


Muchachos

by Les Katzel
and John Haupt

The Hawthorne Muchachos were renown for their Latin-American style and distinctive uniforms. They aroused the passions of the audience. Some feel the 1975 Muchachos represent the pinnacle of the "power corps" of the 1970s. Even today, 26 years after their last field competition, they have a devoted following of fans.

In January 1959, American Legion Post No. 199 in Hawthorne, NJ, and the Hawthorne Caballeros senior corps joined forces to start the Muchachos. Ralph Silverbrand, drum major of the Caballeros, and Marge Moore, wife of the former post commander, were the two main forces behind the humble beginnings.

Other Caballeros who were instrumental in founding the corps were Joe Scarber (horn and founding member of the Caballeros), Jim and Bob Costello (drums and drill, founding members of the Caballeros) and John McAuliffe (later to become the corps director).

Initially about 100 boys showed up. Most had no experience playing or marching. Over the next three years, the corps would primarily march in parades. At its first one on Memorial Day 1959, the organization presented 10 in the drum line, about 40 horns and a color guard of about 15. Memorial Day and July Fourth meant four parades on both days and the corps also marched in firemen's parades and other parades.

The Mothers Auxiliary made all the uniforms for that first year. The instruments had been purchased from a disbanded corps. The horns were brass and the wooden drums were painted white. The drums still used the old calfskin heads, so if it ever rained, the heads would sag.

The 1960 season brought more parades. Art Mura was the new drum instructor. A

perfectionist, he liked big drum lines and within three years the Muchachos were marching five snares, five tenors, four bass drums and four cymbals.



(Top to bottom) The first corps in the first parade, 1959; a year later in another local parade in New Jersey; the growing corps at a 1962 parade (photos from the collection of John Haupt).

The highlight of the season occurred at the American Legion State Convention in Wildwood. Since the corps was not in field competition yet, they entered the parade competition. They took first place in the parade and were thrilled.

The color guard, under the direction of Jack Russell, placed fourth in the state color guard competition.

Still primarily a parade corps in 1961, the Muchachos entered

field competition for the first time. Vic Cascella was the new horn instructor. The repertoire included *Adios Muchachos*, *West Point March* as the color presentation.

Peanut Vendor in concert, *I Want My Mama* out of concert and *Mañana* exiting the field.

The only competition they entered that year was the state championships. They took 12th place out of 24 units.

The summer of 1962 was the corps' first full season in competition. The corps director, along with the directors of several other area corps, started the Garden State Circuit. The Muchachos went undefeated in circuit competition and placed sixth at the state title event.

The repertoire included *Never on a Sunday* (off the line), *That's America to Me* (color presentation), *The Gay Ranchero*, *Adios Muchachos*, *Flying Down to Rio*, *Mexican Hat Dance* and *Mañana*.

In 1963, the corps went undefeated in the Garden State Circuit and began putting out feelers by competing in a few shows against the "big boys." They placed sixth in prelims at American Legion Nationals in Miami Beach, FL, and fourth in the finals. They placed fifth in the state contest.

For 1964, the Muchachos said, "Adios" to the Garden State Circuit and hit the road against the likes of Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights, Garfield Cadets and St. Lucy's Cadets.



Eastern Review magazine stated, "Muchachos are ready for that next step. Here's a corps that improves by points, not tenths, year to year."

The corps tried to live up to those high expectations, but usually wound up in the basement. The one consistently strong point was the drum line.

The Muchachos finished second at the American Legion Nationals in Dallas, TX, and fifth again in the state championships.

Tragedy struck the corps in 1964, when a



The Muchachos at the 1963 American Legion Prelims in Miami Beach, FL (photo from the collection of John Haupt).

charter member lost his battle with Hodgkin's disease. The corps marched a competition the day after his death and then stood honor guard over his casket and at his



The Muchachos at the 1966 American Legion Prelims in Washington, D.C. (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).



The Muchachos in a 1963 parade at Atlantic City, NJ, on the boardwalk (photo from the collection of John Haupt).

funeral. He was buried in his uniform. He was only 15.

In 1965, contras and timbales were added, leading to a more powerful, mature sound. *God Bless America* and *Softly as I Leave You* as the exit were new to the repertoire that

year. At the American Legion Nationals in Portland, OR, the Muchachos placed third. The field was incorrectly measured and presented a problem for all corps and it was another fifth place finish at the state championship.

In 1966, the corps added *I Will Follow Him* and *Lonely Bull/Tijuana Taxi* to the repertoire, while keeping *God Bless America* and *Softly*



The Muchachos' contras "relax" during the concert number at a show in the early 1970s (photo by Leo Derlak from the collection of Drum Corps World).

as I Leave You.

The drum line continued to shine and took several top honors. Forty-seven junior corps competed at the American Legion Nationals in Washington, D.C., including many top names from around the country. The corps placed 10th in prelims and did not make the finals. It was a huge disappointment.

The same thing would happen the following year in

1969 at Atlanta, GA, and fourth in 1971 at Houston, TX. Women joined in 1971.

In 1972, under the artistic leadership of Dennis DeLucia, Frank Gerris, Jeff Kievit and invaluable contributions from others, the corps was ready to make its presence known on the national level.

The show opened with percussion and chords from "La Fiesta Mexicana," followed by *Espiritu del Toro*, an original composition written for the Muchachos by Larry Kerchner. Kievit was prominently featured in a soprano solo. The *Passage of Time* drum solo led into *Variations on a Mexican Hat Dance*. The concert medley, *Cowboys and Indians/Go Down Gamblin'*, featured a contra bass solo.

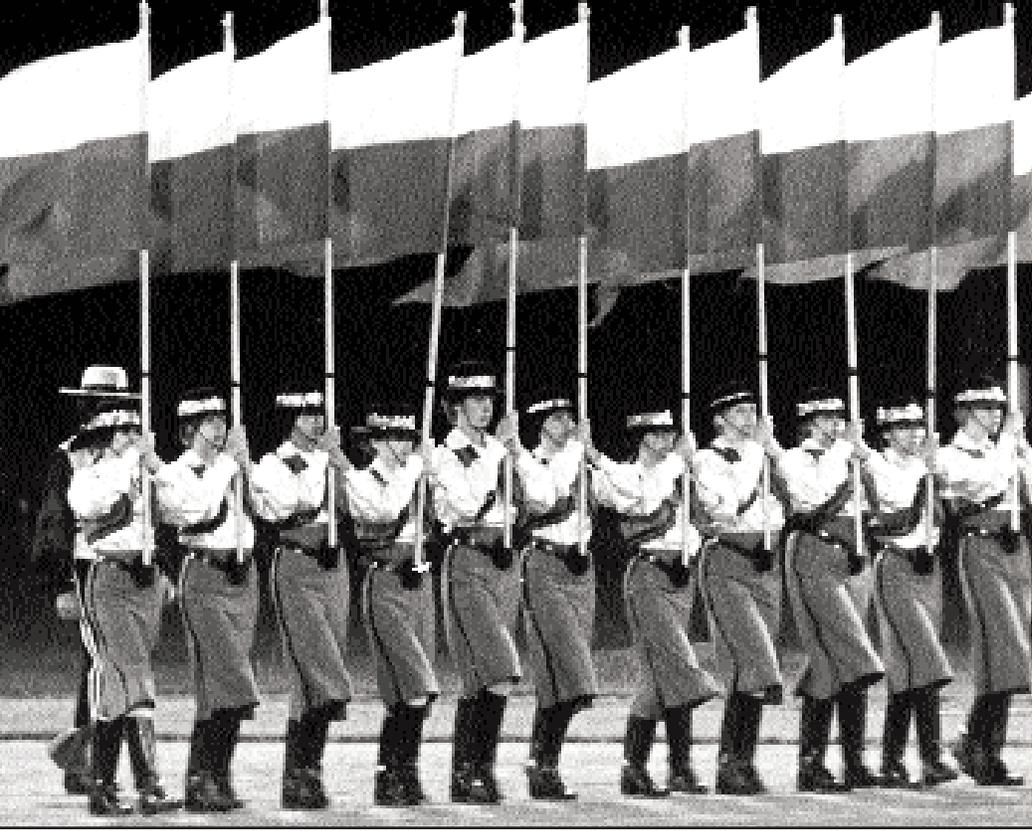
The color presentation, *Prelude and Aztec Dance* from *La Fiesta Mexicana*, tied in thematically to the opening of the show. *Matador* allowed the corps to demonstrate the power of the horn line.

Boston where 55 junior corps made appearances. The Muchachos placed ninth in prelims, but once again were not invited to "the show."

Over the next several years, the corps continued to mature. Many of the original

members were still marching with the corps and this provided a strong base.

Space limitations preclude listing all the repertoires, which can be found on the Web at www.corpsreps.com. The corps placed sixth at the American Legion Nationals in



The Muchachos' flag line in 1974 at DCI Prelims in Ithaca, NY (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Fanfare for the Common Man was used to leave the field and to set up the reprise of *Espiritu del Toro*. The drill for the finale was best described as "the return." Most drills up to and including 1972 had corps standing in

East Coast founding members failed to make the top 12. The Muchachos and St. Andrew's Bridgemen joined the 27th Lancers as the Eastern corps in the DCI top 12. Over the next decade, the Eastern corps would face skepticism about the quality of their programs and the ability of the East Coast corps to compete against the best of the West and Midwest.

The 1973 Muchachos built on the success of the 1972 corps. Chords from "La Fiesta Mexicana" again opened the show. Rule changes allowed the corps to enter the field over a wider range of the backfield, leading to a more dramatic presentation of *Espiritu del Toro*. One of the strongest segments of the show was the new drum solo, *Kouyou Dance*, written by Dennis DeLucia, that was based on African rhythms.

Hoe Down featured successive sections of the horn line. A

spirited version of *Malagueña* was the concert number and Dennis Eschbach was the baritone soloist. Highlights from "Man of La Mancha" were used for the color presentation, which was followed by *Matador*. The corps exited the field playing an adaptation of Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain* that served as the set-up for the return reprise from *Toro*.

The 1973 corps won the

majority of the competitions against its Eastern competitors. The corps went into DCI Finals feeling it had a realistic chance of finishing third. In the DCI Prelims, the corps had an emotionally flat performance and came in fifth, only 0.85 points out of third. Despite a stronger performance in the finals, the Muchachos' score inexplicably fell by three points and finished eighth.

The Muchachos' competition and travel schedule was limited by economics. The organization didn't have the financial resources of the other major corps. The corps was never able to afford its own buses.

To save money, they often competed locally, which allowed the members to drive to the shows. As a result, the corps could not schedule two cross-country tours. In hindsight, this put the Muchachos at a competitive disadvantage, as the corps had few competitions against the best of the West and Midwest prior to DCI Finals. The corps had to continually prove itself to the skeptics.

In 1974, the corps felt it had a score to settle. The show featured a new OTL, *Picturas De España*. This original piece, written for the Muchachos by Kerchner, started with the corps divided into two antiphonal choirs calling to each other. This piece featured an extended solo cadenza by Kievit. *Hoe Down* was lengthened. *Malagueña* once again was the concert number. The new out-of-concert, *Carnival/Marianne*, one of the corps' all-time favorite crowd-pleasers, featured Kievit in an extended solo. During the solo, he would balance on one foot while doing various gyrations.

Concerto de Aranzuez led into *It Was a Very Good Year*. A reprise of *Picturas* ended with a final fanfare. This once again gave the corps the opportunity to let it fly.

The 1974 finals were pandemonium. The corps was stronger than in 1973 and

into finals at Ithaca, NY, feeling they had a shot at winning the championship. The corps was "mis-seeded" in the prelims and instead of competing with the other DCI corps, it competed in the time slots allotted to the non-DCI corps, putting it at a disadvantage. The Muchachos ended up seventh in the prelims. The other East Coast corps did not fare well either.

When the



The Muchachos on June 12, 1976 in Nutley, NJ (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).

the end zone playing their final musical riffs. Frank Gerris realized that the rules did not prohibit the corps from returning to the field from the end zone after the corps had "exited." The distinctive, rousing return was quite a crowd-pleaser.

The competitive highlight of the 1972 season was the corps' first-place finish in the World Open prelims. The corps subsequently finished third in the finals and then finished 10th in the first DCI Finals at Whitewater, WI. The balance of power had shifted when four of the five original DCI



The corps' well-known soprano soloist, Jeff Kievit, in 1975 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

corps arrived at the finals, fans lined up holding banners and the Muchachos were treated as if they were rock stars. Vocal members from other Eastern corps sat in the back stands. They smuggled in a bugle to play the "bull call." If you listen carefully to the recording, you can hear the backstands crowd chanting "East! East!" to spur the Muchachos on and to signal their displeasure with the judging.

To have some fun, the corps played "pick a note" at the beginning of the reprise of *Picturas*. With a spirited performance, the corps jumped from seventh to fourth. Over the course of the 1974 season, the Muchachos had beaten all of the other DCI corps.

The 1975 corps represented the pinnacle of the "power corps." They fielded approximately 135 members (this was before the 128 rule). The level of talent was immense. The show was designed to create walls of sound that would entertain the audience and impress the judges.

The show began with *Picturas De España*, followed by *Pines of the Apian Way*. The piece, symbolic of marching Roman legions, was a perfect showcase for the "in your face" approach. The concert number, Maynard Ferguson's *La Fiesta*, had a challenging

In 1975, there weren't formal "age-out" ceremonies, nor nationally publicized tryout camps. Kids would show up at one of the sessions to try-out with no background checks.

It is well-known that many corps of that era marched overage members, but the enforcement of the eligibility rule was not evenly applied.

Director McAuliffe is now dead, so we do not have his version of the events. My opinion, confirmed by discussions with others involved with the corps, are that McAuliffe was aware the drummer was overage, but for unknown reasons allowed him to march, with catastrophic results.

The instruction staff was not aware that the drummer was overage. Allowing the drummer to march certainly wasn't done for a competitive advantage as there was a surplus of musicians who wanted to join the corps and he could have been replaced.

Ironically, the drummer could have simply joined the Hawthorne Caballeros instead. The director apparently did not truly realize the consequences of fielding an overage member.

The disqualification ultimately proved to be the death penalty for the Muchachos. The



Les Katzel, marched with the Muchachos from 1973 through 1976 and was a solo baritone. For the past 25 years he has played euphonium in the Johns Hopkins University concert band.

Katzel received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University and MD from the University of Maryland School of Medicine. He is currently an associate professor of medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and clinical director of the Baltimore VA Medical Center Geriatrics Research Education and Clinical Center. He has published more than 60 articles and book chapters in scientific journals and medical text books in the areas of aging and metabolism.

He would like to thank and acknowledge Dallas Niermeyer for introducing him to the world of drum corps; the dedicated staff and members of the Muchachos for all the fond memories; John Haupt for his hard work on the chapter; and his wife, Sylvia, for indulging his passion for drum corps.

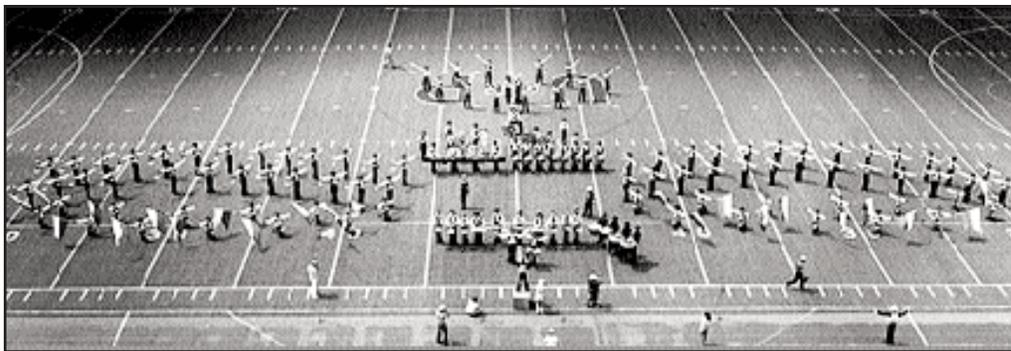
Katzel is still searching for the "holy grail" of Muchachos lore: a copy of the videotape of the Muchachos' 1975 DCI Prelims performance, as well as videos of other Muchachos performances. His e-mail address is: lkatzel@grecc.umaryland.edu.



John "Jack" Haupt grew up in Ridgewood, NJ, encountering drum corps through a friend of his father who marched in the Caballeros. He was a member of the Muchachos from the first day in January 1959 to August 1967 when he went away to school in Texas.

He received a degree in music education and later an elementary certification. He earned a masters degree in education with an emphasis in mathematics from the University of Missouri, Kansas City. He and his wife, Julie, live in Olathe, KS, where he teaches in the Shawnee Mission District.

In 1988, he reconnected with drum corps at DCI in Kansas City. Since then, he and his wife have become fans and attend as many shows as they can each summer. His e-mail address is: jhaupt4@comcast.net.



The Muchachos in 1975 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Les Katzel).

screach soprano duet, followed by *Carnival/Marianne*. The drum solo was DeLucia's masterpiece, *Ritual*. *Concerto De Aranjuez* set up the reprise of *Picturas*.

All the elements came together in 1975. As part of the mental preparation, during the season the huge horn line would stand silently in a circle meditating, visualizing the perfect performance at DCI Finals.

The corps went into the prelims ready to duke it out with Madison for the championship. Their performance at the prelims was sizzling.

Members were told unofficially that they had broken 90 and would have come in first at the prelims, but would not compete for the championship.

As the corps was exiting the field, one of the drummers was pulled aside and his age was challenged. DCI determined that he was overage and the corps was disqualified. The corps members were devastated as their dreams of a national championship went down the drain.

How could this have happened? The events must be viewed in the context of the times.

corps had counted on prize money from the finals and other prize money they were owed was forfeited, making their precarious financial situation worse.

The 1976 season was a rebuilding year. The corps finished 21st at DCI in Philadelphia, but couldn't overcome the psychological and financial blows from the disqualification, folding after the 1977 season.

The creative spirit of the Muchachos lives on. DeLucia brought his magic to the Bayonne Bridgemen and to other corps.

Gerris is now president of the Hawthorne Caballeros.

Kievit is a professional musician. He recorded a tribute to the Muchachos on his "For Once" CD. On the CD is the special version of the *Picturas* cadenza that he was saving for the 1975 finals. Listen to it, to hear what you missed.

The Muchachos in 1976 (photo by Elinn Cefaratti from the collection of Drum Corps World).

