
by Frank Dorritie and Fran Haring

With seven national titles to their credit, the Sunrisers have put up some of the most impressive statistics in senior drum corps.

Their fascinating early history is related by John Hodge, a member of the Sunriser Hall of Fame: "It began in 1950 at a Marine Corps League meeting in Lakeview, West Hempstead, Long Island. Being gung-ho with still the Marine Corps blood in my veins from World War II and anxious to promote youthful projects for my organization, I made a motion on the floor of a meeting to organize the Marines Memorial Drum Corps of Nassau County. Ed McAvoy, a drummer, and Ed Ryan, bugle man, offered to assist me.

"Our first instruments were purchased from the Hempstead Fire Department: four snare drums, two bass, 15 G-bugles, cymbals, etc., for \$140. But by 1953, it was too much for the youngsters to handle. I started thinking big. I sent word out announcing the formation of a senior corps. It wasn't long before my phone started ringing at home! Former players from pre-war corps had moved to Long Island and wanted to be a part of this new group!

"It was in the spring of 1953 when I first met Ray Nichols, a

Sunrisers

Lillian Linde, Howard Larsen and me -- made in Nassau County colors: orange, blue and white. Ray Nichols had written some new French music. To honor this music, blue berets were the new headgear for the corps.

"One evening in 1954, while sitting home studying my baritone parts, I jumped up from my chair to turn the radio up loud. What I heard was Les Paul and Mary Ford playing *The World is Waiting for the Sunrise*. I grabbed my phone and called Ray Nichols. 'Ray!' I said, 'I have a terrific idea! How about a new name for the corps?'

"Friday night (rehearsal) came. Out came the announcement. A great ovation came from the members! The new theme came out of Ray's briefcase. There was electricity radiating through the entire corps when they started reading their parts. This is our song. Wherever we played it, people knew that there was only one 'Sunrisers' and that made us feel proud!

"Through the years 1954-1957 the Sunrisers became the most outstanding corps in the Long Island area, being seen in many parades and exhibitions, competing in all standstill competitions and winning all categories.

"Early in 1957, the sponsorship changed to Massapequa Elks Lodge No. 2162. Fred Rose, still manager of the Sunrisers, and Joseph Coppola Sr. of the Elks, had arranged the transfer.

"Enter Cal Myers, drum instructor and former Skyliner member; Howard Healy; Bob Hartman; Dick Vincemuth; and Henry Kunzweiler, from Hollis-Bellaire Drum Corps.

"In 1958, the corps found a new expression: M&M. Now it became a whole new ballgame.

bugle instructor. We had assembled a 12-man horn line, (including) Bill and Lillian Linde, Bob Staudt, Jack Graven, Bill Butner, Ed Dingle, Ray Anderson and me. The new drum instructor was Herb Wier, bass drum instructor was Harry Porfat, and bass drummer from an ancient fife corps, the one and only Fred Rose.

"New valve horns were purchased, as well as drums. New uniforms were designed by

A new instructor was engaged to put the corps on the field -- Jack Dobson from Orangeburg, NY, a retired Navy man and police officer.

"The management had signed us up in the Yankee Circuit and our first show was to be in New Rochelle. Competing against us were the Interstatesmen, Jolly Whalers, Carver Gay Blades, Westshoremans and Marksmen. That show was our 'baptism under fire!'

"The Marksmen won the show, Carver Gay Blades came in second, both were great! They became our incentive to work harder. Our score was 58.2 -- last place! After retreat, all the corps came over to welcome us to the circuit. Consensus was, 'They're a nice corps. We like their little French berets.'" (Hodge, *The Sunrisers Anthology*, Vol. 1,

p.13-16.)

The story of the Sunrisers has always been the story of the music -- what they played and how they played it. The aforementioned "French theme" encouraged exotic repertoire choices like *Mademoiselle de Paree* and Debussy's *Clair de Lune*. But whatever the music, understanding senior drum corps requires recognizing the sheer intensity of truly passionate performance.

An exquisite example is the Sunrisers' recording from the 1963 World Open. Strong as the competition had been in the Yankee and Northeastern circuits, the corps had never been tested in a contest of this magnitude. Deep commitment to the music can be felt throughout, but nowhere more strongly than in *Sing, Sing, Sing* -- the soloists and ensemble vying with and challenging each other to a spectacular climax and riotous crowd reaction.

But who were these guys, exactly? The majority of the 1963 corps remained veterans like Bill Costello, Al and Marty Beck and the others who had nurtured the Sunrisers from parade to field status. But the corps landscape in the New York area was changing in the early 1960s. Of the four great juniors on the classic "Brass by Night" album, only the Selden Cadets were still on the field by 1964; the Queensmen, Loretto Knights and Floyd Bennett Golden Eagles had passed into history.

There was no scarcity of talent since many of those former juniors had yet to be cordially invited to the service by the draft board and, pending that, were available for senior corps action. Some of the most intrepid looked east toward Long Island, which at first glance might have seemed like drum corps Siberia.

There was something out there: a feisty senior corps, directed by the visionary Fred Rose and taught by three former Queensmen -- John Sasso, Bill Hightower and Orus Cavnor. They were soon to be joined by the likes of the legendary French horn soloist Steve Buglino of Floyd Bennett, with several other great players in his entourage, including Brian O'Connell, Skip Heaney and Paul Calcagno.

The Sunrisers were on a roll and by the time they left the prelims field at Roosevelt Stadium that bright September day, they were in third place, ahead of such powerhouses as the Syracuse Brigadiers, Springfield Marksmen and Carver. That performance, complete with a Billy Cobham-does-Krupa drum solo, was a major turning



Sunrisers, October 5, 1958, in Freeport, NY (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Sunrisers, June 10, 1967, in Stratford, CT (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Sunrisers, September 6, 1964, at the Northeast Circuit Championships in Agawam, MA, for a Cobham, Hightower duet during *Sing, Sing, Sing* (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).



point for the corps.

In the following seasons they rose through the Northeastern and Interstate circuits, and in their first appearance at DCA in 1966, they were 1.1 from first, ahead of the great Hawthorne Caballeros. By 1968, the Sunrisers were American Legion Champions and were contending for the DCA title.

Senior corps and Grand Opera share quite a few parallels: high drama, intrigue and superstars, for instance. Some very prominent personalities were connected to the Sunrisers during this period. Vinny Ratford had a high profile in the drill world, having developed winning visual programs at Syracuse and Springfield, among others. He assumed the M&M command in 1965 and is remembered for his brilliance, energy and not least, eccentricity.

It is said one learns to perform only by observing other performers. Ratford could pack more personality into a raised eyebrow than most of us will see in a lifetime. He took the Sunrisers from black and white to color even as Sasso's charts moved drum corps arranging from the mono era into the stereo.

Two other drill masters



Sunrisers, July 12, 1980, at Giants Stadium (photo by Joseph Zepko from the collection of Drum Corps World).

of the 1960s had dramatic success in converting the Sunrisers from farmers to marchers: Jack Dobson and Joe Mason, both no-nonsense, hands-on guys with great instincts and "teacherly" skills. "If you don't feel confident after an hour with these guys," said Sal Crimi, "you need a psychiatrist."

Cavnor was Sun's drum chief from 1961-1968. A student of the great Bobby Thompson (like Dennis DeLucia after him), Orus moved easily from caption head at St. Catherine's to the Sunrisers, bringing more than a few Queensmen alumni with him. His scoring behind the brass and his demanding solo work offer a concise view into the evolution of field drumming, from 1963's *Defile*, with its rudimental military style, to the early experiments with tuned percussion, to the symphonic approach in 1968's *An American in Paris*.

Great writers notwithstanding, it's the players who actually make the music, and the



Sunrisers, June 16, 1978 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

two most influential performers throughout the 1960s were Frank Diliberto and Ted Sasso. Their collective talent was awesome. Diliberto's Fleetwood-documented solo introducing *Sing, Sing* at the 1965 Bucknell show is standard-setting. Ted Sasso is often referred to as the godfather of the contra for pushing the limits of that instrument in solo and ensemble playing.

But lots of musicians can play. These two had the added qualities of determination and generosity. The rest of us learned from the former and benefited from the latter.

Ted Sasso and Diliberto ran sectionals,

We headed single-file toward our assembly point in an alley off 57th Street and passed the Hurricanes' arc in the parking lot. We cheered them. They cheered us. Everyone understood the significance of this show.

The drums loaded in through a bay, but all the horns had to snake their way up a narrow spiral staircase leading to the wings. Bill Fulsom and Ted Sasso joked about negotiating this maze carrying contras.

At the top of the stairs, we were hurriedly but silently directed to our formation behind a tall beige curtain. Someone was speaking to the house, but it seemed far away and unconnected. Oddly hushed commands came in rapid succession: "Ten-hut! Dress center, dress! Ready, front!"

Suddenly, the curtain opened and spots and footlights nearly blinded us. Squinting, I could make out the edge of the stage, boom stands holding Dick Blake's microphones and finally, the people in the balconies that seemed stacked one upon the other to the sky.

It was May 18, 1963; I was 16 years old and standing on stage at Carnegie Hall.

Frank Dorritie, Sunriser lead soprano, 1963-1973

delivered people to rehearsals, copied music, gave private lessons and taught most of the junior corps on Long Island. Many members of these other corps followed their mentors to the Sunrisers.

A strongly identifiable musical style debuted in 1968 and was refined over the next few seasons. The Sunrisers began a relationship with symphonic music that continues to the present.

Ralph Shur took over the visual department for the 1968 season. His brilliant stroke was the development of, in his words, a "unique and different" movement style, based on a relaxed, controlled 25-inch stride. The concept of technique as applied to ensemble (visual or musical) was in its infancy in drum corps at the time and was virtually non-existent in the senior division.

If John Sasso took his cue from the

Cavaliers and the Royal Airs, Shur looked to the Troopers, not so much for style as for approach. The corps spent the winter adapting stride to 25-inch tape strips on the hanger floor and the summer winning contests.

Though they didn't take home any major prizes,

the 1969 edition of the Sunrisers is generally considered the finest of the decade, for a number of reasons: *Procession of the Nobles*, the first female DCA guard, the introduction of G/F bugles and Gerry Shellmer.

Drum corps' "father of percussion" flat out revolutionized the way drum lines did business and his innovations became the standards of today: timpani, keyboards, multi-drums and melodic percussion features. When asked at a rules convention exactly what he wanted, Shellmer replied, "This," slamming down the complete Deagan, LP and Musser catalogs. "All of it!" He got all of it.

Meanwhile, John Sasso took brass technique to a new plateau. Having studied with Joe Singer, principal horn in the New York Philharmonic under Bernstein, John began incorporating ensemble etudes, exercises and chorales into Sunriser brass training. A certain 1969 rookie lead soprano would one day develop this concept into a formula for unparalleled success. His name was Wayne Downey.

The next couple of seasons saw a "changing of the guard" in staff, management and general direction. Meanwhile, DCA competition was getting tougher. The corps remained strong and quite popular through 1970 and 1971 and put a stamp on some of its most memorable music. *Abraham, Martin and John*, *Hi-De-Ho* and *Norwegian Wood* come to mind.

The 1972 Sunrisers had a sluggish start, but they finished the season with a monumental effort and were probably the most improved corps in DCA that summer. Still, they weren't contending for the gold. A little flirtation with rock and pop music gave some young writers needed experience. Two of these in particular, Gene Bennett and John Arietano, would profoundly influence the future direction of the corps.

Bennett had been the Sunriser guard captain, drum major and drill tech since arriving from the famed George Washington Carver Gay Blades along with Uncle Nick, (Albert Nicholls), Bob Cephus, Ron Isom and Duke Jordan. Jordan became one-third of the spectacular Sun rifle squad that included Vinnie Pesche and Frank Cevasco. (There are no videos, but you can hear the crowd react in *American Salute* 1966 when they throw 11-pound Springfields with bayonets over the

entire horn line.) Bennett became the next great Sunriser drill writer.

A slender lead soprano with an unorthodox embouchure and a screaming upper register, Arietano had been playing in the line since 1966, assisting with brass duties and teaching about two dozen local junior corps, all the while refining his craft as an arranger.

They virtually had to start over, but Bennett and Arietano would eventually help take the Sunrisers to their first DCA championship.

The Sunrisers' fortune began to take a dramatic turn for the better in 1974, with the arrival of Mike DeLorenzo as the corps' new director. "Mr. D" came from the Purple Lancers, a junior corps from New York State that wound up making DCI Finals in 1974.

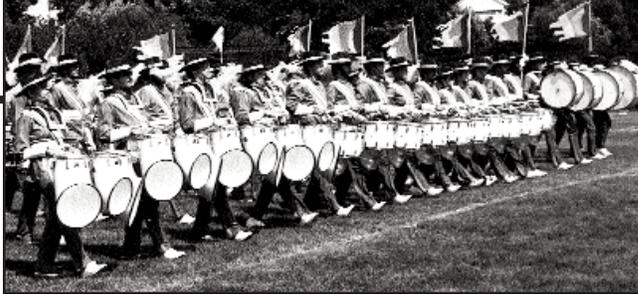
To their credit, the relative handful of people who were still with the Sunrisers decided to work with DeLorenzo to get the corps pointed in the right direction. Sun also began to see an influx of young, talented members from New Jersey, New York City and New York's Westchester County area.

On the competition field in 1974, the Sunrisers struggled with a small horn line, trying to master a difficult brass book. The corps finished eighth at DCA, but seeds were sown for what became the most successful era in Sunriser history.

In 1975, the corps climbed another notch. Bennett was writing the visual show; John Sasso was again heading the brass program; Arietano and Ray Fallon were being given larger roles as brass instructors and arrangers. In a key move, late in the 1975 season, the Sunrisers hired Dennis DeLucia, the guru behind the drum line of the Hawthorne Muchachos, as the corps' percussion coordinator.

Sun's drum line would come to dominate DCA, and during those years the Sunrisers were fortunate to have one of the best percussion staffs around. The mainstay of the in-house staff was Dave Franceschina. Also on board in various years were Brian Callahan, Rich Cesani and Jim Mallen, among others.

In 1976, at Teaneck, NJ -- the first show of the season -- the audience began to buzz as the Sunrisers entered the stadium, sporting new Aussie-style hats. When the corps formed a wedge for its opening "hit" in *Procession of the Nobles*, the crowd erupted in applause, for it was clear that the Sunrisers had arrived as a championship contender. Sun finished a solid third at DCA Finals that summer. The stage was set for what became the most memorable season the corps ever



Sunrisers, August 16, 1981 (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).

experienced.

The hunt for the 1977 DCA title became a two-corps chase, with the Sunrisers nipping at the heels of the Hawthorne Caballeros, beating the Cabs on several occasions and falling short on others. Neither Sun nor the Cabs lost to another corps that season. Sun did battle with a show that combined sophistication with pure audience appeal. The repertoire included *English Folk Song Suite*, *Spain*, *Old Man River*, *Eli's Comin'*, *Dance of the Wind-up Toy* and *Evergreen*.

Bennett, Arietano and DeLucia were show designers and arrangers. The staff included



Sunrisers, September 7, 1987 (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Dave and Pete Franceschina, Cesani, Tom McCarthy, Ted Sasso and Ted Heumann. The personable Tom Hart was drum major.

The corps had a great percussion section, a solid horn line and color guard and a cutting-edge visual show. It was a magical, winning combination. The corps delivered one of its best performances ever at DCA Prelims, beating the Cabs by three points.

That night, Sun performed before a packed house at J. Birney Crum Stadium in Allentown, PA, then nervously awaited the finals results. You could cut the tension with a knife as the announcer intoned, "In second place, with a score of 94.10 . . . the Hawthorne Caballeros!" Sun had done it! "In first place, with a score of 94.15 . . ." Yes, five-hundredths of a point. It was the narrowest of margins, but the Sunrisers were the champs.

"Slow start, big finish" could describe

Sunrisers, 1995, at DCA Prelims (photo by Sid Unser from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Sun's 1978 season. The corps lost its first show, but dropped only two more shows that season and rolled to a successful defense of its DCA title.

The corps got a scare at DCA Prelims, edging the Caballeros by, ironically, .05. But Sun took the night show by nearly three points, winning caption honors for horns, drums, color guard and general effect (including a first-ever perfect score in the GE brass caption).

In 1979, the corps had a big brass section, another outstanding drum line and a strong color guard, but some of the magic was missing and Sun fell short in a bid for a "three-peat." However, the corps did not go down without a fight, delivering a great performance at DCA Prelims that had the audience roaring from start to finish. In the end, it was not enough. The Sunrisers finished third at finals, but took home another percussion trophy.

The summer of 1980 was a rebuilding year. Several long time members moved on and DeLorenzo and Bennett retired. Veteran Sunriser Len Haring Jr. took over as director, and the corps hired Bobby Hoffman of Bayonne Bridgemen fame to write the 1980 drill. Thankfully, Sun's magnificent drum line carried the corps through a "down" year, finishing second at DCA Finals.

From the pen of brass arranger Arietano came a version of *Send in the Clowns* that became a Sunriser classic. Also, Dennis Dewey came on board as brass coordinator for the corps, which finished in sixth place at DCA Finals. That night, Sun also was part of what surely is one of the most bizarre incidents in DCA history.

The Westshoremens, performing before Sun, decided to release a flock of birds at the end of their show for added effect. The birds were supposed to fly away into the night. One problem: they didn't! So here were the Sunrisers, lined up in their starting position, waiting for officials from the Westshoremens and DCA to clear the field of the flock of grounded birds.

Anyone who was there that night will never forget the sight of DCA judge Walter Kelly firing his starters' pistol in an effort to get the birds to move!

True to their tradition, the Sunrisers "shook things up a bit" in 1981, debuting a bright new uniform of orange tunic-style tops and blue pants and a bright new show featuring pop, jazz and Broadway tunes. Sun once again was led by their monster drum line, which took home the percussion trophy at DCA Finals, and the corps placed a close second overall.

In 1982 and 1983, the Sunrisers returned to championship form, winning the corps' third and fourth DCA titles. In 1982, the corps overcame a slow start, eventually passing the front-running Westshoremens and winning DCA Finals by nearly two points. Sun's percussion section once again won top honors.

In 1983, the corps lost only its first

show, capping a great summer with a fourth title. Sun swept to victory that season with a balanced corps, winning trophies for horns, drums, general effect and color guard at DCA Finals. This meant that the corps' dominating percussion section had finished as the best in DCA for six of the previous



Sunrises, September 5, 1992, at DCA Finals (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).

seven seasons. The 1983 percussion section very well might have been the best of all those great Sunriser lines. At DCA Finals that year, the corps' snare line accomplished something that was nearly impossible to do: it turned in a "tick-less" performance.

However, 1983 also marked the end of an era for the Sunrises. Brass coordinator Dewey had left the corps after 1982; when the 1983 summer ended, percussion coordinator DeLucia and brass arranger/instructor Arietano moved on, joining the staff of the Caballeros. The corps retained a nucleus of veteran members, but it was not enough to put the Sunrises in the title hunt for 1984 and the corps finished fourth at DCA Finals.

Once again, the Sunrises decided to stir the pot a bit. The corps unveiled a cutting-edge show in 1985 featuring a fast-paced visual program and also moved to New Jersey after many years on Long Island. The corps wowed the crowd at the 1985 DCA Championships en route to a third-place finish. In 1986, the corps' "Fiddler on the Roof" show took a while to jell and Sun ended up in sixth place. But again the groundwork was being laid for future success.

The 1987 season will be remembered as the "rainout year" at DCA. Rain fell all day during the preliminary competition and by the time the Sunrises took the field the grass surface more closely resembled a mud pit. That didn't stop Sun from putting on one of the most amazing performances in the corps' history, marching and playing as if the field was completely dry. Sun won prelims by nearly two points. That result netted the corps another DCA title, since the finals show was canceled due to field conditions.

The Sunrises were strong in 1988. Now under the direction of long time member Gary Williams, Sun drew standing ovations all season long with a crowd-appealing show. But the Bushwackers from Harrison, NJ, closed the gap on Sun and the two corps made history at DCA Finals by tying for the top spot, the sixth DCA title for the Sunrises.

The 1989 season started out as a great one and ended in disappointment. The corps was hot all summer, dazzling audiences with a full-throttle George Zingali visual show and entertaining repertoire. At DCA Finals, Sun delivered a terrific performance, but again ended up in a tie with the Bushwackers. However, under a new DCA tie-breaker system, Bush was awarded the championship by one-tenth over the Sunrises.

After coming oh-so-close in 1989, the Sunrises faced a tough road. Many members from the 1989 corps moved on. In 1990, the corps fell to ninth place at DCA Finals, but they gave a determined effort. Drum Major Tony Cataneo summed it up best at the beginning of the performance when he turned to the audience and shouted, "We may be down, but we're not out . . . watch this!"

Sun hung on for the 1991 and 1992 seasons. For the first time the corps missed DCA Finals in 1991, finishing 11th in prelims. Sun was back in the finals in 1992 in an expanded 12-corps field, in 12th place.

All the struggles of the past few years had taken a toll and the Sunrises made a tough decision: they would go inactive for the 1993 season. However, several members and some Sun alumni formed a "mini-corps" (20 members or less) to compete at the individual and ensemble show during DCA weekend. The mini-corps was warmly received by the audience, which was happy to see that the "Sun" had not set after all.

The Sunrises now had hope for the future, but the 1993-1994 period also was a time of sadness. The Sunriser family was shaken by the untimely death of longtime drum major Cataneo. His sister Rose, a veteran member of Sun's color guard, took his place on the drum majors' podium when the corps returned to action in 1994.

Thanks to the determination of Williams and a nucleus of members, the Sunrises clawed their way back onto the competition field in 1994 with a 12th-place finish at DCA Prelims and an exhibition performance at finals. The never-say-die Sunrises once again set out to climb the DCA ladder. In 1995, the corps regained its finalist position with a ninth-place finish. In 1996, the corps won the fans' hearts with their "Les Miserables" show and the color guard took top honors at DCA Finals. The corps finished sixth that night.

The show the Sunrises put on at the 1997 DCA Finals ranked up there with the best performances in their history. Sun powered to a fourth-place finish with a sophisticated, hard-driving program of David Holsinger tunes, highlighted by another great performance from the corps' color guard.

Sun fielded a smaller but determined corps in 1998, finishing the season in sixth place with an audience-friendly show of Russian music. In 1999, some of that old Sunriser magic was present at DCA Finals. The corps put on an emotionally charged performance in a driving rainstorm and finished in eighth place, once again led by a magnificent color guard which captured the

"Best Color Guard" trophy that night.

In 2000, Sun once again made the difficult decision to not field a corps and remained inactive in 2001 and 2002. The corps plans to return in 2003.

The Sunrises' name brings memories of one of the most unique, refreshing, innovative and successful corps in drum corps history. Here's hoping the "Sun" shines brightly for years to come.



Sunrises, 1998 (photo by Ron Walloch from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Frank Dorritie is a performer, producer and arranger. His credits include work with Cal Tjader, Wynton Marsalis, Laurindo Almeida, Art Blakey and Dave Brubeck, among others. Nine of his recordings have received

Grammy nominations; two won Grammys.

His drum corps performance began at Xavier High School in New York City and included St. Catherine's Queensmen (1961-1962) and the Sunrises (1963-1973). He has instructed and/or arranged for the Garfield Cadets, Santa Clara Vanguard, Blue Devils, Bridgemen, Madison Scouts, Cavaliers, Bluecoats, Freelancers, Hurricanes, Westshoremens and a host of others as well as marching and stage bands.

Dorritie chairs the recording arts department at Los Medanos College and has authored two books, "Essentials of Music for Audio Professionals" and "The Handbook of Field Recording." His trumpet playing is featured on Patrick Palomo's CD, "Conversations and Monologues."



Fran Haring has been involved with drum corps in one way or another since the late 1960s. He marched from 1971-1976 with the junior Sacred Heart Crusaders from Manville, NJ, and from 1977-1982 with the senior

Long Island Sunrises.

Since 1983, he has been an announcer at a variety of senior and junior shows on the East Coast, including the DCA Championships every year. He also is a writer for Drum Corps World.

Haring has been married to Barbara, a former member of the Westshoremens, since 1991. The two met at DCA in 1988.

A native of New Jersey now living in Baltimore, Haring has worked as a radio newscaster and public affairs director, as well as a section editor for USA TODAY's online newspaper. He is currently pursuing freelance media opportunities.