

Chapter 24: 1974

Late in 1973, December 7th, 8th, and 9th to be exact, the C.D.C.A. / C.U.A. held Symposium 2 in Toronto. The imposing title was an update of what, at one time, was the Canadian Drum Corps Convention. It served the same purpose.

John Robins was now the President of the C.D.C.A. Part of the activities during this weekend was the awarding of plaques for outstanding service and dedication to Canadian Drum Corps. Recipients of these honours included Don Daber, Al Tierney and Dick Brown. A special award was given to Al Baggs, former Chief Judge of the C.J.A. These were only part of the awards ceremony. All these men had, at one time in their careers, been connected with the Optimists Drum Corps.

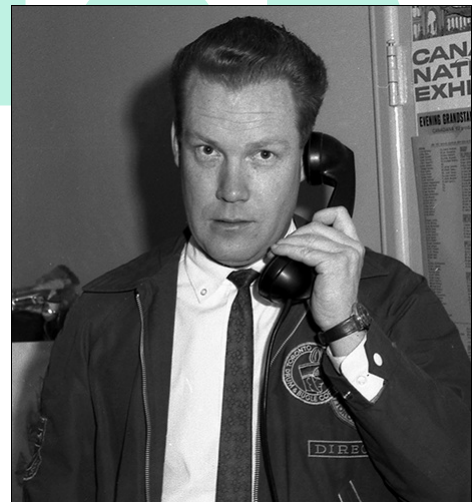


1974: Toronto Optimists

Mr. Robins then announced that the Board of Directors of the C.D.C.A. had, this year, created a special award. It was to be given to the person who, during the past year, had contributed the most to Canadian Drum Corps. The first recipient was none other than Don Daber, the *grand factotum* of Canadian Drum Corps. This announcement drew a long, standing ovation from those in attendance. All were aware of Don's extraordinary contribution to their favourite pastime, if not knowing much about his personal history.

Don Daber

Don was originally from Kirkland Lake, Ontario, hundreds of miles north of Toronto. No Drum Corps existed there in his youth, and probably not today. This is a remote area, with wicked winters. Don showed a talent for art in school, even winning prizes. He furthered his ambitions by moving to Toronto to attend the Ontario College of Art. After graduating, he became a successful commercial Artist. Drum Corps were still unknown to him, until he visited friends in Kitchener, Ontario. He was given a ticket to a Scout House Spring Show. Don was enthralled with what he saw, as were most people who saw Scout House in their prime. Thinking he would like to do something in this field, he approached both Scout House and De La Salle, neither of whom were interested. Indeed, it was thought by one of them that he was a spy. What Don envisaged was a freelance article about Drum Corps with which he hoped to interest one of the Toronto papers.



Don Daber

This was just the sort of thing Drum Corps could have used. Publicity, other than for contests, was virtually non-existent. Unfortunately, this idea drew a blank. It was while still looking that he stumbled across the Optimists. The Optimists welcomed him and Don was soon in, going on bus trips and scribbling notes like mad. He was about thirty-six years old then. To endure trips with a bunch of rowdy, often uncouth, uneducated, and insensitive kids was just the beginning of his drum corps career. It would turn into an almost lifelong dedication to this activity, culminating in this award. The award was for the year just past but Don could have received one for every year he was in it.



1974: Toronto Optimists (CNE)

Don started with the Optimists in 1960 and, just three years later, he was their director. He functioned in this role for nine years, before stepping down; however, when it became necessary, he again picked up the reins. Throughout all those years, his work and influence affected not only the Optimists, but the whole Drum Corps movement. In Canada and the USA, artwork and photography were his most recognizable trademarks. But his influence did not stop there. He held positions in the C.D.C.A. and O.D.C.A. helping any Drum Corps that he could. His name became synonymous with Drum Corps, especially Canadian Drum Corps. All Corps publications knew him as his artwork and photos graced many of their pages.

The scene became “If you want to know anything, phone Daber”. I could go on indefinitely but he, most of all, would insist that I stop, modest fellow that he is. Let’s just say that Don was one of those people who gave far more than he got, never asking for anything in return. The mark he left on Drum Corps, all of them but especially the Optimists, is ineradicable. Without people like him, Drum Corps, or any endeavour, would be far worse off. Don is still plying his trade, still toiling for various and sundry causes while being an indispensable source of information for this humble scribe. The award he received could not have gone to a worthier recipient.

Back to Symposium 1974

Still at the Symposium, another award made its debut that night. This award was picked by,



1974: Toronto Optimists Tynps (CNE)

donated by, and presented by the Canadian Judges Association. It was to be an annual award, presented to the Corps that had made the most improvement. The first winner was none other than the Optimist Lancers of Etobicoke.

Formed in 1969, the Lancers had won the Junior “C” standstill class in 1972, Junior “C” M&M class in 1973, and had entered Junior “B” for 1974. This award was a tribute to Dick Brown and company, who had done such a good job.

A Toronto Colour Guard Contest saw the Optimist Guard in third place, albeit with a nine point penalty. This denied them second.

Facing the Optimists this coming year was a De La Salle that had retained its management, its instructional staff and ninety percent of last year’s Corps. They would be a formidable force. In the west, the young Corps, the Etobicoke Crusaders, were doing well. Under director Bob Duggan, they had 43 bugles, 21 drums, and 30 in their colour guard. Promising!

The Optimists had equipment for sale, 18 Imperial G-F bugles, Baritones, Contras, Sopranos. An ad said “phone Evert Botterweg”. As well as being a superb equipment manager, he was also a salesman.



1974: Toronto Optimists in a parade

A guard show in Kitchener saw the Optimist Guard fifth in a field of twelve. They, along with others, kept plugging away.

Senior-wise, Les Diplomates de Quebec were alive and well; however, the Syracuse Brigadiers were gone. Was it lack of interest? Syracuse had been one of the finest Senior Drum Corps, ever. They

had, at one time or another, beaten everybody. It was from them that Eric Burton first learned some of the ropes of colour guard operation, helping the Optimists get off the ground.

La Salle Cadets, who had toyed with the idea of going senior, decided to remain junior. They would not have found it any easier, maybe even harder. It could have had something to do with their previously noted, unavoidable use of overage people.

At the 1974 Canadian Individual and Small Group Championship, no one Corps dominated the proceedings. Medals were spread around evenly.

Adding spice to the La Salle Cadets decision to remain as juniors this year, Etobicoke Crusaders decided to become Junior “A” for 1974.

More fun ahead!

Other News

South of the border, two fine Corps, St. Lucys and Blessed Sacrament, both from Newark, N. J., left the scene forever. Of all the top Corps that used to wallop the Optimists in that region, only Garfield remained. Most of us thought Blessed Sacrament would go on forever. The OPEC gas crisis and an unfulfilled deal for horns finished them off. If the sheiks only knew what they had helped bring about, maybe they would have relented. "Sac" had been admired by all.

Locally, the Shriners contest was now defunct, the last contest having been held in 1972. Even though it had always made money overage problems brought hassles and disqualifications that made it seem too much trouble. The Corps had cut their own throat. Partially compensating for this would be the "Canadian Classic" on June 22nd and D.C.I. North on August 11th.



The Optimists had become an Optimist Club organization in 1955 and this year celebrated the 20th anniversary of that connection. Since then, they had won 14 National titles over 17 years.

Most of the music for this year was new, with arrangements by Ray Roussel. Percussion still by Ron Kaiser, drill with Bill Kane. Drum Major was Mike Arsenault and Guard Captain Cheryl Blandford. Another two corps members, Gord Parrott on drums and Cathy Collins in the guard, tied the knot. They were wished well.

The Ladies Auxiliary, still tireless in their efforts, were out to raise money for new guard shakos. This was only one of numerous endeavours under way. They were able to give \$250 towards shakos and rifle slings.

The twelfth Annual Awards Banquet had been held in November of 1973. The special guest speaker was Barry Bell, music director through the "glory years", 1958 through 1968. The Corps had changed since then but still clung to the same feelings and ideals. It still had that "Inner Optimist Feeling" of respect for self and the Corps. This would help ensure the survival of the Corps in the future. When it becomes diluted, we see something else.



1974: Toronto Optimists (CNE)

All the usual awards were made for what was considered a disappointing, but enlightening year. Despite all the pitfalls, the Corps had made it through, everyone learning from their mistakes.

The Guard Nationals were held in Kitchener, Ontario, on April 28th. After an up and down season, the Optimists placed third, a two-point penalty denying them second. The Majestics walked away from all others, taking first.

The Optimists were ready to field 100 members with more than 40 bugles, 30 on percussion and a guard of 30. Such numbers were now necessary. When considering that in 1958 an entire Corps numbered between 40 and 50, one can see the changes that had occurred.



1974: Toronto Optimists (CNE)

The Optimist Cadets were just beginning to pick up steam again. At the end of 1970, most had left to join the Junior "A" Corps. They lost so many that they had to revert from Junior "C" status to a parade Corps. Now, they were preparing to re-enter the Junior "C" Division. With 38 bugles, 32 drums, and 20 in the guard, they were large enough for this. They now also had a Cadet Booster Club, established by parents and friends just for months previously.

The Optimist Lancers, in its fifth year of operation, now had over 100 people from 10 to 19 years of age. They were a going concern.

Now, as far as the Corps season itself was concerned, the year in review goes something like this. Really! The winter was long and tedious. The horn line attendance fell from forty to between nine and fifteen. This, fatal for some Corps, was not new to this Corps. It always happened in the early days, with interest picking up later. However, it must have seemed bad to this Corps, not being aware of the early days. Perceiving their backs being to the wall, girls were recruited from the guard. People were brought in off the street. Thus, did girls become part of the main Corps, much to its benefit. The others sound as if a press gang was in operation.



1974: Barb and Cathy

All this resulted in the Corps pulling out of its first scheduled contest, at Porter Stadium. They were not ready. Next was Ajax, June 15th. Still feeling themselves not ready, they could not pull out of this one. If you do that too many times you will not get invited anywhere. The pullout, by the way, was the third one known in its history, so they were not noted for this, rather for reliability.

Contest Season

Ajax

However, at Ajax, their feelings were confirmed, by the scores.

1st	De La Salle.....	67.50
2nd	Seneca Princemen.	60.45
3rd	Optimists.....	56.25
4th	Etobicoke Crusaders. ...	51.55

A low third place.

Due to this, goals were reset for the next show, the Canadian Classic, on June 22nd. Now the goal was to try to catch the Princemen. This was accomplished, due to drum scores, but they slipped another two points behind De La Salle. In first place was the Madison Scouts, ten points above Del. With Del in second, and the Optimists a distant third, it did not look good.

Quebec

In Quebec, at St. Jerome and Verdun, two victories were recorded. At each, the Etobicoke Crusaders were the closest competitor, in second by only one point. For a new Junior "A" Corps, they were doing well.

Things did improve, for a while. Everything clicked at Seneca College when the Optimists placed only seven from De La Salle, but four and eight ahead of Seneca Princemen and Etobicoke Crusaders, respectively. After this blip, surprisingly, the Corps was given a two-week vacation. Rehearsals were optional. They were held, and were bad, with fifteen to twenty bugles. Later, rehearsals began to shape up, but not fast enough.



1974: Toronto Optimists rifles in a parade

Guelph, July 20th

1st	De La Salle.....	77.90
2nd	Optimists.	67.50
3rd	Seneca.....	64.20

There was no stopping De La Salle. They were now, and had been for years, beating the Optimists by greater margins than when the shoe was on the other foot. Much greater. Years before, even though the Optimists nearly always won, the scores were much closer. This state of affairs continued. In a way, it was a tribute to those who stuck it out.

DCI North, August 11

At the D.C.I. North Show, August 11th, Toronto, things got worse.

1st	Santa Clara Vanguard.	85.80
3rd	De La Salle.....	77.40
7th	Optimists.....	64.80
8th	Crusaders.	63.70
10th	Seneca.....	59.70

Even further behind De La Salle, just fending off the Crusaders, with Seneca coming up!

What helped this situation develop was that, although the Corps had pulled together, some people had left, leaving only 32 horns.

Rehearsals had gone well all week with Gary “Chops” Czapinski, working the show. He was to figure greatly in the future. One of the rare times this Corps had brought in outside talent. Talent he had, and knowledge. In a way the Corps was too “up” for this show, too “hyper”. The performance was uncontrolled, resulting in poor execution.

Ithaca, N.Y.: D.C.I. again. This time, the championships. After a fine, uniformed rehearsal something was still lacking, but the Corps had its feet firmly planted in reality. They did not expect to make the finals and did not. Also, with an improved show, they did not expect to place 34th, which is what happened. De La Salle scored an 84 in the prelims, now being virtually untouchable in Canada. The Optimists score was 64.0.

Titusville: The yearly jaunt to Titusville was next, where things definitely took a turn for the better. They were ready for a fight, off the field, with the local greasers, but it did not happen this year. In the past it had. Placing third, eleven points up on the Etobicoke Crusaders, it revived spirits in time for Nationals weekend. Hope springs eternal, etc., etc. There was additional reason for optimism.

De La Salle would not be in it this year, due to failure to comply with C.D.C.A. dictates regarding the use of overage people and releases. This did not mean they were using them, just not toeing the C.D.C.A. line in this respect. This left the door open for a number of Corps to claim the title, the Optimists being one of them.



1974: Toronto Optimists

Before this, there was a contest in London, Ontario. A feeling of confidence was evident, even though two entrants, Etobicoke Crusaders and Seneca Princemen, had been working for weeks with instructors from De La Salle. This is a common tactic but, here, probably designed to ensure that the Optimists would not win the Nationals. It did not affect London. The drum line played well, but the horns made errors that had not been heard for months. Regardless, the Optimists won this one by three points, further bolstering confidence.

Back in Toronto, the Nationals weekend was heralded by pouring rain that would plague the contest. This aside, it was the first time in many years, perhaps since 1966, that the Optimists were not considered as underdogs. They were expected to win this one! And they, themselves, expected to. Regardless of the year past, any year, this Corps always without fail turned on for the National, as, usually, did everybody else.

De La Salle, who would not be there, showed their calibre by qualifying for D.C.I. finals. They were in the top 12 in the world. This does not detract from the drama that took place back at the CNE in Toronto.

After stopping at the Shrine to change and warm up, the “Green Machine” headed for CNE Stadium. Once again, due to lack of facts, we must dispense with the prelims and go straight into the finals. For some reason, the rain was not allowed to interfere with the show. No delays were allowed, as sometimes happens. Maybe it seemed as if it would be endless. Stadiums, crowds, and judges cannot be conjured up in a moment so on it went.

The Optimists did their entire show in the rain, “turning it on” as was expected. Despite their still diminished size, the crowd loved them.

Their two dogged rivals on this night were the Seneca Princeton and the Etobicoke Crusaders. Where La Salle Cadets were is a mystery. The Seneca Princemen did the finest show that a writer for Drum Corps America Magazine had ever seen them perform. They, also, turned on. New bodies had been added to their Corps, which was cheered lustily by all the De La Salle fans present. Negatively, they booed everybody else. It was not hard to determine their hopes for the outcome.

To show the extent of the rain, a “Drum Majors only” retreat was arranged.

At the first show, in Ajax, the Optimists had lost to Seneca. With a score of 71.55, the season ended as it began, with another loss to Seneca. For the first time in their history, they claimed a National title, with a score of 74.8, thereby, making their own fans and those of De La Salle happy.

And the Optimists? Despite putting on their best show of the



1974: Toronto Optimists horns (CNE)

year weather and size had proved obstacles that could not be overcome. Indeed, they only managed to claim second place by 0.85 over the Etobicoke Crusaders. No matter, what had happened could not be changed, was now history. Next year would come soon enough! The Seneca Princemen were the Canadian National Junior Drum and Bugle Corps Champions for 1974. Congratulations to them.

In preparation for next year, things quickly got going, on September 11th to be exact. A meeting of the entire Corps took place at Runnymede Collegiate. A new executive and changes in instructors were announced.

Replacing Don Daber as Director would be Doug MacKenzie. A former soloist, he would now be in charge. Bernie White would continue as Treasurer. Evert Botterweg would continue as Equipment Manager. His wife, Doreen, would serve another year as head of the female staff.

Don Daber, not to be forgotten, reverted to Publicity and Public Relations Director. He was still responsible for G.C.C., and an aim this year was to bring it out more regularly.

Terry McKolsky was back with his original Corps, as the bugle instructor. In the interim, he had become a member of the Canadian Judges Association (C.J.A.), as well as a member of the D.C.I. Judges Chapter. As bugle instructor for the Optimists, he would have assistance from Kevin Martin and Peter Byrne, a five-year marching member. For Mr. Kaiser, this would be his fourteenth year with the Corps, eclipsed only by Don Daber. Greg Oxenham and Jack Roberts would handle drill. 1974 was the first year on drill for Greg, while Jack was returning after an absence. During this he had become a C.J.A. judge.



1974: Toronto Optimists

The design of the 1975 field show would be left to Gary “Chops” Czapinski. His experience included work with Santa Clara Vanguard, Madison Scouts, and other Midwest Corps. Good recommendations. Gary’s cohort, Marie Kas, would work with the colour guard as a consultant.

Joe Gianna, who had been Executive Director of the Corps for 1974, became the new President of the sponsoring club. Whether he had been with the Corps all the time is unknown. If he had, this would make him the longest serving member. He went all the way back to the Danforth Crusaders.

The Optimist Booster Club had a similar meeting on September 27th. It was the booster club that would be responsible for this year’s banquet, assisted by the Legion Ladies.

The Optimist Club of York-Toronto had a meeting on November 5th. Thirteen members were in attendance, along with three guests, Len Perrin, Doug Yarker and Peter Shore, all of whom were ex-marching members. The Club had received a letter from the Optimist Lancers informing them that they were no longer part of the Optimist Club of York-Toronto. The Club wished them well. This was the final act of a murky affair. Years before the Lancers had booked a trip to Calgary. The Optimist organization, for their own reasons, did not approve but the Lancers went anyway. As of then, they had become independent. This letter was a severance of the last link. From the west-end of the city, they would remain western oriented.

Many more similar events were slated for the future. There were so many facets to the Corps and its subsidiary factions that they have become too numerous to list. Maybe even cumbersome. It leads one to wonder how earlier versions of the Corps ever survived.

It looked as if the Corps of 1975 would be the biggest ever fielded. After what was considered a disastrous year, the membership certainly had not suffered.



1974: Toronto Optimists drums (CNE)

The corps banquet, the 13th, was held on November 2, 1974, at a Legion Hall. Hosted by the Optimist Club, the meal and facilities were provided by the Booster Club. At the head table, thirty-eight guests were seated. Included were all of the executive and instructors for both the 1974 and 1975 Corps, as well as representatives of the York-Optimist Club, the Booster Club and the executive of the Cadets.

All Awards were given out and the usual customs observed. With this affair, the year was over. The arrangements were in place for the coming year. It just remained to see what it would bring.



1974: Toronto Optimists Colours on retreat