

# From Single Valves to DCI to Marching Brass.



How Zig Kanstul drove innovation and defined the course of marching brass development from the 1960s to the present day. *By Jack Kanstul*

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**Small Beginnings:** The year was 1961. My brother Ziggy joined the Anaheim Scouts Troop 72. They had a drum & bugle corps. Back then, drum corps played on horizontal piston bugles in the Key of G, with a piston to D. Ziggy's bugle was a Slingerland, and he brought it home to practice. At the time, my father—Zig Kanstul—was in charge of running the F.E. Olds & Son Band Instrument Company, renowned for making the best brass in the world. My father took one look at that bugle and knew we needed help.

**As a musician,** my father was a drummer. He had been a pick-up drummer in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area during the Second World War, playing with the likes of Hank Williams Sr. and others who came through the area. So he volunteered to instruct the Scouts' drumline. In the meantime, he started helping the hornline by making G bugles at the Olds Factory in his spare time. Rather than making G/D piston bugles which were popular at the time, my father designed the very 1st G/F piston bugles, and then as rotors were being allowed, added the F# rotor. Now you had a bugle that could play most notes—the piston being like the 1st valve on a trumpet and the rotor being like the 2nd valve. This led to the rule change—with the help of Don Warren, Zig Kanstul and Jim Jones—for the American Legion and VFW to allow G/F bugles in 1967. Now, all corps would be enabled to reach a higher level of musical performance. All thanks to Zig Kanstul.

Also, at this time our family left the Scouts to help form the Velvet Knights in 1963. The Velvet Knights were instrumental in leading the way for the West Coast dominance

of drum & bugles corps by being invited to attend Drum Corps Digest's Fantasy in Brass at the Chicago Opera House in 1968. The corps was hosted and housed by the



*Left: The Velvet Knights, a strong west coast drum and bugle corps from Buena Park, California, have worked extensively with the F.E. Olds factory in testing the Ultratone bugle under competitive conditions. Right: The Troopers of Casper, Wyoming, VFW National Champions in 1966 and holders of the Worlds Open Championship 1969. The bugle section is equipped with Olds Ultratone Bugles. (Photos and caption: The Olds Ultratone Bugle brochure, 1970)*

Chicago Cavaliers. This led to my father's closer association with Don Warren, Director and Founder of the Cavaliers, and Larry McCormick who was the Cavaliers drum instructor.

At the same time, while Zig Kanstul was changing the way drum corps sound with his innovative G/F/F# bugles for Olds, he was about to set the stage for the way marching bands and drum corps would sound forever.

## Kanstul Sets the Stage

Up to this point the only specific instrument made just for



*The Cavaliers of Chicago, the most winning junior drum and bugle corps of all-time. Among their extensive and impressive list of victories are nine national championships, one international championship and the World Open Championship. The Cavalier bugle section is equipped with Olds Utratone bugles. (Photo and caption: The Olds Utratone Bugle brochure, 1970)*

the marching band had been the marching mellophone and the pitch, like their predecessor the mellophonium that Stan Kenton used, was less than desirable. They had no pitch center so you could lip it up or down. You really had to work hard to make it play in tune. That is until one night.

I use to accompany my father sometimes when he went to Olds at night to work on the Velvet Knights' G bugles. This particular night he had an idea. He pulled down a Kenton Mellophonium they had hanging on the rack, went to the scrap bell bin, pulled out a scrap flugelhorn bell, cut it off and crammed it into the mellophonium bell and said, "Here try this." It really helped to give some pitch center to the horn. This led to his innovative mellophone bell design—which other companies have since copied. So now we have marching mellophones that slot with a pitch center. All thanks to Zig Kanstul.

At the same time, Zig was finishing the first set of G/F/F# bugles which the Velvet Knights premiered at their Chicago Opera House performance. However, he was about to come up with an idea that would go down in the annals of brass-wind history as the most significant contribution to the modern day marching band and drum corps: *Marching Brass*.

## Kanstul: Creator of Marching Brass

Of course it wasn't at first called "marching brass." That is the name the industry dubbed it after my father had created it. The idea came about like this...

After our highly received Chicago Opera House premier (complete with a standing ovation) and our stay and subsequent closer contact with Don Warren and Larry McCormick of the Cavaliers, the stage was set for Olds to not only dominate the bugle market but to launch the premier of Zig Kanstul-designed Olds bell-front Bb/F marching band instruments.

Because of our family's close association with the drum and bugle corps, my father had suggested to the management of Olds that they consider making bell-front Bb marching instruments for the marching band, similar to what the corps used. After all, it made sense; why let the sound go down to the ground like a concert French horn or up into the sky like a concert baritone? Just like with the corps, the sound should go to the stands—straight to the audience. They thought it sounded logical so they asked him to design some bell-front instruments.

So in 1969, the F.E. Olds & Son company offered the first *Marching Brass*: a *Marching Mellophone* (that played in tune, with well-slotted notes, due to my father's innovative bell design), and a *Marching Baritone* (which tooling Bach later purchased in 1979 when Olds was liquidated). Of course, this needed some help to get going—both the new G/F/F# bugles and the new bell-front Bb band instruments. That is where our association with the Chicago Cavaliers and Larry McCormick came in.

As mentioned, Larry was the drum instructor for the world famous Chicago Cavaliers—at the time the most winning drum corps with 9 national championships to their name. Larry decided to start his extremely successful business, McCormick's Enterprise, in 1969, which helped to sell both the Olds Ultratone G bugles as well as Olds Bb/F bell-front instruments to the marching bands. With the Cavaliers and Larry's good reputation behind them, the corps and bands were willing to take a look. Once they heard the superior sound of the Olds G bugles and Bb marching instruments, the instruments took the market by storm. So much so that many of the other manufacturers saw the market potential for bell-front marching band instruments and jumped on the bandwagon—copying Olds and dubbing it *Marching Brass*. All thanks to Zig Kanstul.

Now the stage was set for Zig to bring about an even bigger change in the band and drum corps field of activity.



## Kanstul Goes Full Circle

The year 1971 saw the beginnings of what would eventually take Zig Kanstul and drum corps full circle—the formation of Drum Corps International—more commonly known as DCI. The first DCI Championship was held in 1972 in Whitewater, Wisconsin. It was won by the Anaheim Kingsmen, who interestingly enough came from the same Troop 72 Scout group that my father had left, with others, years before to form the Velvet Knights. Also, as more and more kids from drum corps went to college, many of them graduated as band directors, and bands starting looking and sounding more like drum corps. DCI allowed the corps more room to innovate and create, so of course they got better artistically and the musicality continued to develop to a higher level. This called for better instruments, and Zig Kanstul was up to that challenge.

also designed a marching French horn for King, which he later would perfect under the Custom Class line of Bb/F marching brass. So optimized was this marching French horn in Bb that one of the Santa Clara Vanguard players who was studying with Vince de Rosa in Hollywood let him try it. Vince's comment on the horn: "That's the only French horn I've ever played that plays in tune without having to stick your hand in the bell!" Good thing, as it is a bell front instrument (with an innovative angled leadpipe to accommodate a true French horn embouchure—pictured on title page). Zig would also later design the first G euphonium bugle under the Custom Class name for Kanstul Musical Instruments.

But just as the corps were getting ready to go full circle to Bb/F, so was Zig Kanstul. Never content with resting on his laurels, Zig entered into the most challenging and



(Photo: *The Olds Utratone Bugle brochure*, 1970)

By this time my father had left Olds to become Vice President of King in charge of the Benge Division, located in Anaheim, California. Benge was known for making some of the finest trumpets in the world. Under my father, they got even better. As the corps switched to 2 vertical upright valve bugles in 1977 and with Olds heading into decline for unrelated business reasons, my father was able to help King get into the G bugle business—first by making them under the name American Command bugles at the Benge factory and later as King K-line G bugles. These were improvements on his Olds designs and the first choice for the top corps to play. My father ran the Benge factory for King from 1971 to 1978. While running Benge for King, he was also asked to design King's line of marching brass. So again, he put his talent to work to make the finest marching brass available at the time under the King brand name. He added to their line his innovative design for a marching trombone that later was dubbed a "flugelbone." He

rewarding phase of his career as a horn designer and builder by starting his own company—Kanstul Musical Instruments—in 1981. Zig did this by building horns for the Boosey & Hawkes Company of England, and bringing back the world renowned F. Besson Trumpet, to which Boosey owned the name rights at the time. The venture was hugely successful, allowing my father to make a line of his own instruments under the Kanstul Brand name.

While this was all going on, DCI continued to let the corps develop, and with new rule changes in 1990 allowed 3-valve bugles to be phased in by sections over a 3 year period. This allowed for a complete chromatic scale, and the ability musically to write and play anything. Now the corps could really create. But to create to the high level they desired called for "concert quality" instruments. The type that professional musicians in orchestras around the world were accustomed to. Over the decades, my father had developed a close association with world class brass

instructors—like Wayne Downey of the Blue Devils—and so in collaboration with Wayne and others in the field, like Jack Meehan, he designed the Ultimate G Bugles: Kanstul



THE OLDS *ULTRATONE BUGLE*

(Photo: The Olds Ultratone Bugle brochure, 1970)

Custom Class—and by extension came Kanstul Custom Class Bb/F Marching Brass. These instruments included on most models a Zig Kanstul innovative feature called “Tune Any Note,” which was an adjustable tuning slide on the open horn that allowed for on-the-spot tuning of the entire instrument while playing. So incredible was the sound of these instruments that both dominant West Coast corps—Blue Devils and Santa Clara Vanguard—ended up with a complete set, and won almost half of the

DCI Championships on them in the 90's. Not to be outdone were the Cadets and Cavaliers, who had a large number of Kanstul Custom Class G Bugles throughout their lines. A testament to the quality of these instruments is the fact that 70% of the competing Open Class corps played on Kanstul G Bugles. Also joining the list on the Kanstul Custom Class Bb/F versions was the famous Carmel High School Greyhounds Marching Band from Carmel, Indiana, under the direction of the renowned Richard Saucedo, who purchased a complete line of Kanstul Custom Class Bb/F Marching Brass from Paige's Music in 1995.

By this same time in the 90's, the Kanstul factory in Anaheim, California was growing rapidly, to the point where it was producing a full line of trumpets, cornets and flugel-horns. Jack Kanstul became the first sales manager for the company from 1994 to 1996, then continuing on his own as Kanstul Music for 17 years, selling exclusively the Kanstul brand instruments all over the world. He finally returned in December of 2013 to his former position as the company's Sales Manager. During this time, under Zig Kanstul's direction, the company had continued to expand its line of instruments so that today, Kanstul Musical Instruments is the only American manufacturer to offer the complete line of brasswinds—from the Trumpet to the Tuba—all 100% Made in America, with no outsourcing of any kind. All this has come about from Zig...making bugles in his spare time for the kids in the corps...helping them to play better and to a higher degree of musicality than ever before.

All thanks to Zig Kanstul—Hornmaker Extraordinaire.



#### Take a virtual factory tour!

Visit to see the video on Kanstul Musical Instruments produced by the City of Anaheim.



**About Jack Kanstul:** With the “brass in his blood” that would come from being one of Zig Kanstul's three sons, Jack brings the perspective of living through these historic developments in the industry, along with a love for the musicality of the instruments. Starting out with one of those single-valve G/D bugles, he's been a lifelong trumpet player, having studied with Harold “Pappy” Mitchell, James Stamp and Claude Gordon. Jack manages sales for Kanstul Musical Instruments. Jack's brother, Mark Kanstul, oversees manufacturing.



Nothing *Resonates* like a Kanstul.™



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