

The drum corps activity takes to the airwaves

by Chris Atkinson

Asked about all the people that have worked to make televised drum corps a reality over the years, Tom Blair perhaps said it best: "I have many great memories of my years producing drum corps on TV; too many to list.

"But, like so many from my years marching in corps, most relate to the great people with whom I have worked so closely over the years. Acheson, Pesceone, Cook, Rondinaro, Cesario, DeLucia. These are the names we have all heard and faces the fans have seen. And there are literally hundreds of others who have worked tirelessly to make the initials 'DCI' respected in the television business."

Drum corps owes a great debt to the television coverage it has received, from the small-scale events of the early 1970s to the full digital productions of today and to all the individuals that made it possible.

Normally, fans do not give it a second thought, but video coverage is fully integrated into the activity itself. Yearly, DCI has before it the monumental task of putting together a full

recorded television program, part for distribution on the organization's videotapes and DVD's, and part for broadcast on the nation's PBS network.

Every year, it performs this function on a limited budget and generally with a level of quality far-exceeding what might be expected under the circumstances. Fans respond by purchasing DCI's video and audio products and watching the program on television.

Excruciating anticipation often grows in fans until they receive the finished video product in the fall. Drum corps on television is practically a ritual -- its moderators welcome friends that help to tide fans over until next season.

But drum corps on television is important for other reasons. Dan Acheson, DCI's Executive Director, has called the broadcast "DCI's principle point of contact with its target market." Only the television program has the capability of entering homes throughout the country and introducing a whole world of

uninitiated, potential fans to the exciting world of drum corps.

Some new fans catch the show quite by accident, seeing a rebroadcast during the Thanksgiving or Christmas holidays. Some new members' only contact with drum corps when the audition is what they have seen on television.

This is an important point, given the reduced number of corps capable of acting as a point of contact for drum corps neophytes. Drum corps is less community-focused than it has been in the past, so the creation of a virtual community through television is all the more essential to the activity's continued viability.

Anyone doubting that such a virtual community of fans could be created through the medium of television need look no further than drum corps' collective memory of the broadcasts.

In a sense, a fan plays historian when he or she quotes a "Reliable Rondo" prediction or recalls a particularly riveting commentary on a



ANAHEIM KINGSMEN, Anaheim, CA (1971).
Photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World.



BOSTON CRUSADERS, Boston, MA (approx. 1993).
Photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World.



JETS, Hutchinson, KS (1963).
Photo from the collection of Dallas Martin.

corps' performance.

As fans, we all see the humor in covering such an emotional, human activity; it is at once tragic and triumphant . . . hilarious or deadly serious. Covering it and communicating that excitement through television has never been and will never be an easy task.

But as a community of fans, interested in an activity that has its meetings and conventions in football stadiums across the country, if not around the world, we depend on the recorded documents of video to provide an archived look at "who we are." Drum corps being the collected memories and performances of all of its members, one should not ignore the importance of video -- it develops, sustains and ties together drum corps itself.

From its roots in Whitewater and Don Whiteley and Art Luebke's pioneering efforts, to the eyewitness accounts of perennial color commentator Steve Rondinaro, and from the singular involvement of Bill Cook to the technical genius of Tom Blair, we will examine the history of the televised drum corps experience, through the perspectives of the people that made it all possible.

Art Luebke

Drum corps broadcasting history, like any other story, has a beginning, with key players that had a vision and the talent to make their vision a reality. In the case of the first drum corps broadcasts, it took a bit more than basic production talent.

Art Luebke went into the first broadcast with the most elemental of equipment and shot the show strictly on gut instinct, with creativity flair and capable management of his small crew. He improvised and put

together a show, but it went far beyond that, as we have seen. Drum corps broadcasting, from its first footsteps in Whitewater, owes a great debt to its pioneer, Art Luebke.

"We should probably start with when I first got involved with drum corps. I marched with

Madison Scouts in 1965 and 1966. Played baritone and grew up in southern Wisconsin. I went to school at UW Madison and just decided from day one I was going to be in both the band and drum corps. I made it happen and had a great time doing it.

"But I also was a still photographer and in the early 1970s, I was doing still photos for DCI and working at a television station -- WHA-TV in Madison. That was a university station and clearly one of the better PBS stations in the country. So it gave me an opportunity to get involved in television production and it was a dream I wanted to . . . you know, I really enjoyed drum corps after I got out, but it was something else I wanted to try to apply professionally.

"I was a young director in the early 1970s and was always saying, wouldn't it be neat somehow, but never quite figured out what to do or how to do it.

"I think it was 1974, I was approached by Don Whiteley who was, at the time, publicity director for DCI. His full-time job was with KBTB, the ABC affiliate in Denver, so he had lots of television connections.

"Don agreed to meet me in Madison -- he drove up from Chicago. I remember the

meeting -- it was on some rainy spring weekend. He got out of a car and came into my car and said, "I want you to meet somebody."

"He took me to another car and there was Don Pesceone, DCI's executive director. Don (Pesceone) said, 'What do you think you can do? Would you like to get involved doing a little television?' and we decided that the Whitewater regional contest that summer would be the perfect place to do this.

"The Whitewater show in the 1970s was really big, probably in my opinion the second biggest show to the DCI Championships, because of where DCI formed. As a result, everybody was there and it was a great place to do something. Only 35 miles from Madison and I thought, why not? WHA-TV had a fairly modern mobile unit -- actually a converted 20-foot camper; a mobile home. We loaded up three cameras and had a modest production facility.

"As far as how many people we had on the project, if I added it up, it probably wasn't any more than 10 or 12 . . . that's all it took in those days. We had four cameras our second year and that was all that we could put in that truck, a couple of engineers . . . including talent, it was a dozen people.

"We took our audio feed from DCI recording engineer Ken Kobald. Ken was doing a lot of the DCI recording, he started out sometime in the 1950s doing drum corps recording, but he was there on the sidelines with his audio rig and I knew he knew more about it than our engineers, so I just asked him, could we tap into your feed? And he said, 'Sure, why not.'

"So there was our audio. We had a fledgling crew that I had to teach drum corps, but somehow we got it done and that was intended as a regional broadcast.

"There were some professional engineers who worked for the television station, but most of the crew were University of Wisconsin -- Madison students. One of them went on to make a pretty good name for himself. He ran camera one for me which was my least ambitious camera, because it was the wide shot.

"He went on to be President of ESPN. That's Steve Bornstein. I don't know what his title is, but Borny . . . Borny as we called him, ran camera one a couple of years. It was a one-hour broadcast, the five years I did that. Steven Bornstein is currently the president of ABC Television.



Photo by Dick Deihl from the collection of Drum Corps World.



GREECE CADETS, Rochester, NY (1975).
Photo by Joseph Zepko from the collection of Drum Corps World.



HORNETS, Chicago, IL (approx. 1983).
Photo by Dick Deihl from the collection of Drum Corps World.



EMERALD KNIGHTS, Cedar Rapids, IA (approx. 1980).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.

"We did this from 1975 to 1979. Four years and possibly five -- I know we produced the DCI Championship broadcast in 1979 and 1980, so I don't know if that included the Whitewater broadcast in 1979, I just can't recall. .

"Drum corps did not actually broadcast from the DCI Championships until 1974. I think I did it from 1974 to 1978, so that would be right. A Rochester television station did some filming at DCI 1974 in Ithaca, NY. The next year, 1975, the first national broadcast on PBS, was 'live' from Philadelphia.

"That was the very first major drum corps broadcast. Well, who knows what small stations across the country may have done prior to 1974. Not to say that somebody in Casper, WY, did not put something on a local station or someone in Belleville, IL, didn't do something when the corps came through.

"But nothing went beyond the local stations that I am aware of, until early in the 1974 season, when WGBH in Boston put a short program together featuring the 27th Lancers and Blue Stars. I think it was a marching performance on Boston Common that made it somewhere in the PBS schedule, so it got some exposure. It wasn't a contest, but it was certainly something with drum corps.

"The first nationally-televised championship was 1975 in Philadelphia. It was WGBH Boston that did it. One of the PBS flagship stations and clearly that was a huge opportunity for television because you had a major station making a major commitment to something that was four hours 'live.' We don't do four hours live of anything except the Superbowl. So that was a monumental step.

"Even allowing for inflation since then, we probably only spent about 10% of what Tom Blair is spending today. So it was a very minimalist effort and yet it gave us something that hadn't been done up until that time.

"The 1974 Whitewater show, though, was also a pretty big deal, putting an important DCI contest on a regional network -- that was the Central Educational Network, headquartered at that time in Lincoln, NE. It reached 40 to 50 stations and I think some other stations may have picked it up off CEN.

"Our work also preserved on tape something that was important, a contest . . . there were important corps on that, specifically Blue Stars and Santa Clara Vanguard. Santa Clara had already started to make a good name for



Television game show host Gene Rayburn and his wife Helen were the first PBS commentators in 1975 and 1976 for drum and bugle corps on television. *Photo by Bob Fields from the collection of Drum Corps World.*

themselves.

"As far as great memories, I recall sitting in that truck at Whitewater, having only seen the corps at prelims and trying to make a television program of something that was literally done on gut instinct. I had no notes, I had no assistant director to tell me what was coming up, I had no recollection of seeing some of the corps, so it was literally gut instinct. I was relatively happy with what I was able to pull off under difficult circumstances.

"Now it is so carefully choreographed . . . it's actually scripted to the second. We were just flying by the feet of our pants. I remembered



The most enthusiastic hosts was Broadway, movie and TV star Rita Moreno, who did the 1980 telecast from Birmingham with Steve Rondinaro. *Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.*

pulling out of the garage at WHA-TV at 7:00 AM with that mobile unit. I was not only driver of the truck, but also producer, director and made sure that people got fed and then I would drive home at 1:00 AM. What a day! And it was the most exciting thing I had done up until that time.

"I've worked with Tom Blair the last three years and once in 1994. So I've still been helping with the current production. Production is still limited by what happens inside that field and the philosophy really isn't any different. Tom's just got a lot more toys to play with. Yes, it is slicker, cleaner, better timed, more precise, but it still isn't a whole lot different because it still takes place in 11 minutes. You still have to tell that story.

"My station manager at the time we saw the first show wondered why I was on a wide shot most of the time. He said, 'This is a close-up medium, get your cameras in there, get some closer shots' and I had to explain what it was like. Even back then, explaining to a TV professional why, if you went on a close-up too much, you would get the corps fans angry. They want to watch the high shot.

"So there's always been a compromise. The real action is in close, the real interest to the non-fan is in close and so you have to remember. I was always cognizant of the fact that we had two audiences -- the hardcore fans and the people that just tuned in and said 'What the heck is this?'

"I look for a balance. It is impossible to achieve something that will please everybody, but you had to do what you felt worked the best. In the back of your mind you knew that people were tuning in and saying, 'What football game is on today . . . what half-time show is this?'

"Back then, they still showed bands and they still showed halftime shows.

"You know, there are a lot of kids out there that have an affinity with good marching and good field presentations. That's how I got involved. I was in a marching band and went to a parade one day and here comes a thing called a drum and bugle corps. I had no idea what it was,



DUTCH BOY, Kitchener, ONT (1986). *Photo by Dick Deihl from the collection of Drum Corps World.*



PACIFIC BLUE, Surrey, BC (1985). *Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.*



TROOPERS, Casper, WY (1974). *Photo by Jane Boulen from the collection of Drum Corps World.*



Steve Rondinaro and 1979 guest host Maynard Ferguson. Photo by Dick Deihl from the collection of Drum Corps World.

but it was one of the neatest things I had ever heard. I couldn't get enough of it -- every time there was a parade, I went there.

"It was mainly Chicago corps and Racine corps and Madison . . . there were some good corps there. It was really fun. I wasn't probably a lot different than most kids who were first caught by seeing drum and bugle corps precision and wanting to be part of it."

Steve Rondinaro

The name Steve Rondinaro is practically synonymous with the annual Drum Corps International Finals broadcast. Throughout the years, Rondinaro has proven to be an integral part of the broadcast itself -- providing commentary and keeping the action moving for the home viewer between performances and doing so in a surprisingly seamless manner.

From his roots as a nine-year-old drum corps member, Rondinaro has always been about drum corps and about putting the best face on the activity to attract and retain DCI's viewership. His story of drum corps is remarkable on a number of levels. It is, in and of itself, a history of drum corps broadcasting. The following is his story.

"By way of background, I grew up in Watkins Glen, NY (population 2,700 in Schuyler County, population 14,000), and was a charter member of the Squires. I started marching at age nine when the corps started.

"At 15, I got a part-time job at the local

radio station, WGMF. Shortly thereafter I began a weekly update show we called 'The Squires Report.' It ran 10 to 15 minutes. We had a report on the Squires, regional drum corps happenings and played a cut or two from various drum corps records. We did the show in varying forms until I left for college.

"During the season, I would call in live from



Photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World.

the road with show results and scores. We may have had the best informed little drum corps town in the country. I also did a weekly column in the local news paper during the season and did some writing for various drum corps publications.

"We hosted an annual competition at the high school each summer and broadcast it live on the radio for two or three years . . . with one lonely microphone up in the press box. It must have sounded like hell on the air. I also did the PA announcing for the show and may have made some kind of history one year as contest director, PA announcer and brass execution judge. So with that history . . .

"DCI's Don Whiteley got me started with the drum corps telecasting, working me through the 'minor leagues.' I was in my first year as director of the Squires during my last year as a marching member in 1975. We took thirteenth that year, just missing the Troopers and finals by six tenths of a point. That was our highest DCI ranking ever. We were also perennial New York State Champs during that stretch.

"I began to work with Whiteley in trying to schedule tours for the corps. I had done some very bad small market TV news in Elmira, NY, during summer breaks starting in 1973 and was getting better. In 1976, I landed an internship in my senior year at college (SUNY at Geneseo) at WROC in Rochester, NY.

"My first day there, I ended up covering a bank robbery and doing the lead story at 6:00 and 11:00. Whiteley apparently saw the spark of something as well. I went full-time at WROC after the summer season of 1976.

"The first live shot I ever did on television was a drum corps live shot . . . in Denver at the DCI Championships in Mile High Stadium. (Gene Rayburn and company were down the track aways at the time on PBS.) The local Denver station that Whiteley had set up to co-promote the show sent out a live truck (which was pretty new technology at the time), but didn't have a reporter to go with it.

"Whiteley asked me to do it as a 'resident expert' and it went well; and I could go back to Rochester bragging that I had done one of those fancy live shots in the Denver market.

"Let me digress for a moment with another bit of TV history. We filmed the Squires performing the national anthem for WROC-TV in Rochester. I also gave a copy to WENY-TV in Elmira, NY, where I had started. Both stations



ROYAL BRIGADE, Meadowlands, NJ (1980). Photo by Ron DaSilva from the collection of Drum Corps World.



TRAILBLAZERS, Overland Park, KS (approx. 1966). Photo from the collection of Dallas Martin.



EAST COAST CADETS, Harbor Point, MA (1993). Photo by Christopher Lewis from the collection of Drum Corps World.

used it for their sign-on and sign-off. Thus, the Squires were more than likely the only drum and bugle corps doing that in two different markets simultaneously.

"My chronology is fuzzy here, but I believe it was 1976 or 1977 that I was asked to co-host the DCI East Finals from Allentown on the regional PBS affiliate. It was a 'live-to-tape' production and I was the resident expert/color man sitting next to a lovely blonde weather lady from one of the Philadelphia stations. I did it for no pay, but it was nice to be able to take a real shower in a genuine hotel room in the middle of tour. I believe we did that show for at least two years.

"Right about that same time, the folks in Hamilton, ONT, talked CHCH-TV into doing that show as a 'live-to-tape' production. I did that as the resident expert/color guy for several years running with various members of their sports staff. It was great fun and I came to love Trudy and Allen Denton who ran the show. My pay for that one was a fresh roll of LifeSavers that Trudy would always have waiting for me on finals night.

The 1979 season was the first year for my doing the PBS telecast. I overlapped with Hamilton for awhile. In these soon-to-be 23 years, I have filled about every on-air role at



Musician Chuck Mangione co-hosted 1983 DCI with Steve Rondinaro. Photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World.

one time or another with a variety of producers in a number of formats. I was barely 25 when I sat down that first year with legendary star Rita Moreno and nationally-syndicated game show host Jim Peck.

"We were live for almost five hours straight from Birmingham, AL, doing the entire finals. We were

right in the middle of the stands under hot lights on a humid Alabama night. My recollections -- Rita was wonderful! To this day the best celebrity co-host we ever had. I was excited, but not nervous.

"I loved doing live television, loved my subject and was comfortable with my base of knowledge. It was fun being in the middle of the stands, feeding off the electricity of the crowd and getting the corps full face. Rita particularly loved the Cavaliers that night!

That November in 1979 I left Rochester, NY, for a reporting job at the NBC station in Miami. I ended up inheriting what was left of the Vanguards (yes, they were Vanguards in the plural) as the new corps director at the request of Don Whiteley. The corps was pretty much a financial and organizational mess.

"The Miami transition was pretty wild. In the spring I was out in a field working drill with the corps when I saw first one, then two columns of smoke down toward the city. Then my beeper went off. It was the beginning of the Miami riots as I went screeching off from the field to the shower to the battle zone in Liberty City where I would spend the better part of the next two weeks.

"The riots were good training for running that drum corps. I also moved into the main co-anchor chair on the evening news shortly after that. That was a pretty big deal at the age of 25 in what was then the fifteenth biggest market in the country. From the wreckage of the Vanguards, we hatched the Florida Wave which won the DCI Class A title and finished as



Photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World.

high as thirteenth in open class.

"Back to DCI TV . . . 1980 was Birmingham with Jim Peck and Maynard Ferguson. What a kick hanging with Maynard. During the live show, I handed him a soprano bugle on the air so he could talk about the differences from a trumpet. He started wailing on the thing, much to the delight of the crowd around us!

"Subsequent years brought varying formats and different hosts. I even wrote the liner notes for the albums one year. I became the host for 1983 in Miami when Chuck Mangione was brought in as the color guy. That was a kick as Chuck was from Rochester and I watched him climb the ladder of the music world. As a fellow Italian, I was his dad's favorite local news guy on TV.

Some years we were live, some live-to-tape -- some good, some not-so-good. Montreal in 1982 was a little rough, but it was fun working with Canadian jazz band leader and trombonist Rob McConnell.

"The 1981 DCI Championships in Montreal was the one when we couldn't do the show because of customs problems and other logistical issues, so we did DCI Midwest. They brought in drummer Carmine Appice to co-host. I knew I was in trouble when I saw the purple hair.

"Carmine had drummed for Vanilla Fudge or something like that (actually he had pretty good credentials) and had drum corps roots, although he couldn't seem to remember them very well on television. It was a very long night.

"The telecast really took a leap forward



BLACK DIAMOND REGIMENT, Schuylkill Haven, PA (1976). Photo by Joseph Zepko from the collection of Drum Corps World.



CALGARY CAVALIERS, Calgary, ALB (1985). Photo by Donald Mathis from the collection of Drum Corps World.



SANTA CLARA VANGUARD, Santa Clara, CA (1992). Photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World.

when Bill Cook came in as executive producer. Basically he put his money behind the effort, realizing its importance.

"I don't know if people really know or appreciate the depth of Bill's contribution to the drum and bugle corps activity. I have come to like and respect the man deeply. Sure, I wished I had the assets of Star of Indiana when I was running a corps, but Bill supported ALL of the activity. His contribution to the telecast gave us the chance to put together the resources to kick up the quality another notch.

"Enter Tom Blair. It was great for me to have a fellow drum corps guy at the helm. For most of the previous years, a big part of my job was 'crash-educating' non drum corps producers and directors and helping to steer the show from the set. Not easy. Art Luebke was a help in the early years, but he wasn't around nearly long enough.

"Tom had a vision for this thing and he knew how to make it cook. My role continued to shift. In the Curt Gowdy years I was back to



Well-known sports commentator Curt Gowdy took part in the PBS broadcast during the late 1980s. Photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World.

being the resident expert/color guy and that was fine. I was thrilled to work with a legend in my business, even if he did have a tendency to mis-pronounce my name

from time to time.

"I used to love going back to the bar after run-through's and having Curt tell me old baseball broadcasting stories from his days with the Red Sox (something that came in very useful when I later met Ted Williams).

"IBM entered the picture as the show producing entity as part of an overall agreement with DCI. Tom Blair was out and the quality suffered, although we had some good people on the crew. The 'three paisans' also became an entity.

"My role changed yet again as Michael Caserio and Dennis Delucia became part of the

on-air team. It was wonderful to have two guys with a genuine passion for the activity and such depth of knowledge.

"Blair later came back into the picture and we were flying. My main job became -- and is today -- the host/anchor (the on-air traffic cop). I have to keep it moving, keep it on time and on target with producers/directors talking in my ear while I'm talking on live TV.

"Tom has it tightly produced so we're motoring, unless of course there's an unexpected tie at the top as we're scrambling to join PBS cleanly at the top of the hour. That first tie threw us with the delay in scores. I'm sure it felt worse to us than it looked on television. The second year we were more ready for it, but couldn't believe the odds that it had happened again.

"So here we go for year 23. I love doing it as much as ever. One of the true bonuses has been the close friendships that have evolved with Dennis, Michael and Tom . . . and, to a lesser degree, other tech people on the crew that I've come to know over the years.

"I've had a chance to work with some luminaries from show business and music. I've also gotten to know Bill Cook and have learned a great deal from him. I treasure some of the relationships with a lot of the old timers who are gone -- Mo Kazazian, Dr. Baggs and others who gave of themselves from a sheer love of the activity. And the countless volunteers and the original characters of Bob Briske's DCI contest

crew . . . many of whom are still at it today.

"I truly feel blessed to be able to combine my craft that I love with a pastime that has been such a major part of my life these many years. I hope that shows on the telecast. I got a lot out of drum corps as a kid and I hope the kids of today get something out of what we bring them on TV. A whole generation-plus has passed through since I started doing this thing.

"Doing the show with Dr. Charles Webb was humbling on the one hand, given his musical accomplishments, and challenging from a TV standpoint. We were pretty dry. Charles coined the immortal phrase 'It's like opera on the football field.' He loved Santa Clara's 'Phantom of the Opera' show. That represented another 'morphing phase' for the telecast as well -- a good point to make here.

"We made philosophical shifts in the nature and goal of the show over the years. The obvious priority was/is exposing drum corps to a wider audience and growing the fan base. We also used the show as a vehicle to 'legitimize' drum corps in the face of other musical idioms.

"Thus, Dr. Webb was a wonderful co-host (thanks to the Bill Cook connection). The show became somewhat 'high brow' as we emphasized the musicality of what we do.

"I think you could crystalize the shifting nature of our approach as 'Art versus competitive sport.' We got into the 'art' phase -- then came the Olympics, Curt Gowdy as co-host and the Summer Music Games concept.

We then focused on the excitement of competition, physical demands, parallels to major athletic events, etc. It made for better, more exciting TV.

"One of the best features we ever did was hooking some kind of remote heart monitor to a Star drummer during a show. He was humping at the pace of an athlete. We also had some supporting sound from then-IU basketball coach Bobby Knight. Look back at the telecasts and you'll see an evolution.



The 2001 PBS broadcast team -- Dennis DeLucia, Stacy Johnson and Steve Rondinaro. Photo by Dan Scafidi from the collection of Drum Corps World.



DRIFTERS, Surrey, BC (approx. 1974). Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.



ALLIANCE, Bois-des-filions, QUE (approx. 1973). Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.



BEVERLY CRUSADERS, Beverly, MA (approx. 1974). Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.

Surprise outcomes? Nothing surprises me anymore. Have I disagreed with some results over the years? Absolutely. The reaction of fans never surprised me. They've always been a vocal bunch. It sometimes created delicate moments explaining the booping on television.

"Am I glad I'm not a judge? Yep. I miss the variety of styles we used to have in the activity. Look back at some of the shows from the late 1970s. There was something for everybody.

"It is very difficult to 'sell' some of today's esoteric shows on national television, especially when they run back-to-back-to-back. The one saving grace is that the top corps do it very well. Lesser-talented corps trying to imitate them present more of a challenge.

"My mindset has always been that I'm doing this show for the uninitiated viewer. I want to pull him in and make him a drum corps fan. I figure drum corps fans who are watching already 'get it.'" Quite honestly, I'd much rather start the telecast with a Madison or Crossmen shaking the joint with some hot jazz or someone doing familiar, melodic classical literature than another fifth-place corps (that's quite good) doing obscure or angry modern wind ensemble music.

"I look at myself as the 'guardian of the popcorn eater' on TV. I want him entertained, not scratching his head.

"My buddy Dennis says, 'We have become what we've chosen to judge.' I agree with him. Thus, we have the debate that rages in drum corps today. But we have a remarkable level of excellence and an activity that offers unparalleled experiences for its participants. It's my job to bring that across with enthusiasm, regardless of the nature of musical programs surrounding the commentary."

Bill Cook

Perhaps more than anyone, Bill Cook brought a sense of legitimacy to the DCI broadcasting tradition. The shows took a remarkable step forward when Cook turned his resources to helping not only his own corps, the Star of Indiana, but all drum corps, by



Photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World.

turning the yearly broadcast into a first-class venue for the powerful performances of the activity's elite.

Even today, Cook is one of drum corps' principle proponents. But his addition to the drum corps broadcast legacy cannot be underestimated. He gave a business sense and a strong realization of the activity's entertainment potential to the program and countless resources to make his vision a reality that could help to perpetuate and grow the activity. He reflects:

"As far as I can remember, I first became involved with the DCI telecast in 1987. The first executive producer was Keith Kline from WTIU, a PBS Indiana University affiliate. Keith's contribution was immeasurable. Not only did he produce and direct the shows, but his base station solicited all other PBS stations to telecast it.

"I don't exactly remember how many stations ran the championship, live or delayed, but the results of this selling effort was quite exceptional. I know that as long as WTIU was involved, 225 to 250 stations participated.

"When Tom Blair assumed the role of director/producer, the quality went up a couple notches. Tom brought in better TV/audio equipment trucks, provided more cameras, installed the two 18 foot pole mics that help mix the sound and he brought in professional television crews.

"However, college students still were responsible for manning the TV cameras. Larry Rock, a Chicago radio station owner, volunteered his expertise in mixing the sound and Tom maintained control of whatever was shown, both live and on video.

"For one year, Dr. Charles Webb, dean of the IU School of Music, provided color commentary and, of course, Steve Rondinaro has always been the anchor volunteer.

"There was a lot of controversy relative to telecasting the championship because some corps directors felt that it cost too much money until they learned that Cook (the company) was picking up

the tab. Cost of the telecast ranged between \$250,000 to \$350,000 per annum.

"In 1993, the cost was transferred to DCI and, once again, the championship telecast almost died. The board of directors of DCI finally realized, however, that killing the show would effectively end tape sales. By the time we turned the show over to DCI, the income from video and audio tapes had become a large profit center.

"In the early 1990s, 800 Video Express



Photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World.



EDMONTON STRUTTERS, Edmonton, ALB (1976). Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.



NITE EXPRESS, Cedar Rapids, IA (1996). Photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World.



KING'S GUARD, Hawaii (approx. 1973). Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.



Dr. Charles Webb from Indiana University co-hosted the 1987 PBS telecast with Steve Rondinaro. Photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World.

assumed responsibility for production and sale of videotapes and they demonstrated to DCI what marketing could do when properly applied to selling video cassettes.

"The sale of video and audio tapes is a profit center that was developed during the years that we produced the show. Tom Blair, Keith Kline, Larry Rock and Steve Rondinaro were/are the men most responsible for laying the groundwork for the excellence demonstrated in all of the shows from 1987 to the present.

"Our contribution to the telecast was to keep the emphasis on making the venture profitable, to make certain that only experts were used to produce the show and to sponsor it between 1987 through 1993.

"Looking back, I do not believe that we made too many mistakes. As far as I'm concerned, PBS is the ONLY network that can adequately cover the United States with a show of this kind that will provide DCI with their own promotion people and producers (when requested), has a tremendous investment in modern audio and video transmission equipment and has a potential market of over 10 million viewers.

"When a DCI championship is telecast each year, we estimated that most of PBS's markets were covered and that viewing was high. In summary, any other network does not have the type viewers we need, does not

have the sound/video expertise and are too expensive to use."

Tom Blair

Tom Blair is the technical wizard and broadcast manager behind all aspects of the recording and production of the yearly DCI broadcast and championship recordings. Together with audio engineer Larry Rock, he is the principle leader of a small army of production people that help to document and archive the DCI Championships in all their glory.

When you as a viewer watch with wonder at the remarkably slick production of the new DCI DVD product, for example, think of the countless hours of dedicated (and largely voluntary) effort that goes into producing that piece of drum corps history.

With very little concern for his own accolades (though he certainly deserves them), Blair quietly serves as a tremendous fan of drum corps with the technical and experiential know-how to make that come

across on the small screen for home viewers. His reflection on the work of drum corps broadcast production and its evolution over the years follows. It provides a wealth of insight into the activity's recorded component -- a keystone of drum and bugle corps and its best link to its traditions and history.



Tom Blair (right) has been in charge of the DCI telecast from the late 1990s into the 21st Century. Photo by Karen Sunmark from the collection of Drum Corps World.

People and production

"As a veteran of many world-class productions from the Olympics to Oprah Winfrey, I can tell you that the television production for the DCI Championships is truly done on a large scale. Eleven cameras, 12 videotape machines, on-location editing, duplication and live national carriage make DCI a major television production event.

"Remember, too, that the coverage of finals

is only one part of the picture. TV coverage starts with the division III prelims on Monday for a total of 35 hours of shooting and hundreds of hours of pre-production are needed before DCI Championship Week.

"I also produce the 21-corps championship CD, the 21-corps championship videotapes, the division II/III finals tapes and the DCI DVD. All these products and telecasts add up to a staggering 50+ hours of finished programming and 225 corps performances in their various forms of CDs, videotapes, DVDs and television.

"Television production on this scale is a tremendous example of teamwork, not unlike drum corps, really. It requires a large number of talented individuals to work together. And, while the work of each member of the team is significant, individually that work means nothing without the role the other members of the team play.

"The DCI crew consists of about 65 people. The list includes directors, cameramen, tape operators, audio engineers and various support personnel as well as the more obvious on-camera talent who provide a voice and a face to a much larger machine behind them.

"A television crew can be divided into two major groups: the production team and the technical team. The production team is made up of the producer, director, assistant directors and production assistants. Their job is to determine the content of the program.

"The technical team operates the cameras, graphics, audio, tape and so on. The technical staff puts the production staff's ideas on the air, as well as bringing their own ideas to the table.

"DCI is fortunate to have a group of talented people working on their production for a number of years. Larry Rock, recording engineer for the New York Philharmonic, first worked with Jim Unrath in 1982 to make the first digital recordings of the championships in Montreal. I first worked to edit the 1984 tapes and began directing the show in 1987."

With the exception of the years 1995 through 1998, Blair and Rock have worked on



GRENADETTES, Rockaway Township, NJ (approx. 1973). Photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World.



TROOPER CADETS, Casper, WY (1995). Photo by Ron Walloch from the collection of Drum Corps World.



VENTURES ALL-GIRL, Kitchener, ONT (1988). Photo by Orlin Wagner from the collection of Drum Corps World.

every show since.

Many other television pros have gotten hooked on "The Big Show" as they call it and have worked on every Blair production. It's the hard work of the team that delivers that DCI quality, year after year.

Technology

Blair continued, "The greatest technological advancement in television has been the advent of digital audio and video. Drum corps pushes the envelope, both visually and audibly, and digital has allowed us to get closer to the real thing. We know it will never be like 'being there,' but we strive to give the clearest picture and the most dynamic audio possible. Digital recording has helped with both.

"As The Cadets like to say, 'Music is motion,' and the use of the crane or 'jib' camera has been a welcome addition to the coverage as it adds that extra sense of flow to the image. If we could afford it, I'd put all the cameras on jibs!

"The basic coverage of drum corps performances principally involves the first five

cameras. The others provide additional angles for specific purposes:

- 1) High/wide and DVD high camera.
- 2) Mid-height left, with an ensemble focus.
- 3) Mid-height right, with an ensemble focus.
- 4) Hand-held left for the low angle and up-close coverage of effects and emotion.
- 5) Hand-held right for the low angle and up-close coverage of effects and emotion.
- 6) Jib (placed right or left, depending on the stadium and corps' show design).
- 7) Reverse angle for crowd shots.
- 8) Rover for use with talent.
- 9) DVD percussion.
- 10) DVD color guard.
- 11) Judgecam (wireless 'lipstick' camera). And yes, I'll do it differently next time.

"With the audio recordings, less is more. Because the performers are so spread out, the fewer microphones used, the better. Phase cancellation is a major concern and can result in a significant loss of quality. We use Scheeps mics for the primary music recording and supplement those with selected others for the surround channels.

"Solos are enhanced with shotgun mics which are used only when necessary. Everything -- audio and video -- is now 100% digital from start to finish.

DVD

"It's almost like the DVD medium was made for drum corps. The multiple video angles provide the control the frustrated couch potato director has always wanted. We all know everyone has their own ideas of what they want to watch during the three-ring circus we call drum and bugle corps.

"We record a 16-channel, 24-bit digital audio multitrack of the division I corps. DVD's 5.1 Dolby Digital surround format finally allows us to bring the dimension and dynamics of drum corps into the consumer's living room.

"Larry Rock's phenomenal recordings bring the power of a finals' night performance back to life. The commentary tracks allow the corps designers to illuminate the listener and show just how sophisticated drum corps has become.

It has been an interesting new experience producing the DCI DVD. Remember that we started with nothing. From scratch we determined the content, layout of the discs, created the artwork for the menus and conceived and implement the functionality of the disc.

"DVDs can be tailored to function almost any way the producer can imagine. It's an incredibly powerful format and in the hands of a talented DVD author like DCI's Casey Mershon, it can become a truly great viewing and listening experience. I'm very proud of the DCI DVD.

"The process starts with the live recordings. My 'line cut' as it's called -- what you see on PBS live -- is recorded, as are most of the cameras, on digital beta tape. The CD recordings go directly to DAT (digital audio tape). Larry Rock takes the DATs back to New York where he edits them on the same system he uses for the Philharmonic.

"I take the videotapes back to Chicago and edit the various tape packages, using the line cut and the camera 'isos' to create the best possible coverage of the performances. After the tape packages are done, I edit all the video elements for the DVD -- multi-camera, high camera, percussion and color guard. Each of these must be edited for the six corps featured on the DVD.

"The next phase of the DVD is the design of the menus. In 2000, we started from scratch. In 2001, I felt that the design concept from 2000 was still terrific and that we'd just change the images -- still a great deal of work for the graphic artist.

"While graphics were built, we recorded the designer's commentary tracks. The Cavaliers, Glassmen and Phantom were all recorded in Chicago. For the Blue Devils, I flew to a studio in San Francisco. For Santa Clara, we used a 'phone patch' with a studio in Portland, OR.

"I sat in my office with a videotape of SCV and, over the phone, I directed Jim Casella and Myron Rosander, who were watching a matching copy of SCV in the Portland studio. It's kind of like directing by remote control and a relatively common practice in the production world.

"Next, all the commentary and judging tracks are edited and cleaned up. Then comes the fun part -- the mix. We go into a state-of-the-art Dolby Digital recording studio



Photo by Dick Deihl from the collection of Drum Corps World.



COPPER STAR, Phoenix, AZ (2001).
Photo by Robert Westerman from the collection of Drum Corps World.



EXPLORERS, Melrose, MA (1988).
Photo by Christopher Lewis from the collection of Drum Corps World.



MID-HUDSON RIVERMEN, Wappinger Falls, NY (1989).
Photo by David Schwartz from the collection of Drum Corps World.

and mix the 20 or so tracks to the picture using phenomenal speakers. Live or Memorex, I don't know, but it's the most fun of an otherwise long and laborious process.

"Once all the elements are completed, Casey pulls them all together and creates the Digital Linear Tape (DLT) that is sent to the DVD replicator. Test discs are burned and checked, final discs are loaded into their packaging, then shipped to DCI and finally to the customers, thousands of man hours later."

A little history

"There have been many, many smaller TV and film productions involving drum and bugle corps, both before and during the DCI era. The first PBS involvement of DCI-era drum corps (that I'm aware of) took place in 1974.

Produced by a local station from Rochester, NY, it was a short program highlighting the preliminary performances of the Anaheim Kingsmen, Madison Scouts and Santa Clara Vanguard.

"In 1975, PBS giant WGBH took on the live coverage of finals from Philadelphia's Franklin Field. The show appeared in a four-hour format from 1975 through 1980. Steve Rondinaro joined the program -- not as the host, but as an expert commentator in 1979 and has appeared on the show ever since. 2002 will be the 30th anniversary of DCI and the twenty-third year Steve has brought his talent to the program.

"From 1974 through 1978, WHA-TV in Madison produced several programs about drum corps and produced the championship telecasts in 1979 and 1980. WHA producer Art Luebke marched in the Scouts and the WHA shows were far and away the best of that era.

"WHA produced the only PBS coverage of DCI in 1981 from DCI Midwest in Whitewater, WI. Ironically, there was no coverage of that year's first truly 'international' championship in Montreal, QUE, because of governmental issues. In 1982, a tape-delayed version of the show from Montreal was done with the unfortunate choice of commentary during the corps' performances. It was especially frustrating in a particularly memorable year for drum corps.

"In 1983, championships returned to U.S. soil in Miami. From 1983 to 1986, the show was produced by WTVP in Peoria, IL, and a producer by the name of Steve Norman. Steve created the popular 'On the Road Again' segment for the show. While a talented television producer and director, Steve had no experience with drum corps or music and DCI

tried to provide him with help in covering the corps. The late Fred Sanford served as DCI Coordinator first and I followed in 1986.

"Bill Cook stepped up to the plate from 1987 to 1993. In cash or in-kind support, Bill donated well over \$1,000,000.00 underwriting DCI's television effort. Let's face it, every TV show has a 'director' in its credit role. From 1987 to 1993, we had a credit for 'pilots.' Bill would loan us his corporate jets to cover drum corps. Now that's cool!

"WTIU in Bloomington, IN (Bill Cook's hometown station) became the sponsoring PBS station -- that was a Cook request -- and I became the director of the telecast at the insistence of Don Pesceone, then DCI's Executive Director.

"I directed the show from 1987 to 1992, directed and produced in 1993 and '94.

"Remember the name Art Luebke? Art became the station manager at KRMA in Denver and they sponsored the show for PBS in 1994. Art re-joined the production team in 1999, when I returned to the program.

"But during and after the 1994 season, DCI was having considerable problems, financially and internally. After being unable to reach an agreement with the organization in the spring of 1995, I left the drum corps production business and my entire production crew left with me.

"From 1995 through 1998, a corporate television production department at IBM in Atlanta produced all the DCI products, including the PBS telecast. A long-time drum corps participant named Bill Duquette worked for IBM and convinced IBM and DCI this was a good connection.

"But much as WTVP lacked experience in drum corps, IBM lacked experience in broadcast television production. However, the nature of the business arrangement between DCI and IBM, at a time when DCI was sorely strapped for cash, allowed DCI to continue to get some production done without spending cash it simply didn't have.

The IBM era coincided with the Disney era and both helped to save DCI.

"Meanwhile, slowly but surely, Dan Acheson, now the executive director of DCI, started working to get me 'back in the fold.' Our first production together was in 1997. 'Brass Roots' celebrated DCI's 25th anniversary and the experience showed me that, under Dan's

leadership, DCI was once again an organization with integrity. That word alone best describes Dan Acheson.

Acheson knew changes had to be made in the production of the DCI broadcast, tapes and CDs. Initially, he tried to get me involved in the IBM production, but in 1999 DCI was finally in a financial position to break away from IBM and stand alone in the production of the show and other products.

"We struck a deal and I returned to produce and direct all of DCI's audio/video products starting in 1999. I'm proud to say, my entire production and technical staff returned with me."

Concluding thoughts

Drum corps videos are a hallmark of the activity. The yearly broadcast on PBS has become an annual rite of conclusion and renewal -- looking back on the best of performances from the year and looking ahead to even more amazing performances next year.

But drum corps broadcasting and video do not merely provide entertainment for fans when they are not at performances in person.

Regardless of what corps one marches or marched in, the television program has a sense of magic to it. If drum corps is everyone that is involved in the activity, in whatever capacity -- as fans, members, volunteers or staff -- then drum corps is the best of us, transmitted into homes around the country and seen on video around the world.

The videos also serve as our collective memory, with their victories and defeats. When we pop in a tape of our favorite drum corps programs, we connect with a microcosm of everything that has ever gone before in the drum and bugle corps activity.

Years later, we talk about who won, the gritty performances we saw and sometimes even who we feel *should have won*. But the point is, we talk about these things.

The drum corps community is greater and stronger, its affiliated organizations more pronounced in their brotherhood, because of the actions of those who have helped to document our history.

Drum and bugle corps would not -- indeed could not -- be what it is without the service of its faithful advocates. Those who create the video spectacle we wait for every Fall are perfect examples of such advocacy.



TORONTO OPTIMISTS, Toronto, ONT (approx. 1973).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.



ATLANTIC CITY HURRICANES, Atlantic City, NJ (1998).
Photo by David Rice from the collection of Drum Corps World



PLAINSMEN, Emporia, KS (1963).
Photo from the collection of Dallas Martin.