in emphasis could not help Quebec drum corps in any shape or form. The marching band activity has never existed in the Province.

The loss of interest for the drum corps activity also threatened the financial health of the FAMQ.

The Quebec Provincial Department of Culture and Communications tabulated the grants it gave to the organization according to the number of youths who participated in its member groups.

By the 2001 season, all Quebec drum corps combined had a membership of about 150. The grants received by the FAMQ from 1999 to 2001 were 23% lower than their 1993-1995 numbers.

By the winter of 2002, the organization had accumulated a series of deficits that severely restricted its ability to stage projects that would promote the activity's visibility and renewal.

The activity continued to be popular among the drum corps participants of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Les Amis du Drum Corps Québécois, an alumni association regrouping former drum corps members, had yearly membership rosters nearing the 300 mark.

Founded by drum corps enthusiast André Thériault in 1989, the ADCQ publishes the monthly "Quoi de neuf" newsletter and attempts to provide support to the corps of the Province.

The organization's roster reached the 400 mark in 1993, but has been in a slow decline ever since. The ADCQ's main challenge remains in attracting members of the corps of the 1990s, who have not apparently developed

the same sense of loyalty to the activity as a whole that had been prevalent among previous generations of participants.

The dawn of the 21st Century sees the whole Quebec drum corps movement shifting into survival mode. Still-hooked staff and management keep attempting to jump-start groups in former corps hotbeds such as Quebec City, the Lower St. Lawrence region and towns such as St-Hyacinthe and St-Eustache.

Etoiles' organization remains one of the most creative, having attempted to develop a feeder corps, a senior corps, as well as a senior winter guard from 1999 to 2002.

A group led by a former Les Éclipses member vowed to start two drum and bugle corps and two winter guards from scratch in Chambly during the fall of 2002. These efforts have all achieved mixed results.

It also became very difficult for the FAMQ to sustain the type of competitive schedules that have become a staple of the Quebec drum corps movement since the early 1970s. The number of existing corps makes it difficult to stage viable contests.

The first years of the 21st Century saw the association attempting to create a Province-wide elite group modeled around Star of Indiana's "BLAST!" concept, which had successfully translated the drum and bugle corps idiom to the theatrical stage.

The FAMQ's financial challenges made it hard to believe that such an ambitious project could ever become reality in Quebec.

The history of the Quebec drum corps community is one of creative innovation, passionate members and staff and remarkable peaks followed by major disappointments.

It is one dominated by tensions between attempts at maintaining a healthy local drum corps scene on one side and efforts to field elitist groups intent on climbing the DCI ladder on the next.

As Drum Corps International leads the North American drum and bugle corps community to continuously closer ties with an activity that has never existed in the Province, the key to survival in Quebec appears to be one firmly entrenched in local and regional consideration.

It would appear that a search for the roots of the unique brand of drum corps practiced in the Province of Quebec will be essential before a turnaround can be effectively staged.

BEYNON'S FUNNIES



364



CHATELAINE ALL-GIRL, Laval, QUE (1982).
Photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World.



BOUCLERS, St. Laurent, QUE (approx. 1972).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.



ABENAKIS, St-Prospier, QUE (approx. 1972).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.