

The inspiring performers of **FREE Players and Community Living Hamilton** are marching into Indy for World Championships Week.

Special



TALK TO ANY DRUM CORPS performer, and you'll find a person who loves a challenge. By the time they reach the World Championships in Indianapolis each year, every member has conquered his or her personal limitations countless times.

On August 9-11, DCI's elite will get a chance to share the Championship Week spotlight with marching musicians who must overcome their own set of challenges. Comprised of performers with special needs, Old Bethpage, N.Y.'s FREE Players Drum & Bugle Corps and Hamilton Ontario's Community Living Hamilton (CLH) Drum Corps are coming to Indianapolis to take part in several exhibitions and Saturday's SoundSport International Music and Food Festival.

"We are so honored that DCI looked north into Canada and were impressed enough to invite us down to compete in DrumLine Battle," says CLH director Robyn Garnier. "Ever since we received the invitation, it's been countdown to Indy. Our members are super stoked."

"Since the beginning, DrumLine Battle and SoundSport have been about giving more performers a chance to become part of our wider musical community," says DCI senior director of business development John



By Stephanie Susnjara

DEDICATION

DeNovi. “These outstanding ensembles show that differently abled performers have plenty to contribute to the marching arts— we can’t wait to see them in Indy.”

While the World Championships in August will mark the first DCI event for the CLH Drum Corps, the FREE Players made their DCI debut in 2015 at the Eastern Classic in Allentown, Pa., where they performed their program, *The Ice Kingdom*, inspired by the Disney film *Frozen*. “We got to perform right after the [18-time World Champion] Blue Devils,” says FREE Players director Brian Calhoun. “It was an incredible experience.”

The FREE Players was the first drum & bugle corps of its kind in the United States. Founded by Calhoun in 2010, the corps started out with five members as part of the theater program at Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (FREE), a not-for-profit agency for people with autism, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, traumatic injury, and other disabilities. Eight years later, the FREE Players have expanded to 70-80 members, 90 percent of whom are in their 20s to early 30s. The corps is comprised of five sections: a drum line, color guard, front ensemble, woodwinds, and, brand new to 2018, a brass section, which will be debuting at the August event.

“We have traveled and performed at world class events across the country, making history each and every time we go, breaking down boundaries and raising the bar for human potential,” says Calhoun, noting that the group has performed at the WGI Percussion World Championships, the DCI Eastern Classic, the US Bands NY State Championships, the *Newsday* Marching Band Festival, the Roxbury Marching Band Classic, the WGI Eastern Color Guard Championships, the NYC Columbus Day Parade, the Battle in the Apple, and at Walt DisneyWorld. “It’s just been such an incredible journey.”

Like the FREE Players, the CLH Drum Corps is also affiliated with a not-for-profit parent organization. Community Living Hamilton is an agency that works with and on behalf of individuals with intellectual disabilities. The CLH Drum Corps is an all-inclusive competitive drum corps—that is, it’s comprised of members both with and without disabilities—and is the longest running organization of its kind.

“We are one,” says Garnier, who has been Direct Support Facilitator at Community Living Hamilton since 1989. “And we always hold true to our philosophy—to celebrate life experience, inclusion, and fun.” The drum corps program’s roots go back to 2003, when Garnier put a drum line of six special needs individuals together to help celebrate Community Living Hamilton’s 50th Anniversary.



Images 1, 3, 4, 6: The FREE Players prepare for Indianapolis 2018, the group’s first DCI appearance since performing at Allentown in 2015 (**6**). **Images 2 and 5:** Community Living Hamilton’s award-winning drum corps prepares to travel from Canada for its first DCI appearance.

Special DEDICATION

Robyn Garnier (top) rekindled her lifelong love of marching music by launching the CLH Drum Corps program.

For Garnier, bringing drum corps to CLH stems from deep roots. Her parents met while marching in competing corps, and she marched with a number of highly competitive corps, culminating with the Royal Canadian Air Force Band, where she played quads. "Then work life happened, and marching ended," Garnier says. "But then I thought marching could be a great way for our population at Community Living to get out from behind closed doors and participate in the mainstream."

Today, the CLH Drum Corps has 50 members, ranging in age from 23-71. They perform as a full corps that includes a banner, honor guard, spinning flag line, and small waving flag line. The drum line consists of eight snares, two quints, five tenors, five basses, and 11 cymbals. The front ensemble includes a xylophone, a vibraphone, and some Glockenspiels.

Frequently in demand at events throughout the area, the group has won several competitions in southern Ontario and was recognized as the 2015, 2016, and 2017 DrumLine Ontario Festival Champions as well as the SO-MAC 2018 Percussion Independent "A" Stand Still Provincial Champions.

Like Garnier, Calhoun's work at FREE was influenced by both music and family background. He spent his early career as a touring drummer. Inspired by his brother, who has autism, he often volunteered with special needs individuals. When he decided to get off the road and settle down to family life, Calhoun discovered FREE's theater program and found a new musical home. "It's been the perfect marriage for me," he says. "While we have other instructors on staff, I am still very hands-on with every section of the corps."

Thanks to the success of the FREE Players, Calhoun has been invited to advise drum corps programs for people with special needs in other states and overseas.

"This [the DCI World Championships] is by far our biggest undertaking, to fly 80-90 members halfway across the country," says Calhoun, who notes that traveling with FREE



members presents logistical challenges not faced by typical drum corps groups—like additional support staff, nurses, and more.

"It's not just get on a bus and go," adds Garnier, "We have a lot of things to think about, such as managing chronic medical issues."

To cover expenses, not to mention equipment and instrument costs, both of the FREE Players and CLH Drum Corps' programs rely on sponsorships, donations, and fundraising efforts.

While Calhoun and Garnier have spoken on the phone in the past, the 2018 World Championships will be their first in-person encounter. "We are excited to meet up with the FREE Players," says Garnier. "Although we are going there to compete, it is also about exposure and meeting new people. Hopefully some friendships can develop between our members."

In addition to competing in DrumLine Battle, both groups will perform in exhibitions throughout the week—including at several special events in and around Lucas Oil Stadium.

CLH will play their award-winning show, *Through the Years*, which celebrates their 15th

anniversary and features the musical selections "Ode to Joy," "Land of Oz," "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," "Ding Dong the Witch Is Dead," "Yo De Oh," and "Colonel Bogey."

The FREE Players will be performing their 2018 program, "Against All Odds," inspired by the movie *Rocky*. "Instead of the story being told through the eyes of a boxer, our story's going to be told through the eyes of a musician," says Calhoun. "It's the classic underdog story of somebody nobody believed in, somebody whom society shunned and never had a chance to succeed in their life or told they belong."

For Calhoun, it's a perfect metaphor for both groups. "In real life, we *are* the *Rocky* underdog story," he says. "And we are making history, performing at the DCI Championships amongst the greatest marching artists in the world." 