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# PIPING TODAY



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## THE GLENFIDDICH CHAMPIONSHIP

***Finlay Johnston: A new champion***

**The Battle's O'er**
*Tulsa pipers and drummers commemorate the World War One Armistice*

**The language of leadership**
*A guide to constructive critique in an ensemble setting*

**Alden Biesen Schots Weekend**
*A Scottish cultural event with classy Continental flavours*

**Getting over solo competition anxiety**
*Eating an elephant*

**William Kennedy Piping Festival**
*25th anniversary*

**A year of police piping in America's Heartland**

**Youngstars**
NYPBoS Newsletter No.89

**Grey's Notes**
by Michael Grey
*In praise of Morag (and teachers)*

**Theoretically Speaking**
by Tim Cummings
*Learning tunes by ear – Part 2*

January 2019

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FRONT COVER:
**The Glenfiddich 2018 competitors with winner Finlay Johnston**
See feature on pages 8-14.

Photos: Derek Maxwell

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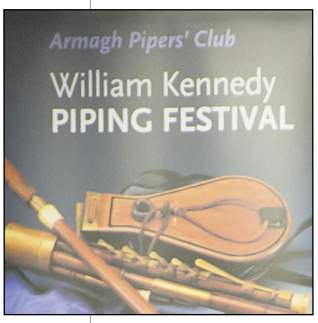
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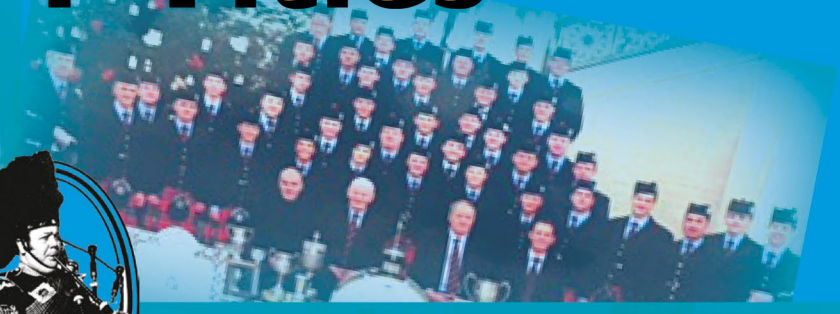
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# Editorial



**IT seems appropriate in this editorial to have a look back over 2018. It really was quite a year for The National Piping Centre and our staff.**

First of all I have to say how proud we are of Finlay Johnston, one of our teachers, for his success in winning the 2018 Glenfiddich Piping Championship. With an outstanding performance of *My Dearest on Earth Give Me Your Kiss* he won the Piobaireachd event and with a third in the March, Strathspey and Reel, he secured the Overall prize.

Within the archives at the Centre we have quite a few photos of a very young Finlay Johnston holding cups and awards at our junior competition and as a young student at our summer school events. It is nice to look at these and see how his dedication and practice has paid off. How time flies! It was also very good to see Finlay pay tribute to his long-time teacher, Ronnie McShannon, who has mentored him through to the pinnacle of success in piping.

Clearly, this was a momentous year for our organisation. In May, the news broke about the incorporation of the College of Piping into The National Piping Centre. I don't suppose news within the piping world gets much bigger than that. The College of Piping has had a great tradition and from pretty humble beginnings, under the guidance of founders Seumas MacNeill and Thomas Pearston, so much was achieved that quite literally changed the world of piping. Out of a dedication and passion to teach correctly and spread the gospel of piping, new projects such as summer schools abroad, publications, competitions and educational initiatives flourished. So it is with great respect for that work that we have proceeded in this merger.

Things are going well. Visitors to Otago Street will see some improvements in the environment with a refresh of the internal décor and new audio visual resources in place. Other improvements are planned for early in the New Year, foremost among these being the installation of disabled access facilities. The sharing of resources has allowed us to refresh the museum collection in McPhater Street and shine a new light on some tremendous artefacts and instruments which were previously held in Otago Street.

Importantly, the staff are settled, working well together and working hard on a diverse range of projects as a single entity and so we proceed into 2019 with great optimism about how we can continue to make a difference for piping in Scotland and globally.

It's been a great year for The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland. Following their tremendous sell-out *Inspire* concert at the Corn Exchange in Edinburgh, the band performed at many events with highlights being a performance at Buckingham Palace for Prince Charles's 70th birthday celebrations and a trip to the Ortigueira folk festival in Spain where they received rapturous ovations from an audience of more than 40,000. The band membership is at its strongest ever and so under Alisdair McLaren's strong guidance, there is much to look forward to in 2019, not least to their Celtic Connections concert on February 2. Tickets are on sale now.

*Piping Live!* 2018 presented us with challenges again, primarily due to the fact that Glasgow hosted the European Championships and this took over George Square, normally a *Piping Live!* hub. However, challenges are not new to us and with renewed thinking we expanded our infrastructure around The National Piping Centre. This proved to be a great success, giving us an entirely new comfortable, weatherproofed venue. We will definitely be keeping it.

Most importantly, the music and atmosphere of the festival was great and with more than 32,500 spectators and almost £2million of impact to the Scottish economy, there is no doubt 2018 was a great success. Planning is already fully under way for 2019 and new ideas are flowing, so roll on next year!

A full run-down on all that has happened would probably require many more pages than this editorial has room for but then that is what the rest of the magazine is there for. I hope you continue to enjoy our news and wish you all a very happy and healthy New Year in 2019.

by RODDY MacLEOD MBE, BSc
Principal, The National Piping Centre

# New Silver Medal qualifying procedure

**THE Competing Pipers' Association, in conjunction with the Argyllshire Gathering and Northern Meetings, have developed a new qualifying procedure for competitors to gain places in the Silver Medal events. This new method will give clarity to the competitors, as well as providing more transparency on the eligibility process.**

This qualifying procedure will begin in the 2019 season, with competitors qualifying for the following year's Silver Medals in 2020.

The formula that has been devised has a number of different channels including through a series of competitions throughout the season in a calendar year that will act as qualifiers. By the London Championship at the end of the season, every player would know whether they have successfully qualified for the following year or not.

The following formula would make up the competitors for the Argyllshire Gathering and Northern Meeting Silver Medals. The proposed series of events would be:

1. **Silver Medal placed competitors from the previous year;**
2. **All A- players;**
3. **Winners of B Graded Piobaireachd contests in the current year;**
4. **B Grade League table placings.**

The competitions in which taking a first place and earning a guaranteed spot in the following year's Silver Medals will be:

- ***Kansas City, Winterstorm***
- ***Duncan Johnstone***
- ***BC Indoors • Highlands and Islands***
- ***Blair Atholl • Roseneath • Inveraray***
- ***Perth • MacGregor Memorial (AG)***
- ***Cowal • Blairgowrie***
- ***Captain John MacLellan Memorial***
- ***London Championships.***

It is felt that this formula will deliver the best and most consistent players qualified each year to compete in a strong competition. This system will also allow for fluctuations in numbers across multiple event winners, Silver Medal placings and A- players to ensure a full complement of 26 players each year.

As part of this, the CPA encourages pipers to compete at all Highland Games events and piping competitions, not just the CPA graded ones, to improve their track record and get experience of competing.

CPA President Glenn Brown said: "This was no easy task coming up with this new system. The CPA committee spent a long time thinking this through but we feel that it is the fairest way possible for all competitors to gain entrance to the Silver Medals at the Argyllshire Gathering and Northern Meeting. With 65 B grade players, it's very difficult for the CPA and Joint Committee coming up with the list of who gets into the medals each year. This lays out the exact method in which the player will get into the Silver Medals. Essentially, every competitors' fate is in their own hands. We understand that this first year will have a learning curve and are prepared to take action where needed in the future."

Northern Meeting Convenor of Piping, Alan Forbes said: "The proposed new qualification process seems fair and transparent and will have the added benefit of letting Silver Medal qualifiers know where they stand much earlier than in the past."

Argyllshire Gathering Piping Secretary Torquil Telfer said: "The Argyllshire Gathering is of the view that this positive proposal is both transparent and fair – each competitor is aware of the qualification process in advance. We encourage competing pipers to join the association, however, this structure is also open to non-members."

For more Information, please contact the Competing Pipers' Association Secretary Helen Urquhart – secretary@competingpipers.co.uk






# NPC overseas schools in 2019

## Bruggen Winter School

THE National Piping Centre will continue its partnership with the The Pipers' Corner Shop in Brüggen and the confirmed dates for the 2019 Original Winter School of Piping, Drumming and Drum Majoring in Bruggen, Germany are from March 10-16, 2019.

The National Piping Centre teaching line-up will be Willie McCallum, Finlay MacDonald, Alisdair McLaren, John Mulhearn and Dan Nevans.

You can register now to take part in this course on the Pipers' Corner website, www.piperscorner.com, with fees starting from €395.

## Homburg Winter School

THE ninth annual Winter School in Homburg will be held at the Jugendherberge (youth hostel) in the town in Saarland, Germany, from February 10-17, 2019.

The teaching team will once again be led by John Wilson, with Willie Park and a host of other National Piping Centre and guest teachers. One of our teachers, James Beaton, will be presenting a talk about Gaelic and Piping and short beginner Gaelic workshops during the school.

A residential place on the school is £520 (around €580) per student, based on four people sharing a room. There are also a limited number of twin rooms available at £625 (around €700) per person, based on two students sharing a room. Non-residential fee for the week is £420 (around €470)

If you would like to register your interest for the school, please email Margaret Maxwell on mmaxwell@thepipingcentre.co.uk with *Homburg School - Register Interest* in the subject line.

Residential prices include meals, tuition and accommodation. Each student will receive a PDF downloadable copy of the music pack for this school shortly before the start of the week. You can also purchase a printed copy which will be given to you on the first day of the school through the booking form.

## Italian Spring School

THE Italian Piper's Association are hosting another spring school in 2019. Details are yet to be announced, so keep an eye on www.thepipingcentre.co.uk/learn/overseas/the-italian-piper-s-association-school for updates.

## Virginia Piping School

THE Virginia Piping School will be held at Shenandoah University, Winchester, VA, USA from June 16-21, 2019. The school welcomes all levels of player and there is a top line-up of instructors with Roddy MacLeod, Willie McCallum, Matt MacIssac, Pipe Major Brian Donaldson and Andrew Donlon.

The school costs £500 for full tuition but if you would like to bring a group of five or more, email learn@thepipingcentre.co.uk to find out about bespoke group rates.

There are two accommodation packages available, one at the University Inn on campus starting from £30 per night or in the Clarion Inn located right next to Shenandoah University for a promo rate of $79.12 per night.

# NPC evening classes for everyone

The National Piping Centre's evening classes begin again on Saturday, January 19, meaning they are the perfect way to get the New Year's piping resolutions off to a flying start.

There are teaching options at both McPhater Street and Otago Street locations with times, dates and a learning journey to suit everyone. These 10 week courses are £90 for adult and £80 concessions.

To find out more and enrol visit the website at www.thepipingcentre.co.uk/learn/group-sessions/evening-classes

# Piobaireachd Society Annual Conference 2019

**THE Piobaireachd Society annual conference will be held in The National Piping Centre on Saturday, March 23, 2019. There will be an informal evening ceilidh in the Pipers Tryst on Friday, March 22 and the conference will conclude with a dinner in The National Piping Centre on the Saturday evening.**

The programme will include a talk by Jack Taylor, entitled *New Evidence from the Old Competitions* – with tunes by Iain Speirs and John Dew. The presentation will also feature a replica Donald MacDonald bagpipe and tunes selected from the 1844 list.

There will also be a panel discussion led by Gary West titled *My Piping Life and Times* and this will be followed by the film premiere of *MacCrimmons' Gold*, the Piobaireachd Society AGM and then evening dinner and tunes.

The conference rate including dinner is £55; day rate including lunch, teas and coffees is £35.

A preferential hotel rate of £109 per room per night for single occupancy and £119 per room per night for double occupancy has been obtained for March 22 and 23 at the Holiday Inn Glasgow, 161 West Nile Street, Glasgow, www.higlasgow.com. This hotel is just across the road from The National Piping Centre. Delegates should book directly with the hotel, quoting DOCTORS, telephone 0141 352 8300 or email reservations@higlasgow.com.


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# The Glenfiddich enhances the global reach and appeal of the pipes

by Fergus Muirhead




**I HEARD more accents this year at Blair Castle than any other year that I can remember. Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany, England, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Brazil and of, course, Scotland, with accents from the east, west, north and south all represented. Forty per cent of the competitors came from overseas and each judging bench was represented by at least one adjudicator from outside Scotland.**

It was a real worldwide affair and an indication of the global reach of the piping community these days. Although Scotland is still seen, by the majority at least, as the home of piping, there is no question that piping is now an important part of the music scene all over the world.

No more so than in North America. We had three competitors this year from Canada including,

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The Glenfiddich Piping Championship competitors 2018 from the left are: Bruce Gandy, Roddy MacLeod, Alex Gandy, Jack Lee, Finlay Johnston (Overall Winner 2018), Stuart Easton, Callum Beaumont, Peter McCalister, Stuart Liddell and Angus MacColl




for the first time, a father and son – Alex and Bruce Gandy. Bruce has been a regular over the years but it was Alex's debut as a competitor, although he said his dad's presence wouldn't make any difference on the day.

Alex said: "I'm aware of him being here but it has no bearing on how hard I've worked, which will be no harder than anyone else because I know everyone is going full tilt right now. If I was to be invited a year that dad wasn't, then I would have been doing exactly the same things, playing all the time, reviewing what I'm doing and doing what all 10 of the guys here are doing."

Even Alex's preparation had an international feel since it involved regular communication with Colin MacLellan back in Scotland. Alex explained: "I've had help from dad and I've sent my tunes to Colin who has been helping




Alex and Bruce Gandy

me with my piobaireachd work. I've played them all from start to finish with the recorder on and that adds an element of pressure. I'm comfortable with my MSR tunes, I haven't made many changes from the tunes I've been playing all summer.

"I chatted to dad and Colin about which tunes to submit and to make sure that the ones I submitted were of the right pedigree. They are perhaps bigger tunes than I've been playing over the summer but they're tunes that I have played and have brushed up on."

On the day, Alex was glad that he had weel-kent faces watching him perform. He said: "Mum and dad being there won't add pressure. I like having a familiar face in the audience that I can zone in on.

"When I played in Inverness I made sure I knew where people were sitting so when I was tuning up, I saw where Glenn Brown and Callum Beaumont were. I play for these guys in jeans and a T-shirt when I'm getting ready and it's comforting that you know there are guys sitting in the audience that are rooting for you."

Alex had his brother, his parents, his fiancee Chantelle, his aunt Ainsley, his grandmother and many family friends at Blair Castle.

He added: "So it's special but I wouldn't say that it adds undue pressure. In fact, in some ways it alleviates pressure."

Bruce agreed: "I don't feel any more pressure, I just feel a surge of support. I truly feel blessed to be here this year. It's everything I hoped for two years ago, to get myself back to this position. I'm highly competitive and I'm hugely passionate about it.

"Even at home if the pipes aren't right, I'm swearing away at them. When you can get the bagpipes right and you know that you are physically moving people and you have them inside your pocket, there is nothing that can beat that. That is what all the preparation is for, when you get in your groove. And the Glenfiddich is great for that."

Stuart Easton was another first-time competitor and had travelled from New Zealand.

He was anxious but excited at the prospect of taking part. He said: "It's been fairly intense preparation since I got the invite.

"I had to make a plan and by and large, I've stuck to that plan every day. Although I have a couple of little kids, so it doesn't always go to plan but I'm generally happy with the build-up.

"I was here back in 2001 as a spectator and it was always the dream to compete here. Now it's a reality. It's been a fantastic year."




Stuart Easton

*'We have a lot of great youngsters coming through back home at the moment. There are a lot of really good teachers and a lot of top soloists throughout the grades...'*

Stuart is confident the strength of the piping scene in New Zealand will mean that more of his fellow countrymen will be making the same journey in future.

He said: "We have a lot of great youngsters coming through back home at the moment. There are a lot of really good teachers and a lot of top soloists throughout the grades so even our C and D-grade piobaireachd competitions are really strong so it's all looking positive. There is a lot of depth coming through."

With friends and family in New Zealand keen to follow his progress, Stuart was glad that the Glenfiddich was live-streamed and believes that such coverage also helps to widen the appeal of piping more generally.

He said: "We streamed the Hastings Highland Games this year, the former winners' clasp and the MSR so we've tried to replicate what happens at the Glenfiddich and wherever I've gone round the world, the feedback has been fantastic.

"I think a lot of other competitions are replicating that. Our Silver Chanter and clasp at Christchurch were streamed.

"We had a new competition, the New Zealand Young Piper of the Year, and that was live-streamed. I think people are getting more involved with all of this access to watch the competitions and it's far easier than it once was."

It's not just the competitors who travel thousands of miles to Blair Castle. Many spectators made long journeys to listen to the top 10 pipers in the world.

This year, the audience included Steve Busch, who came all the way from Los Angeles. He said: "It's the top piping event that there is

and I'm super excited. I've watched it online once and I enjoyed it so much I decided I had to see it in person.

"I'm taking lessons from Jack Lee so secretly I'm rooting for Jack and I'm looking forward to his performance. There is more interaction with Scotland in my part of the world, the western United States. There are more piping schools and we're bringing more top-level people over from Scotland and I think it's having a big impact.

Steve's interest in the pipes dates back to his teenage years.

He said: "When I was 16 I saw a piper playing and the music just grabbed me and that was it.

"Once I got into the piping scene, I researched my genealogy a bit and I realised that I have Scottish heritage so I think I have a genetic predisposition to like the pipes although I didn't know that at the time.

In my area, an hour north of LA, we only have lower level bands and so I played with one of them until I was in my 20s and then I went to a school in Canada with Jim McGillivray and that's what opened my eyes to the higher levels of piping, and the people who are involved at these levels, and that motivated me to take private lessons.

"I'm not sure I'm at a level yet where I can distinguish the finer points so I enjoy listening to everyone. It's been a life-long goal to come here and because Jack is competing I thought this was the year to do it."

Cristiano Bicudo, (who we featured in *Piping Today* issue 92) had travelled from Sao Paulo in Brazil for the day, and just as well, since it turned out that he was this year's Balvenie Medal recipient.

He is very active in the piping scene in Brazil and is passionate about the global movement that is the pipe band world.

Cristiano said: "I had a Scottish mentor. He was a piper with the British Caledonia pipe band and he brought me to Scotland and told me where to start learning the pipes. I met him in Sao Paulo because B-Cal used to send pipers there to promote their flights. I was very lucky to meet him in 1984 and it was great to find the musical environment and it's been part of my life ever since.

"I don't have a Scottish background but I wanted to learn and I'm lucky that my mum and dad were very supportive.

"You can never explain why. It was a kind of magical thing when I fell in love with the instrument."



Ken Eller and Cristiano Bicudo

***'The kids that learn in the Rio band play all sorts of gigs to raise money for themselves. I've been funding our band with my own resources ... and have invested a lot of money over the years, mainly because I love it and want to see it growing'***

Such is his passion for the music that Cristiano sometimes finds it tough to keep up with everything else in his life.

He said: "I'm a lawyer and it's difficult sometimes to maintain a balance between the personal and the professional because it is an instrument that requires a lot of devotion.

"I concentrate on the pipe bands but I do play solo as well. We are about to have some solo competitions in South America and I'll take part in that. I'm trying to motivate pipers to engage in this competition.

"Last year we had our first solo competition in Chile and another this year. We're all really excited. Piping is a growing community in South America and in Brazil in particular. We have civilian and military bands playing pipes. The military band are not exactly a pipe band, they mix pipes with brass instruments but the there are three civilian bands in Sao Paulo and one in Rio as well. They do great work with impoverished communities in Rio. It's called Brazilian Piper and we give them lots of support because it's such a great initiative."

Cristiano has ploughed thousands of hours of his own time and, as he admits, a lot of his own money, into developing piping in Brazil.

He said: "The kids who learn in the Rio band play all sorts of gigs to raise money for themselves. I've been funding our band with my own resources but we've also raised some funds from performances.

"One of the other bands is supported by St Andrew's Society in Sao Paulo so there are a few institutions that help with funding but it is a huge problem mainly because we can't get pipes

# Finlay Johnston: A new Glenfiddich champion




**NATIONAL Piping Centre employee Finlay Johnston was the 2018 overall winner of the Glenfiddich. He placed first in the piobaireach with *My Dearest on Earth, Give me your Kiss* and was third in the MSR with *Mrs John MacColl, The Islay Ball and The Rejected Suitor*.**

This is the fourth time he has competed at the prestigious competition in Blair Castle and he adds the Glenfiddich title to his Gold Medals from Oban and Inverness (2012 and 2015) and his Clasp in 2016.

He arrived at the traditional Glenfiddich meeting place on the evening before feeling slightly uneasy.

Finlay explained: "There was definitely an undercurrent of nerves arriving at the Atholl Palace the night before. There is an informal dinner that the competitors attend, which is really nice, and this is where we are handed our tunes that have been selected for us to play. I was a little apprehensive but I was sitting with friends which was a good distraction.

"We had a bit of a laugh as the last time I played at the Glenfiddich in 2016, I was late to arrive on the morning of the competition due to a wrong turn en route to Blair Castle. This resulted in having to play first. It was silly, as it's hard to go wrong driving from Pitlochry to Blair Atholl, and I've driven the road a lot – I must have been distracted!

"I was happy with the tunes selected for me. I hadn't put any tunes into my list that I wouldn't want picked. Once I had played the piobaireachd, I suppose I was just happy to have got through the tune without anything major go wrong. That was it really – prizes were not on my mind. I was just trying to focus on my next performance in the MSR."

To win the Glenfiddich for the first time is undoubtedly a major milestone in any top solo piper's career.

It is the de facto solo World Championship after all and the success means so much to Finlay and the friends and family who tutored and supported him through the years to reach this pinnacle.

Finlay said: "I've followed the Glenfiddich from an early stage in my piping career and always enjoyed listening to it. Now to have won – for me it is unbelievable. It means the world to me. I did an interview right after the results had been announced and I was a bit lost for words as I wasn't expecting it. It's definitely a moment I'll remember for the rest of my life.

"I'd like to thank Ronnie McShannon, as he's been my teacher for 25 years now. He's a great tutor and friend and I'm fortunate to have someone like him in my corner. My parents have also been a massive support to me throughout my piping career. I'm delighted that Ronnie and my parents were both there on the day." ● BY JOHN SLAVIN

in Brazil and all of the instruments need to be imported. I have invested a lot of my money in it over the years, mainly because I love it and want to see it growing.

"There are more and more people getting interested in the pipes and drums and because of the recent South American Gathering that we had. The event first started in 2004 and we gather bands from Brazil, Chile and Uruguay every two years.

"It's been great to keep us together and it's a great experience. The gatherings have been restricted to South American bands till now but we're now discussing allowing bands from anywhere in the world to come and join us."

Although there are now pipes bands all over South America, Cristiano reckons that Scotland is responsible for sparking such worldwide interest.

He said: "You have to give credit to Scotland for the global reach of piping. The instrument is

so fascinating and it makes people think of Scotland. It's the whole package – kilts, bagpipes and whisky. But when you have the opportunity of hearing the pipes, it's a huge impact with the sound and the sight of the piper and this really grabs you if you have an ear for music."

There is no question that the pipes do make a huge impression when they are heard for the first time but the idea to stream the Glenfiddich was to help it reach a piping audience that couldn't get to Blair Atholl on the day, rather an audience new to the music.

There was always a concern it might have an impact on the number who came to the castle to watch the event live but, according to Dougal Perman, Director of Inner Ear that organises the filming, the opposite has happened.

He said: "I've been bowled over by how passionate the audience was and by the hunger there was for what were doing. It's really rewarding and there is a lot of demand. I can't help but feel proud and a bit patriotic about our culture that is inherently Scottish and part of the national heritage but contemporary and alive and evolving – and it is appreciated the world over. It's a truly international audience.

"We have people listening from all over the United States, even one guy who is listening while driving his truck through Idaho, at least I hope he was listening and not watching.

"There are people watching all over Europe and Japan and in South America, and even the Far East, as well as Canada, USA, Australia and South Africa.

"I think that things like this really help to get the message out there and to share the art form. So do major events like the Worlds, Celtic Connections and the Lorient Festival. There are also showcase events like Womad and Folk Alliance and there are these international exchanges of traditional music that encourage Scottish musicians to go abroad and overseas musicians to come here."

Working with the The National Piping Centre at The Glenfiddich has given Dougal the opportunity to showcase more Scottish music and culture to a worldwide audience. He said: "It was through working with The NPC filming and live streaming events like *Piping Live!* and The Glenfiddich that let us see the demand and appreciation there was for piping and traditional music all around the world.

"We saw what demand there was and what an audience there was. We had been doing a lot of work on traditional music across the board for many years so that led us to starting our own TV channel called TRADtv which is at the moment focused on performance from Gaelic, Celtic and traditional Scottish music, although we would like to do more feature and documentary productions on that too.

"There is such a great demand for it and it is great working with The National Piping Centre. We were delighted that last year TRADtv was nominated in the MG Alba Trad Music Awards in the Media category and hopefully we'll be nominated again because there's definitely a big audience out there to be reached with this type of material." ●

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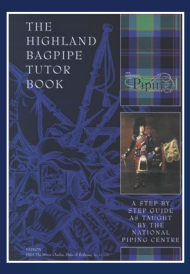

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# January days and nights filled with bagpipes at Celtic Connections 2019

**FOR 25 years, this festival has been adding some sparkling traditional music to an otherwise dreary month. The 26th Celtic Connections festival, from January 17 to February 3, 2019, has more than a dozen concerts featuring the pipes so it should provide many musical highlights for piping aficionado.**

At these big events, there is always a clash in programming that makes you wish you could be in two places at once but we really shouldn't complain that we are getting so many chances to hear top quality music played on the pipes. There is something for everyone – whether you have a love of pipe bands, piobaireachd, solo piping, trad music bands, smallpipes, European piping traditions or all of the above.

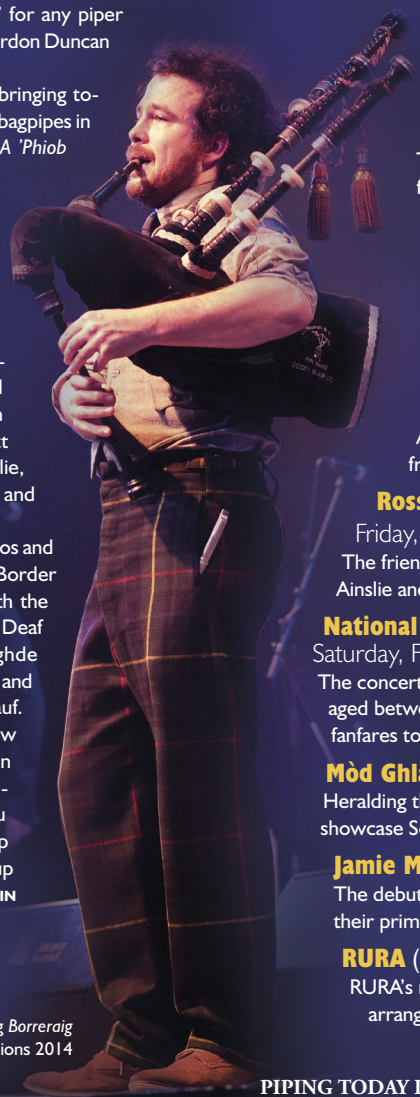
The annual Celtic Connections pipe band concert in the main auditorium of the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall is always a big attraction and this year The National Youth Pipe Band will perform their *Made in Scotland* concert on the big stage on February 2.

Another highlight is the *Thunderstruck* play by David Colvin, about the life and music of the late Gordon Duncan and the effect Gordon had on a young piper from Fife. This was performed at *Piping Live!* in 2018 and the skilled performance, humour, emotion and gritty storytelling was very powerful and entertaining – it is a 'must-see' for any piper who appreciates the contribution Gordon Duncan made to our music.

There are two special concerts bringing together lots of musicians, singers and bagpipes in collaboration. The first is *Seinn Air A 'Phiob (Singing the Pipes)*, presented by the Big Music Society on January 18, with Allan MacDonald and Margaret Stewart heading an all-star cast of musicians and singers who will explore the connections between Gaelic song and piobaireachd. The second is *The Conundrum: International Piping Night* with Finlay MacDonald which features pipes and pipers from five Celtic regions including Matt MacIsaac, Anxo Lorenzo, Ross Ainslie, Brighde Chaimbeul, Calum Stewart and Enora Morice.

Traditional music bands, piping duos and solo performers with Highland and Border pipes are also well represented with the chance to see concerts from Daimh, Deaf Shepherd, Breabach, RURA, Brighde Chaimbeul, Ross Ainslie & Ali Hutton and Jamie MacDonald & Christian Gamauf.

So all of the above – and also a few other special events such as Brave in Concert, the Young Traditional Musician of the Year and Mòd Ghlaschu – should be more than enough top quality music and piping to brighten up the start of the year. ● **BY JOHN SLAVIN**



Calum MacCrimmon performing *Borreraig* at Celtic Connections 2014

**Daimh** (with The Chair), Friday, January 18. Queen Margaret Union
West Highland champions Dàimh, with Angus MacKenzie on Highland pipes, deliver a rich mix of finely-wrought instrumental firepower and delectable Gaelic singing.

**Seinn Air A 'Phiob**. Friday, January 18. The Mackintosh Church
Calum MacCrimmon and John Mulhearn's Big Music Society present a concert spotlighting the connections between Gaelic song and piobaireachd, headlined by Allan MacDonald and Margaret Stewart.

**Brighde Chaimbeul** & guests, Friday, January 18. St Andrew's in the Square
Skye piper Brighde Chaimbeil is a winner of numerous top competition titles as well as 2016's BBC Young Folk Award. In this concert she launches her debut album, *The Reeling*.

**Brave in Concert**, Saturday, January 19. Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
The animated fantasy adventure film will be screened at the venue while the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra perform Patrick Doyle's iconic score. The film will be further brought to life with solo performances from Lorne MacDougall, Jim Sutherland, Chris Stout and Jarlath Henderson, all of whom played on the original soundtrack.

**Royal Conservatoire of Scotland**, Saturday, January 19. Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Join the students of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's BMus Traditional Music course as they bring you an afternoon of newly composed and arranged music.

**Deaf Shepherd** (and Alden Patterson & Dashwood), Saturday, January 19. Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Having headlined the first Celtic Connections in 1994, Deaf Shepherd return to the festival to celebrate their 25th anniversary with a special evening featuring guest appearances by all of the band's original members including Rory Campbell on Highland pipes. The enduringly popular Scottish group bring their vibrant sounds from the Lowlands, the Highlands, the Hebrides and Glasgow with fiery jigs and reels to the haunting eloquence of slow airs and ballads.

**The Conundrum: International Piping Night**, Friday, January 25. Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Adopting a format from *Piping Live!*, this multi-national line-up curated by Finlay MacDonald brings together pipes and pipers from five Celtic regions.

**Breabach** (and Steph Geremia), Saturday, January 26, Old Fruitmarket
Traditional and contemporary material features alongside original compositions from Breabach, including songs in English and Gaelic, plus an multi-instrumental armoury which includes twin Highland pipes.

**BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year Final 2019**, Sunday, January 27. City Halls
The finalists are: Sarah Markey, flute: Benedict Morris, fiddle: Catherine Tinney, Gaelic song: Ross Miller, pipes: Luc McNally, guitar, voice: Cameron Ross, fiddle.

**Thunderstruck** by David Colvin, Tuesday, January 29, and Wednesday, January 30. Tron Theatre
A play exploring how the traditions of bagpipe music were rocked by a bin man from Perth, and how he forever changed the life of one young piper from Fife.

**Ross Ainslie & Ali Hutton's** *Symbiosis* with **Anxo Lorenzo Band**
Friday, February 1. Queen Margaret Union
The friendship and shared music-making between pipers and multi-instrumentalists Ross Ainslie and Ali Hutton, dynamically underpin their recent two-album project.

**National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland** *Made in Scotland*, Saturday, February, 2. Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
The concert will feature the very best of the next generation of young pipers and drummers, aged between 10 and 25, from all over the country. From solo spots, quartets, fanfares to full accompanied musical suites, there will be something for everyone.

**Mòd Ghlaschu**, Saturday, February, 2. City Halls
Heralding the Royal National Mòd's return to Glasgow in October 2019, this concert will showcase Scotland's Gaelic culture today.

**Jamie MacDonald & Christian Gamauf**, Saturday, February 2. Drygate
The debut album, *The Pipe Slang*, from this pipes and fiddle duo vibrantly reflects their primary Hebridean allegiance while embracing their wider influences.

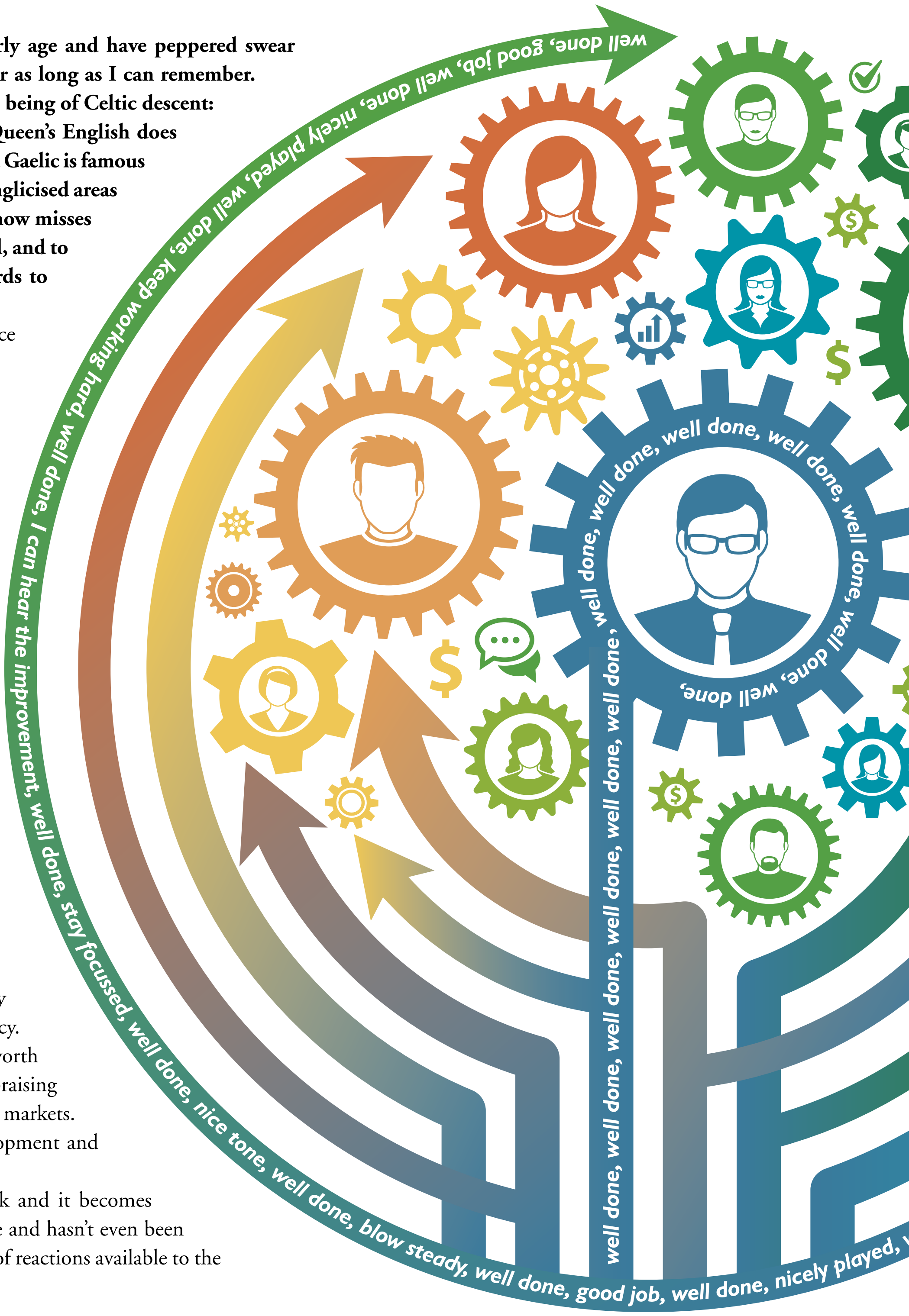
**RURA** (and Talabarte), Saturday, February 2. Saint Luke's
RURA's new album, *In Praise of Home*, builds on traditional roots with inventively spacious arrangements on fiddle, Highland pipes, whistles, flute, guitar, keyboards and bodhrán.

by Dan Nevans



# The language of leadership

*A guide to constructive critique in an ensemble setting*




**I PURE love swearing. I started at an early age and have peppered swear words into my day-to-day vocabulary for as long as I can remember. I think it might be something to do with being of Celtic descent: Gaelic has a certain ebb and flow that the Queen's English does not. With the use of the extended syllables that Gaelic is famous for, I wonder if the Celtic gene pool in such anglicised areas as the central belt of Scotland perhaps somehow misses phrases being more rhythmically complicated, and to compensate, we insert rude or offensive words to make up the difference.**

Or, more likely, it's a way of inserting a space into the sentence so you can think up the next thing you are going to say.

When I was a wee boy, I remember pipe bands were rough as rough can be. I distinctly remember watching a world-famous band tune up in the early 2000s and a piper being reprimanded with great flourish and gusto for unsteady blowing. At the time I thought that was just an aspect of playing at a high level; do something wrong and you will receive a thorough telling off using a variety of key phrases and words which may or may not hurt your feelings. In fact, I thought how cool it would be to become one of the players who never got a roasting, a solid player, a pro...

Here's the thing about people who "go pro"; they are very passionate about what they do. Serena Williams, one of the world's finest athletes, hit the headlines a few months ago, not for a stunning tennis performance but for going off her nut at the chair umpire. Passionate people care and therefore the activity they choose to focus on has a lot of personal currency. The language we use in training can affect the worth of this currency just as much as a world leader praising or deriding a product or industry can affect the markets. Keeping players passionate is the key to development and achievement.

Let's say you are at band practice this week and it becomes apparent that one player has not learned a tune and hasn't even been through it enough to ghost. There are a variety of reactions available to the band management to confront the issue:

1. Nothing. Do nothing and maybe the problem will go away.

2. The tried and tested disciplinary option of shouting, swearing and shouting again.

3. Calmly approach the player and ask in a non-threatening tone: "Why has this tune not been learned?" This option may be the only positive move. At worst, you will learn that this player does not have the right attitude to be in your band. At best, you will find a way of helping the player. They may have difficulties in interpreting the music that you didn't know about. By asking the question to one player, you will set your whole corps thinking.

***'Pipe majors, leading drummers, sound setters and coaches. Lend me your ears! When you have to critique a performer inside your ensemble, please consider a few key factors...'***




PIPE bands are changing. The whole culture is changing. I'd like to believe pipe bands are becoming a much more youth centric, forward thinking pseudo-sport.Some of you may be very uncomfortable with this concept. There are always those among us whose rose-tinted glasses are firmly welded on to their heads and can only imagine their version of pipe bands being the fundamental vision of the sport. That's all well and good but listen here – you will be left in the dust just shortly.

The vast majority of people picking up the bagpipe in this modern era are under 18. Sure, in central Europe and North America there may be a big culture of adult learners and that is wonderful. However when it comes to developing the next generation of world pipe band champions and solo piping title winners, you generally start them between age seven and 12.

There's one thing about champions that ties them all together regardless of what they compete in: discipline.

Think back to being about 10 or whatever age you were when you first blew a note in a pipe band. You're playing the 3/4s (That's pretty universal, right?) and you play the start of *Green Hills* when you were meant to be going into *Battle's O'er*. The pipe major stops the band at the end of the set and singles you out because of the mistake. Because you're wee, you get a finger wagging and told to do better. The language used in this moment can make or break a player.

When people talk about discipline they often think of a person being "disciplined", to be chastised or threatened with consequences as imaginative as they are violent. That's not what discipline is. Discipline is getting the pipes or drum out every day and making your playing better regardless of any other factor. Discipline is planning and preparing every piece of your musical routine. Discipline is acting on the directions given to you by your ensemble leader without delay.

Pipe majors, leading drummers, sound setters and coaches. Lend me your ears! When you have to critique a performer inside your ensemble, please consider a few key factors:

PERSONALITY: Know your team. If you bark down a wallflower, they'll crumble. Conversely if you lose the tattie at someone who is foolishly confident or obtuse then you'll be wasting your energy. If you have an insight into your players' personality then you will have a blueprint for motivating and developing them.

EXPERIENCE: All players need support. New players need to be taught the process and disciplines required to be a successful member of your team. Experienced members need to be maintained, give them an inch and they'll take a foot but at the same time, these are the players you expect to know the score.

ABILITY: Not all players are born equal. You, the ensemble leader, have to organise your corps so that individual strengths can balance out individual weakness. You can't lambast someone for doing all they can in the moment. You could, however, refine your process to develop them.

In short, discipline takes a lot of energy. If you are leading an ensemble and find it frustrating or difficult, well, bad news. It is frustrating and difficult to lead an ensemble but you have taken the job, so lead. You have to discipline the way in which you develop players, this means taking the bad with the good and having a plan to deal with both.

Earlier in this piece, I asked you to imagine being a child, without experience, playing for the first time in a pipe band and getting a roasting because I wanted you to remember that feeling. The excitement, the attainment of the sense of worth you had that first time playing, then the sinking feeling as you make a pig's ear of something.

The vulnerability is breathtaking. What I am saying is, wouldn't it have been great in that moment for someone to let you know that one little mistake isn't the worst thing and also to show you how to discipline yourself to make sure you don't make that mistake again?

We have to decide as a culture how we want to appear to the world. Is it as a professional and upwardly mobile musical artform or as a tartan-clad rugby team? The appearance all starts with discipline.

A quick tale before I wrap this article up. In June, on the way home from the European Championships in Forres, the band stopped in Aviemore to grab some food for the rest of the journey back to Glasgow. A few of us popped down to the




# 'Talk softly and carry a big stick'

chip shop at the bottom of the town and waited in the long queue. Most of us had changed into civilian clothes for the return journey so were pretty much in disguise as non-pipe band folk. The chip shop was full of members from another band, a lower grade band who I refuse to embarrass directly.

Their band members, including the pipe major, were not just drunk but trying to outdo one another in their use of swearing and vulgar imagery while they haranged the staff cooking their food (which, by the way, is an easy way to get your mushy peas spat in).

I stood and listened to all this and thought about the young family, obviously not with the band, who were further up the queue. The mother was mortified and the father bristling with discomfort. Their small boy was visibly intimidated. There's one wee lad who will never pick up the pipes. Three people to go out into the world and tell others that pipe bands are full of louts and vagabonds.

I'm not saying everyone has to act like monks. Like I said at the beginning, I'm a fan of the comedy swear as much as the next person and under stress I am wont to express myself in such a manner. I am saying, however, that there is a time and a place. In your band uniform in public is neither the time nor the place. Every pipe band represent something, a community, a company, a regiment, an emergency service. When you put on the tie, you are a symbol of that entity.

For ensemble leaders, I offer these three keys nuggets of advice for the coming season.

Leadership has a trickle-down effect. If you behave like a shaved ape inside and out of rehearsals, then so will your corps. What goes around, comes around. This also applies to what you are trying to work towards. I've said it before and I'll say it again, your band's performance is a reflection of your own.

Manage the expectations of your corps. If you spend the winter treading water without positive development, you will find players listless and bored. This saps discipline and pulls the ensemble backwards. Create an objective and lead your players to it, not with shouting and swearing but with education and compassion.

Talk softly and carry a big stick. A quiet word in private will have more of the effect you are looking for than the dramatic speech or lecture. If a player does not appear to be developing towards the shared team goal then this needs to be addressed, not in public but in private where one doesn't have to worry about social standing. This also eliminates fear in the corps. Come January, your competing team should be made up of veteran players, surviving new players and players you wish to develop.

The experience of surviving the trial period and moving into the formative part of the year can bolster confidence and stoke the competitive fires. After all, if you're getting a game, it's 1000 times better than not getting one. ●

As always, if you have any thoughts, positive or negative about this article please feel free to get in contact via the Piping Today facebook page or with me directly on twitter at @DanNevans where I'll mostly be tweeting about soup and the podcast "Top Flight Time Machine".

# A stately setting for the NYPBoS tuition camp in Ayrshire



**THE National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland are taking their young members to Dumfries House, Cumnock, to conduct a Piping and Drumming Camp on February 23 and 24. This will be the first time the NYPBoS have held such an event in Ayrshire.**

The programme will run from the Saturday morning through to the Sunday afternoon and will see NYPBoS Senior Band members teach and collaborate with other young pipers and drummers aged between 12 and 25. During the camp, students will learn new music, attend workshops on tuning, bandsmanship, musical theory and, most importantly, meet other young pipers and drummers from around the region. To finish the camp there will be a small performance by the students and a brief recital by members of the NYPBoS who have been involved in teaching on the camp.

## Camp aims

The objectives of the camp are to teach students new music in a safe and fun environment, to help improve musical theory skills through focused workshops, to assist in building confidence on the pipes and drums by teaching students new skills, to provide a platform for young pipers and drummers in the region to meet and socialise and to provide a platform for young local pipers and drummers to perform together.

All pipers attending the camp will be placed into groups of similar abilities on the first day so that everyone will be able to progress at the same speed.

Following on from the success of previous camps around the country, the drummers will again be working in small and larger groups. Senior drummers. along with NYPBoS instructors from D2 Percussion. will be working with students on techniques to improve their drumming as individual and corps players.

Intermediate and advanced pipers and drummers will be expected to attend the full duration of the camp, whereas the beginners course will only run for a two half-days.



## Venue and accommodation

Students will be staying at The Tamar Manoukian Outdoor Residential Centre in the Dumfries House Estate. One night's accommodation and meals will be provided to everyone attending the camp as a residential student. Spaces are limited and will be allocated on a first come, first serve basis. NYPBoS adult supervisors will also be on hand in the evenings to supervise.

## What to bring

Pipers are required to bring along their practice chanter and bagpipes. However a full set of pipes is not essential as long as each student has a practice chanter.

Drummers are required to bring their own snare, tenor or bass sticks and practice pads. If students are able to bring a drum it would be helpful as there will only be a limited number of drums at the camp.

Music packs for the camp will be provided but please feel free to bring along your own music to use as a reference.

## Bursaries available

For local residents in East and South Ayrshire, there are bursary residential and non-residential spaces on the camp which are covered by the NYPBoS. These are limited and can be applied for by emailing nypb@thepipingcentre.co.uk for more information.

For advanced and intermediate students, the cost is £80 for residential and £45 for non-residential. The non-residential course for beginners is £20 and will run for two half-days. All costs go towards accommodation (residential only), meals, tuition, music packs and venue hire.

For any more information regarding this event, email Alisdair McLaren at nypb@thepipingcentre.co.uk or call 0141 3530220.

## Scottish Schools piping competition gets bigger and bigger

The 2019 Scottish Schools Pipe Band Championships are predicted to have more than 150 schools from across Scotland represented. Organisers say the boost is because of the number of pupils being taught in programmes run by the contest's parent charity, the Scottish Schools Pipes and Drums Trust.

There are already a large number of inquiries from schools wanting to be part of the event on March 10 at Inveralmond Community High School in Livingston. Local education authorities, teachers and parents are invited to contact the SSPDT via the website at sspdt.org.uk, and entries can be made through the website at thechampionships.org.uk.

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by Morgan Holmes

# *The Battle's O'er* – Tulsa pipers and drummers

**IN November 1933, Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie, the commander of the Canadian Corps during World War One, poignantly reflected on the "unspeakable sorrow for the great army of youth that had gone so early to its death". "We who came home," Currie observed, "move back in memory 15 years to the hour when our army halted where it stood, when the firing died suddenly away on the Western Front, when the few last straggling shots echoed down the mightiest battle line the world had ever seen, and were swallowed up in utter silence."**

That 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month is remembered across the world, from Ottawa to Wellington, London to Washington. Every year since 1919, Armistice Day has been commemorated in Tulsa, Oklahoma, by a parade through the city's downtown core.

This year, of course, is the centenary of the Great War's end. In Tulsa, the annual Veterans Day (as the federal holiday is now known) parade was to be on Monday, November 12. But what about Sunday, November 11? How might our city mark the moment the guns fell silent and the killing stopped 100 years ago?

On a warm September evening in 2017 under the shade of a towering bald cypress in



The Choctaw Code Talkers

## American heroes

**OKLAHOMA and the rest of the United States were profoundly affected by World War One. Between the US declaration of war on Germany on April 6, 1917, and November 11, 1918, more than 116,000 American soldiers had lost their lives to combat and disease. Another 200,000 were wounded.**

In Oklahoma, as Tulsa Metro piper Eric Kingery noted: "In the heartland of rural America, and with a sizeable Native American society honouring the credo of a warrior, volunteers from this part of the country disproportionately heard and answered the call of duty." From the state, which had come into being only a decade earlier, more than 91,000 men joined the overseas fight, including three complete military units from Tulsa County, 5,000 African-Americans, as well as many Native Americans (Gibson, Lampe). These latter included the famous Choctaw Code Talkers (Meadows). Of the thousands of brave Oklahomans who served, 1,064 paid the ultimate sacrifice and another 4,154 were wounded in battle (Gibson). Our goal was to remember and pay tribute to these men and all who fought for liberty and peace. (See p23 for references.)

# commemorate the World War One Armistice

the backyard of the home of Michael Davidson (a long-time member of the Tulsa Metro Pipe Band), a group of us began tossing ideas back and forth.

Several of us are amateur historians and most of us had a foggy sense of the roles and sacrifices of pipers and drummers during World War One. As the beer and banter flowed, we hit upon the idea of tying a commemorative event in Tulsa to the College of Piping and Bruno Peek's call for pipers around the UK to play *The Battle's O'er* on November 11, 2018.

Instead of sounding the retreat at six o'clock in the morning, however, we opted to strike in at the hour the Armistice took effect. (Kent Pharaoh and George Rice of the City of Tulsa Pipes and Drums, however, piped the tune at 6am in front of the World War One Doughboy monument in Kent's hometown of Henryetta. They then hurried back to Tulsa to join the 11am memorial.)



Lest We Forget



Lest we forget banner designed by Tony Spurlock

## Gearing up for the centennial

SERIOUS planning for a pipes and drums-focused memorial began in mid-August 2018. Central to our vision was the quest to bring together Tulsa's three bands for the occasion.

Cody Wagnon, Tulsa Metro's pipe major, puts it this way: "I thought it was a great opportunity to reach out to other pipers and drummers in the area, and to be part of something larger that was taking place all around the world. I also saw it as a chance, especially here in America where at the moment everything is very divisive, to look back at a single point in time when the world came together to make peace."

Alexander Peiffer, the pipe major of the Tulsa Police Pipes & Drums, and William Tetrick, the pipe major of the City of Tulsa Pipes and Drums, quickly signed on to the project.

The issue of location was one of the most considerable hurdles we encountered. A park,



The Bloody Fields of Flanders: Stretcher bearers carry wounded through the mud near Passchendaele, West Flanders, Belgium. ©IWM

*'the pipes were able to open a door to the past – all in attendance were transported to another time'*

a cemetery, a street corner? Operating with zero budget and flying by the seat of our kilts, we were overjoyed when, through Alex Peiffer's initiative, the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 577 decided to partner with us and open the doors of their historic building (originally constructed as a military post in 1918, and part of which served as Tulsa's longest-running speakeasy until the end of prohibition in Oklahoma in 1959). VFW member Dan Fuller and post commander Joshua Starks immediately grasped our intent and generously took on most of the logistical planning and media relations. They also brought on board the local British Legion, one of whose members (Pat Eagan) supplied the tank seen in the background of the photo below.

## In harmony

IN the month leading up to November 11, one of our main goals was to ensure that the three bands could deliver a note-perfect, in-unison rendition of *The Battle's O'er*. To that end, Tulsa Metro piper Tony Spurlock coordinated four dedicated all-band practices, as well as the distribution of sheet music (including seconds) and drum scores.

To our delight, a couple of weeks before the event, the VFW informed us they would begin the day at 9 am with a massive buffet breakfast (eggs, grits, pancakes, fry bread, coffee, juice – the works) for all the musicians and attendees. With everyone warmed up, our bellies full and our pipes tuned, we then all trooped outside at 10.30am to get the proceedings under way.

In order to ensure a smooth operation, we had recruited Jim Anderson, a former school principal from nearby Verdigris, to be our master of ceremonies. First up was the presentation of the colours, followed by a welcome by Commander Starks. Next, Chelsea Clark, Miss Muskogee 2018, gave a full-voiced rendition of the US national anthem. This was followed by Amy Brown, the City of Tulsa's deputy chief of staff and veteran liaison, who read an official proclamation from the mayor. Kim Jones, the former director of the Tulsa Air and Space Museum, then delivered a moving invocation and put our event in the context of global and local history. Tulsa police officer (and piper in training) Benjamin Elliot then sounded the Last Post on his trumpet, after which the JROTC Sapulpa colour guard fired several rifle volleys.

Following two minutes of silence, our memorial culminated with drum rolls and the striking-in of drones as Tulsa's three bands joined forces to play *The Battle's O'er* twice through. For good measure, PM Peiffer then led us through a stirring *Amazing Grace*. In a manner befitting remembrance, camaraderie and the traditions of piping and drumming, Commander Starks brought our World War One commemoration to a conclusion by inviting everyone upstairs to the VFW's Centennial Lounge bar, where we gathered, drank and cracked on well into the afternoon.



Tulsa Metro, Tulsa Police and City of Tulsa pipe bands with JROTC Sapulpa

Reflecting on the memorial's piping and drumming component, Tulsa Police pipe major Alex Peiffer said: "It was truly amazing to see the level of cooperation – and enjoyment – reached by all of the musicians involved. Often, small disagreements and differences can pull individuals and groups apart. But it is usually by common desire that togetherness comes. Whether it is due to tragedy or, in this case, honour, common beliefs can reunite.

"While each band have their own niche, there are often opportunities and circumstances where the community benefits when we act together. It was great to see that it can work, that it did work, and that there is now solid potential for the three bands to continue to collaborate."






Photo: Lisa Carr

## Lest we forget

FOR our memorial, Tulsa Metro's Tony Spurlock designed a banner that flew from the second storey of the VFW post. Emblazoned with a red poppy and the crests of the VFW and our three bands, it proclaimed: "Lest we forget."

Through our programme and, in particular, our playing of The Battle's O'er, pipers and drummers in Tulsa strove to give life to that powerful admonition.

Commander Starks, himself a first lieutenant in the US Army and Oklahoma Army National Guard from 2005 to 2015 (including two years of combat deployment in Afghanistan), gave a sense of that dimension when he spoke of how "the pipes were able to open a door to the past – all in attendance were transported to another time. This commemorative event and music echoed the service, sacrifice, and hard-won freedom we all are the beneficiaries of. Throughout the day's events the overwhelming sentiment was thankfulness for those who stood against tyranny so that we may know the sweet taste of freedom."

Josh's words certainly put me in mind of Sir Arthur Currie's call to contemplate the meaning of all those bloody battles that finally ended on November 11, 1918: "We need, as never before, the healing qualities of devotion and fidelity and self-sacrifice and goodwill and comradeship and friendliness, so that suspicion may be vanquished and justice and mutual trust may be permanently enthroned. All this desire is in harmony with the real spirit of Armistice Day – the day dedicated to sacrifice and loyal remembrance of others." For Tulsa pipers and drummers, it felt good to have played our part in this once-in-a-lifetime act of remembering. ●

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Photo: Ashlea Haskins



City of Tulsa, Tulsa Police and Tulsa Metro pipe bands


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Director, National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland

# Preparing for Celtic Connections

**THE past few months has seen the members of both Senior and Development Bands in full rehearsals for their upcoming concert at the Celtic Connections Festival 2019.**

This *Made in Scotland* concert will see the band perform a fantastic mixture of traditional and contemporary music infused with the ever so popular NYPBoS twist and will include recent hits *Thunderstruck*, *The Beaches of Harris* and *Hector the Hero*. The show will also celebrate my 10-year anniversary as Director and the band plan to feature one of the original suites from my first concert as a part of the programme. From solo spots, quartets, fanfares to full accompanied musical suites, there will be something for everyone. ●

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Riaghaltas na h-Alba

by Stuart Milne

# A Scottish cultural event with classy Continental flavours

Alden Biesen Schots Weekend

**I FIRST came to Alden Biesen in north-east Belgium when it hosted the European Pipe Band Championships in September 2003. It was possibly the first RSPBA major championship I ever attended, and I have two standout memories: Boghall & Bathgate Caledonia's wild celebrations as they were declared Grade 1 Champions, and the oyster and champagne stall not far from the entrance – a far cry from the burger vans and Mr Whippies we are more accustomed to on the Scottish games circuit.**

It was the only time the Europeans have so far been held on the Continent, picked to supplement the annual "Schots Weekend" (Scottish Weekend), established in 1986 in Genk and held since 1994 in the grounds of the 16th-century Alden Biesen Castle in the town of Bilzen, a 20-odd minute drive over the Dutch/Belgian border from Maastricht.

While the Belgian Pipe Band Championships are at the heart of the Saturday events programme, the weekend appeals to far more than just



Scots Guards with Belgian Blend Pipe Band




All photos: Stuart Milne

pipe band junkies. When I returned in September 2018 there was a Highland dancing competition alongside the Saturday band contests, a Highland games team event on the Sunday, plus sheepdog and archery displays among other pastimes in addition to the bustling market.

Most enticing of all was the scintillating line-up of folk music assembled for the festival's 33rd edition, a big enough draw for trad-lovers to come to Belgium for this reason alone. Kicking off the programme on Friday, September 7, was the ever-popular duo of Ross Ainslie and Jarlath Henderson, before Hó-Ró, winners of Up & Coming Artist of the Year at the 2017 MG Alba Scots Trad Music Awards, brought the opening night to a close.

Unfortunately, the evening highlighted the downsides of travelling alone to an event in this part of rural Flanders, which is a far cry from the heavily populated Ruhrgebiet area of north-west Germany where I now live. Delays in my journey to my accommodation in the nearby city of Hasselt, plus the lack of trains from Bilzen once the gig had finished, meant I couldn't make it in the end, forcing me to settle for the poor consolation of watching Scotland being torn apart by Belgium at Hampden from my hotel room. Happily, I soon discovered that the Schots Weekend organisers were posting clips of the gigs on Facebook, so all was well in the end.

Shuttle buses were laid on for those travelling to Bilzen by train on Saturday and Sunday to take visitors to the Alden Biesen grounds. As we pulled in to the festival site, it was clear that hundreds of people had taken the much more practical choice of either driving down for the day or camping in the orchards for the weekend.

Although the other Continental competitions I had attended during the season had only two judges for the band competitions, this time the organisers had flown in a full RSPBA judging panel for the Belgian Championships: John Moles and William Garrett for piping, Allan Craig for drumming and Ciaran Mordaunt for ensemble, with Alistair Patterson assessing the drum majors.

While the bulk of the bands came from Holland and Belgium, a few ventured from further afield. No bands made the trip from Germany but the locals were joined by Essex Caledonian Pipe Band from England and two bands from France: 92nd North Fox Pipe Band from north-west Paris and Bagad Roñsed-Mor from Locoal Mendon, near Lorient in Brittany.

Alden Biesen is typically one of the bigger contests in this part of Europe, and 2018 was no exception, with nine bands competing in Grade 4. The more local bands from Belgium and Holland

were Venlo Caledonian, The Ghent District Highlanders, The Wallace Pipe Band, Pegasus Pipes & Drums, Blue Stone Pipes & Drums, Inter Scaldis Pipes & Drums and Antwerp & District Pipe Band.

Some of these bands are much more competition-oriented than others, and the gap between the prize-winners and those finishing lower down the table was clear at times. While a few bands followed the RSPBA-sanctioned MAP list of 2/4 marches, this is not compulsory in this part of the world, and it is refreshing sometimes to hear some alternatives in 4/4 and 3/4 time to the usual staples you hear a dozen times at any major championship in the UK.

It was yet another clean sweep for Inter Scaldis, who took the top band and drumming honours in their third victory of the season despite fielding only six pipers this time. Even at full strength they are a little smaller than the prize-winning bands in Grade 4B in the UK, but on the evidence of this season, they have the quality to contend for prizes should they make it over to Scotland.

Venlo Caledonian picked up second place, while the two bands with the longest journey home had silverware to take with them, as 92nd North Fox finished third and Essex Caledonian in fourth.

The English outfit played up to Grade 3 in the Medley contest alongside some familiar names from the Continental scene: Concord Pipe Band from the Netherlands, Belgian Blend and Antwerp & District from Belgium, while Coriovallum from nearby Heerlen in Holland made their first appearance of the outdoor season. From my years living in the Netherlands as a teenager, I remember Coriovallum as an extremely musical Grade 3 band at the time Concord and Belgian Blend were on the rise from Grade 4.

Although Antwerp played very well indeed throughout the day, there was to be no repeat of their triumph in the first contest of the year at Peine, where they beat Concord to win all three events they entered. Aware that many of their members would be unable to play due to other commitments that weekend, Antwerp had brought in several guest players from Scotland and England, disclosing their intentions well



Essex Caledonian Pipe Band

All photos: Stuart Milne


Antwerp & District Pipe Band





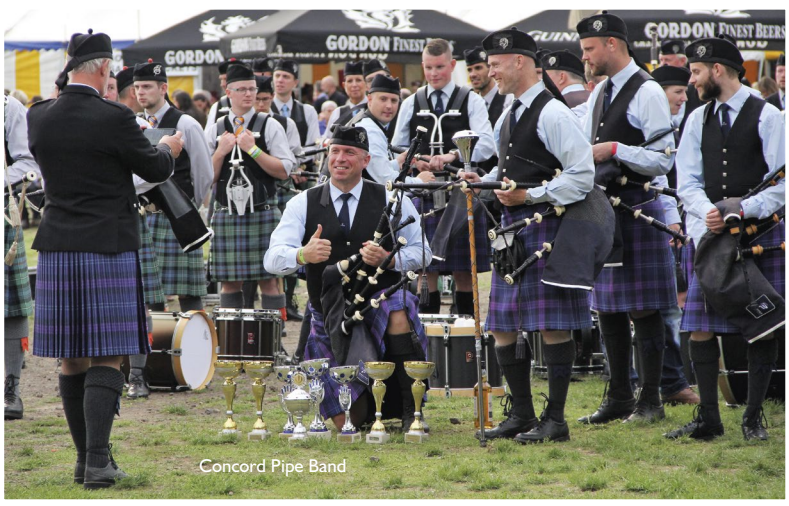

Coriovallum Pipe Band




Bagad Roñsed-Mor


Concord Pipe Band




Concord Pipe Band

in advance. It transpired that the competition organisers ruled that the band would still be ineligible for prizes due to the rules on playing numbers, and so Antwerp came to perform on the understanding they would be playing for adjudicator feedback only.

Concord were delighted to get a win in Grade 3 against the strongest field they had come up against all season, with Vincent Verweij's drum corps continuing their excellent form and scooping up all three Best Drum Corps prizes across the grades, plus Best Bass & Tenor Section overall. Coriovallum placed second ahead of Belgian Blend and Essex Caledonian.

With Denmark's Balagan Pipe Band choosing to focus solely on the RSPBA majors in 2018, Alden Biesen was the first outdoor competition in the Dutch/Belgian/German calendar to feature a Grade 2 band. Bagad Roñsed-Mor earned fourth place in the premier grade of the Breton Championships in Lorient this past August, and the pipe and drum corps put on a characteristic display of the musicianship we have come to expect from the elite bagads. It was fitting to hear a Breton band playing Bob Worrall's tribute to the 2018 Breton Champions, *Salute to Cap Caval*, in their medley.

Roñsed-Mor emerged victorious in the Grade 2 Medley competition and in the Open Grade MSR ahead of Concord, Belgian Blend and Coriovallum, with the Wallace Pipe Band also playing up in the Open event.

As a welcome break between the pipe band competitions and prize-giving, after Concord had played for the drum major contest, the band of the Scots Guards entered the main arena to perform a brief display ahead of their Sunday concert, joined by Belgian Blend Pipe Band for *Highland Cathedral* and the regimental march, *Highland Laddie*.

While the competition itself went smoothly, stricter stewarding in the marchpast would have been valuable in getting all the bands on to the field much quicker, since the unnecessarily big gaps between bands marching on gave centre bands Concord and Belgian Blend quite a workout after a long day of playing with three competitive performances each. The Wallace Pipe Band used the opportunity to promote their 20th anniversary celebrations, marching

on to the field bedecked in balloons – a spectacle reminiscent of the famous parades through Dunoon town centre after the Cowal Highland Gathering.

There was plenty more music after the bands had finished playing off the field, with the concert tent becoming the hub for the evening's festivities. There was yet more piping to begin with in the form of the Calum Stewart Trio – the piper frontman in the company of Ronan Pellen on cittern and Yann Le Bozec on double bass. Thanks to his upbringing in the north-east of Scotland and long-term residence in Brittany, Calum and his band blended Scottish and Breton music (on Irish bagpipes) to great effect, getting quite a few audience members out of their seats and on to the dance floor.

Bristol-born singer/songwriter and former *Britain's Got Talent* finalist Sam Kelly took to the stage next with his own trio, offering a sublime mix of traditional English and Irish folk, a passion passed down to him from his Irish grandfather, and his own material. His version of *Wayfaring Stranger* featured on British soap opera *Hollyoaks* in 2017, and he is more than capable of holding an audience under his spell with some haunting songs of his own – his performance of *Spokes* was my personal highlight of the weekend.

The late-night hardcore partying was left to the award-winning Scottish ensemble Elephant Sessions and Hungarian Celtic rockers Firkin. Alas, the gods of Belgian train timetables conspired against anyone needing to take public transport home again, and a few people will have missed out.

Sunday's music started in gentler fashion at the sensible hour of 11am, with the band of the Scots Guards performing a mixture of classic big band material, Hollywood film themes and a few Scottish tunes centred on *Loch Lomond*. Fresh from performing at the daily Menin Gate ceremony in Ypres on the Friday evening, the band's arrangement of *The Last Post* near the end of the concert was particularly moving and well received by the Belgian audience. As Alden Biesen was their last engagement on their tour before heading home, the band master pointed out that his newest musicians were about to leave with new-found affection for their host country and painfully-learned respect for the potency of its beer.

Outside the concert tent, the Highland games were in full swing by the time the Guards had finished. As



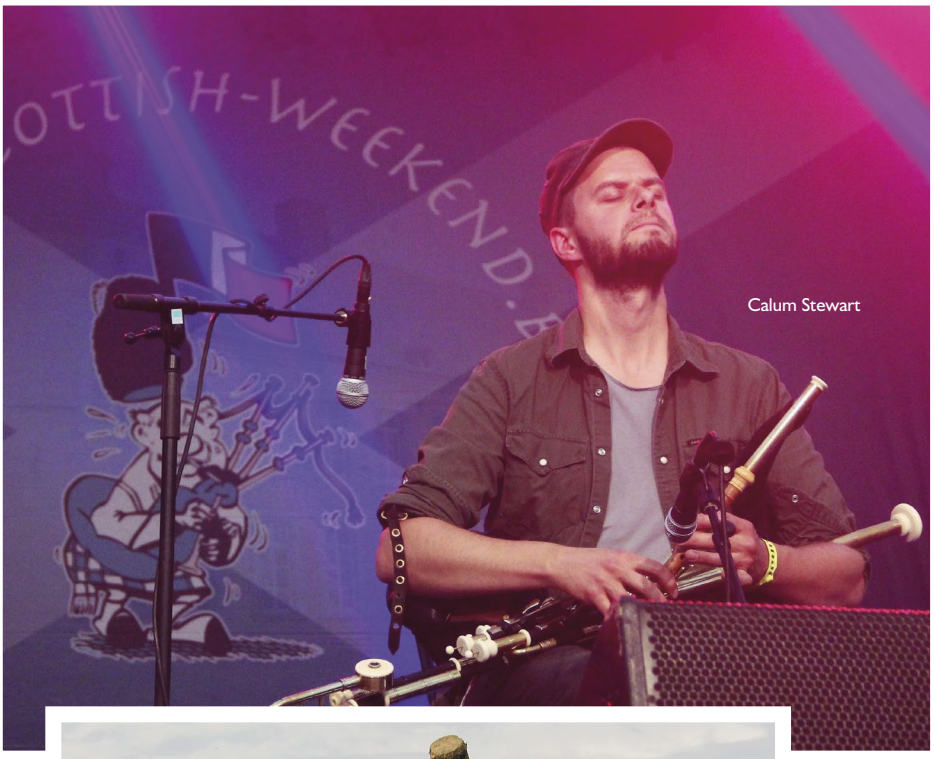

All photos: Stuart Milne





Botswing


Sam Kelly




Calum Stewart






is typical in this part of Europe, there is a greater emphasis on team competition rather than the individual pursuits of athletes attending games in Scotland, and the camaraderie in these units, men and women alike, as they supported each other through these physical trials was palpable.

They were spurred on throughout the day by three of the participating Belgian pipe bands from the previous day's competition: Antwerp & District, Belgian Blend and Wallace. There may have been no prizes for Antwerp at Alden Biesen this year, but there is still real quality in the Grade 3 band and their Grade 4 outfit is growing and improving all the time. Success at this level is surely not far away.

Back in the concert tent there was Belgian piping of a different variety in the form of the band Botswing, with the single-drone and double-chanter Flemish bagpipes one of five instruments (along with guitar, bass, violin and flute) combining in a lively selection of tunes and songs.

Before the international line-up of Ghent-based Americana band Old Salt brought a bluegrass flavour to the proceedings in late afternoon, Lyy delighted the crowd with music from their native Sweden. I saw them perform their first Scottish gig at Celtic Connections in 2011, and they were on the same marvellous form as that evening in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall's Strathclyde Suite. The blend of fiddle, guitar, drums, nyckelharpa (keyed fiddle), hurdy gurdy and the sublime vocals of Emma Björling works so well together that within a few minutes you will feel like you have been listening to Swedish folk music all your life, even if you don't understand a word of the lyrics.

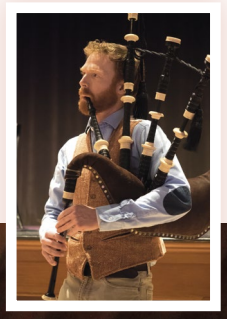
In between performances in the main tent, there was so much to see and do all over the grounds (including musical and other displays in the courtyards of the castle itself) that there was no excuse for being bored.

This is the great strength of this event – it is far more than just, as the title would suggest, a "Scottish weekend". As well as the international folk line-up, there was a host of other more local bands performing in other venues throughout the day. If pipe bands are your thing, the Belgian Championships are one of the biggest such events in Continental Europe. The parallel universes of heavy athletics and Highland dancing are given their own time to shine. The folk programme is exciting enough to be a worthy festival all on its own. When waiting around between acts, there are plenty of shopping opportunities to while away the time in the market – just make sure to ask the price of artisan nougat *before* you buy.

Indeed, the Alden Biesen Scottish Weekend has just about everything you could want from a Scottish cultural event, combined with a bit of Continental class: a Highland games, a folk festival and a pipe band competition in the grounds of a lovely renaissance castle in (this year anyway) beautiful warm sunshine, fuelled by Belgian chips, Belgian waffles and Belgian beer.

And yes, the oysters and champagne. ●

by Timothy Cummings



## THEORETICALLY SPEAKING:

# Learning tunes by ear – *part two*



**I'M going to make the possibly dangerous assumption that the majority of *Piping Today* readers are Highland pipers who learn most of their tunes from sheet music; and so, following on the heels of my recent discussion on the merits of learning by ear (*Piping Today* issue #93), I'd like to challenge you to spend more time learning aurally, and offer some tips for doing so.**

What I want, for those who aren't yet able, is for you to nurture and enjoy the ability to learn tunes straight from another piper, from recordings, and from other instruments (perhaps in your local session), and to be able to play anything that you are hearing within your own head (such as for improvisation and other forms of composing).

To help you get started, there are numerous steps and suggestions for learning by ear listed below.

There are probably far more than can be digested initially or even employed in one tune-learning session; so before you look at them, please note that as you develop this skill, many of these steps can eventually be combined and automated, or even skipped altogether.

I believe you will soon find you can learn new tunes with surprisingly little effort and in a relatively short amount of time. You may even find, as many of my colleagues and students have, that tunes learned by ear have a tendency to 'stick' better in the long run.

I'm sure you've all heard the only-slightly-exaggerated tales of freak pipers who can catch and flawlessly regurgitate a new tune upon a single hearing. But for those of you totally new to this approach, and for other normal humans, here are some recommendations that may help you get close to achieving that level of freakhood:

**1. Be not afraid.**

**2. Listen to the new tune once or twice without trying to achieve anything else**. Just relax, listen and absorb freely without fear, without pressuring yourself, without judgment and without analysing the music. Just listen.

**3. Listen once again, and if the tune has a regular pulse, try tapping your foot to the beat**. If it is a fast tune from a recording, you may want to find a way of slowing down the track. Eventually you may not need to slow tunes down to learn them but if you are new to learning by ear, this will probably be a crucial step. (If you are an app user, consider Anytune, which has pitch and repeating loop settings, and which can save your speed settings for your next session.)

*'Instantly convert the music you hear in your head to the corresponding fingering patterns'*

**4. Listen to the tune another time, and start singing (or humming or whistling) along with it**, ideally while continuing to tap the beat. Singing a new tune is one of my favourite tactics, one learned in workshops with Gary West. The sooner you can sing or otherwise reproduce the melody from your own brain, the sooner and more deeply the tune will plant itself in your head, and the sooner you'll be able to learn and memorise it. (It doesn't matter one bit if you don't think your voice is on par with Beyoncé's or even Bob Dylan's.)



Iain MacInnes teaching both by ear and with the aid of sheet music at 2014 Càirdeas (aka Vermont Bellowspipe School)

**5. Once you can sing the tune pretty successfully, start analysing the music**, ideally from your singing of it, or, if necessary, from the original source. Ask yourself any of these questions to help create a mental map of the tune:

•What is the likely metre (or time signature)? In other words, what type of tune is it – a jig, reel, waltz, etc.?

•Are there any pick-up notes? Does the tune start before the downbeat of the first full bar (or measure)?

•How many parts are there, and do they repeat and have second endings?

•What key do you think it's in? What's the *tonic* or 'home base' note? Identifying this will help give you a melodic anchor of sorts.

•Are there any specific notes that aren't ever heard, that you can immediately rule out as options? (For example, D-pentatonic tunes like *The Ramnee Ceilidh* won't have any Cs or Gs in the melody.)

**6. Listen to and sing the tune once or twice more and begin to identify the larger puzzle pieces**, starting with the first downbeat and the last note (which are often, but not always, clues to the key of the tune). Then try to pick out other prominent notes:

•What are the highest and lowest notes of the tune?

•Are there any notes that are significantly longer than others, that stand out a bit more and are easier to identify?

**7. Listen to and sing the tune yet again, and now make a mental note of any readily identifiable melodic patterns.** Ask yourself:

•What is the shape of the tune, if any? (eg an arc, a bowl, lots of jumpy intervals, etc.)

•Are there any scale-like passages? (If so, what notes do they start and end on?)

•Are there any arpeggios? (ditto above)

•Are there any repeated phrases?

•Are there any sections, small or large, that remind you of another tune you already know?

**8.** Now that you have the tune in your head, the starting and ending notes figured out, and other larger puzzle pieces in place, **try playing it through slowly a few times.** You will probably find you can play a good chunk of the tune from memory, but that there are still a handful of notes and tricky intervals yet to be identified. This would be a good time to begin relying on both your ear and intuition for making some good guesses. Stay relaxed, and keep trying to match what your fingers are producing to what you're hearing in your head until fingers, head and ears all agree with each other. Expect that you'll make some mistakes, and that's not only OK but completely normal.

**9. Take a short break to let the tune settle and marinate for a moment.** Get up and walk around and find something else to think about for a minute or two, preferably something not involving a glowing screen (seductive though they be).

**10.** As the tune begins to fall into place – which it will, I promise – **go back to your source and listen yet again for subtleties** like articulation (specific gracings), phrasing and the general groove. Try applying these to your own playing of the tune but also keep a door open to any personal variations you may ultimately want to inject into the tune to make it your own.

BY now you will have heard the tune from its original source and/or from your own singing of it at least seven times, probably more, and it will likely have imprinted itself on your brain more significantly than you may realise at first.

A quick aside: if you're learning a tune in

person from a real, live instructor, consider bringing a device to record your instructor playing it. An iPad, smartphone or other portable recording device will do just fine. If they're willing, have your instructor play the tune once through slowly, and then again, closer to full speed to record the proper groove. (Be sure to ask permission before you record, of course.)




WARD MacDonald, a talented fiddler and instructor from Prince Edward Island, Canada, once told me that he believes the very best way to learn a new tune is to do so subconsciously. He described something I suspect many of us have experienced at one time or another: unwittingly learning a tune simply because you happened to hear it in the background a bunch of times. For example, most of us have several recordings that we have obsessed over, having replayed them countless times while doing other tasks like exercising, commuting to work, seasoning a pipe bag, dutifully ironing a band shirt, succumbing to clickbait while your eggs overcook, etc.

Assuming that's true for you, have you ever found yourself playing one of those tunes without ever having made any dedicated, focused effort to figuring it out, and without ever having seen the music for it – it just magically seeped into your brain and fingers somehow? If this hasn't yet happened for you, repeat the above steps for a handful of new tunes, and before you know it, you'll be able to relate to this phenomenon. And then you may find yourself agreeing with a fiddler for once.

Speaking of Ward, while I was working on this article I emailed him and a few other colleagues who have heaps of experience both teaching and learning tunes by ear. They were happy to respond with some excellent nuggets of wisdom, here edited a wee bit for clarity.

FIRST, this from Ward:

**"Forgetting is part of learning by ear.** You may not remember the tune the next day, or even an hour later, but that's part of the natural process, so don't get discouraged. Tackle it again, and when you 're-learn' it the second time, you'll find it happens very fast. This can be very satisfying. Soon you will be waking up with the tune in your head!

**"Consider writing the tune out** as an exercise before you go searching for the sheet music to verify what you've picked up by ear. This will help with memorisation. We've all been taught to read and write language in school, but when it comes to music, we're almost never encouraged to write it out ourselves. Engage those brain centres!

**"Slow the tune down if you need to** in order to hear all the notes and ornaments. **But sometimes repetition is more useful** than slowing it down. With regular ear practice, you may find yourself learning tunes at, or close to, full speed sooner than you imagined.

**"Learn some tunes for the fun of learning them** without putting any pressure on yourself to get them stage-ready. You may learn some tunes and forget them before you ever perform them and that's OK. Learning for the sake of learning is great for expanding your mind and skill set."

And then from Fin Moore (pipemaker, performer, and instructor from Edinburgh, Scotland):

"For the first few attempts at learning a new tune by ear, **pick a tune from an album that you have listened to for a couple of years.** This will give you a head start as you will have already heard it numerous times.

"Keep in mind you couldn't sightread written music the first time you looked at it; but over the years, and **the more you've done it, the better you've become.** It's the same with learning by ear."

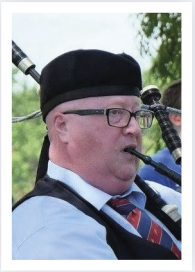
And finally from Bob Mitchell (piper and instructor from West Virginia, USA):

"I have been trying to learn tunes phrase by phrase, kind of like what is often done in certain classes and group workshops. But I found I could never quite get the tune until I went over the notes visually. I've since come to realise **the tune is already in my head, and now try to make the fingers play what I hear in my mind."**

AND that, my fellow pipers, may be the crux of what I am trying to get you to do: to be able to instantly convert the music you hear in your head to the corresponding fingering patterns that produce the same music from your chanter. This is a skill jazz musicians must develop to the extreme in order to improvise – to instantly perform what they are composing in their heads in the moment. It is also an extremely valuable and sometimes necessary skill for practically all other musicians.

Upon reflection of the above steps and suggestions, you may already be concluding there are many good ideas for learning music aurally – too many for an individual to take in all at once. (We are reminded, thus, of the individual way each of us experiences music.) So please keep these suggestions nearby for your next learning-by-ear session and focus on the approaches that turn out to be the most effective and helpful for you.

I guarantee that if you can hear music with your ears, you can learn it that way, too. And I can also guarantee that the more you practise this skill, the better and quicker you will be at it. The process will become considerably less intimidating, as well. You may even find yourself preferring to learn tunes by ear; and if that becomes the case, don't completely diss the sheet music—it has significant benefits, too. (So says the proprietor of a music publishing enterprise.) ●



by Jim Williamson

# Getting over solo competition anxiety

**I'M an adult learner from the States, who picked up the pipes 11 years ago just before turning 44. I've worked for more than 20 years for a mental health care agency and I live with generalised anxiety disorder.**

I was slated to compete in two Grade 4 events at the 2015 Wisconsin Highland Games. Just as I struck in to play my 2/4 march, I started to hyperventilate. My legs felt weak and the field started to spin. My mind raced. I tried to start marching but my feet wouldn't move. After what seemed like hours – probably 10 seconds – I told the judge, "I'm sorry" and walked away.

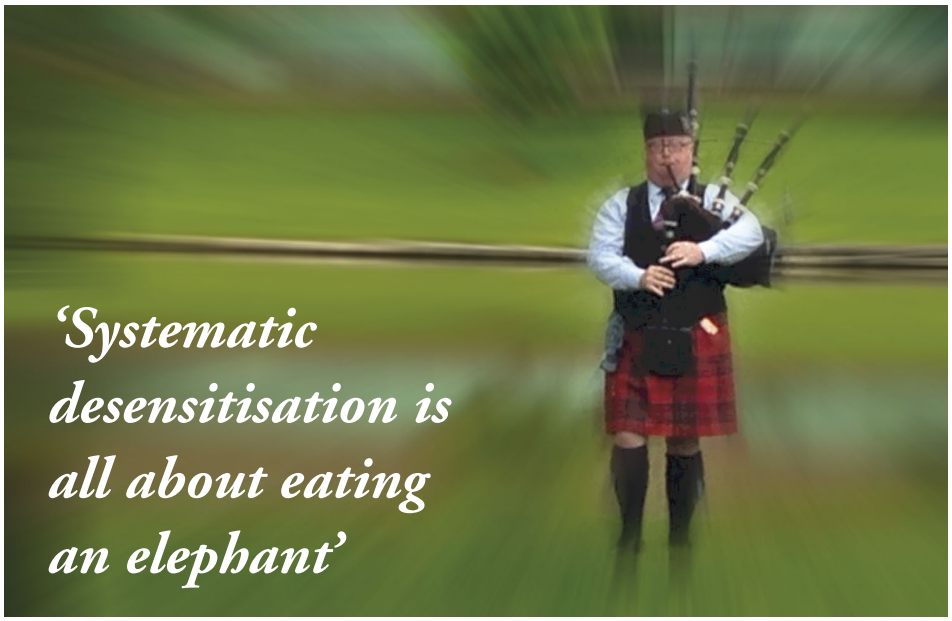
A minute later, I felt physically sick and was on the edge of tears. I was having a panic attack. I found a spot away from everyone else and let the panic attack run its course over about 10 minutes. About that time, I was scheduled to play my 6/8 march. I pulled myself together enough to approach the steward and scratch.

I've competed with mixed results over the years. By "mixed", I mean I would either hyperventilate and break down, as I did in Wisconsin, or I'd somehow manage to play all the way through my tune with minimal anxiety and win a prize. Only once in eight years of trying to compete had I managed to get all the way through both my tunes.

I found myself without a band last spring so I decided there was no better time to start competing in solo events and doing it properly. It would feed my competitive side and motivate me to practise. I also decided my experience was going to be markedly different this time.

I found a teacher who would make me better, musically and technically, and who understood how anxiety affects my life.

I only had two months before my first contest, so I developed a plan: learn and better understand what sets off my anxiety; set goals to measure my progress; and put my plan into action in a solo contest.




## Anxiety is anxiety

ONE thing I've learned from working at a mental health care organisation is that anxiety is anxiety. Even though there are lots of different things that people are afraid of – snakes, speaking to an audience, playing a tune in front of a judge – when it's all said and done, the physiological and emotional reactions are the same: nervousness, dry mouth, trembling, feeling light-headed, trouble breathing, racing heart, sweating and nausea.

One proven way to deal with anxiety is systematic desensitisation. Systematic desensitisation exposes a person to situations or things that cause fear and anxiety in a safe setting and for short periods of time. As the person deals with the stressor better and better, they are exposed more intensively for longer periods of time. Ultimately, the person can be exposed completely to the situation or thing that used to cause them stress with little or even no anxiety. The person responds to the same anxiety-provoking situation in a new way that eventually becomes a habit.

## Set goals

MY ultimate goal is to compete in solo contests with minimal anxiety. I doubted that was achievable in just a few months, so I established short-term goals that would tell me if I was moving in the right direction.

I decided my only goal for the 2018 season would be to "get through the tunes". That was my greatest obstacle that I wanted to take on first. I knew I would go to at least two contests during the season – Chicago and St. Louis. My goal was to complete my tunes at both with no breakdowns. If I forgot how the second part of my tune started, I'd improvise until I remembered. If I forgot a doubling, I'd just keep going. Breaking down was not an option. This wasn't the Former Winners' MSR at Inverness; it was the Grade 4 senior 2/4 march at an amateur contest in the US. Mistakes are expected. Just. Keep. Playing.

Why weren't prizes part of my goal? Prizes weren't the point (for now, at least). Friends told me, you can't win a prize if you don't finish your tune. In the past, if I had finished my tune, I

had a chance of a good result. So, it made sense to focus on finishing the tune. Let prizes take care of themselves.

This goal may be too simple for some players. If getting through your tune isn't your challenge, identify your issue and create goals that help you chip away at them. Your goals have to fit your needs and what you want to accomplish.

## Eating the elephant

HOW do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Systematic desensitisation is all about eating an elephant.

Step one in desensitisation was to practise my competition tunes alone, outdoors, while marching. I'm perpetually riding an undercurrent of stress, so even this can be a source of anxiety. I got nervous once and started marching on my right foot at a contest. I broke down two measures in. The tune was fine but I was on the wrong foot. Probably not reason enough to stop but I did. After a couple of weeks, I felt pretty comfortable marching, turning and playing.

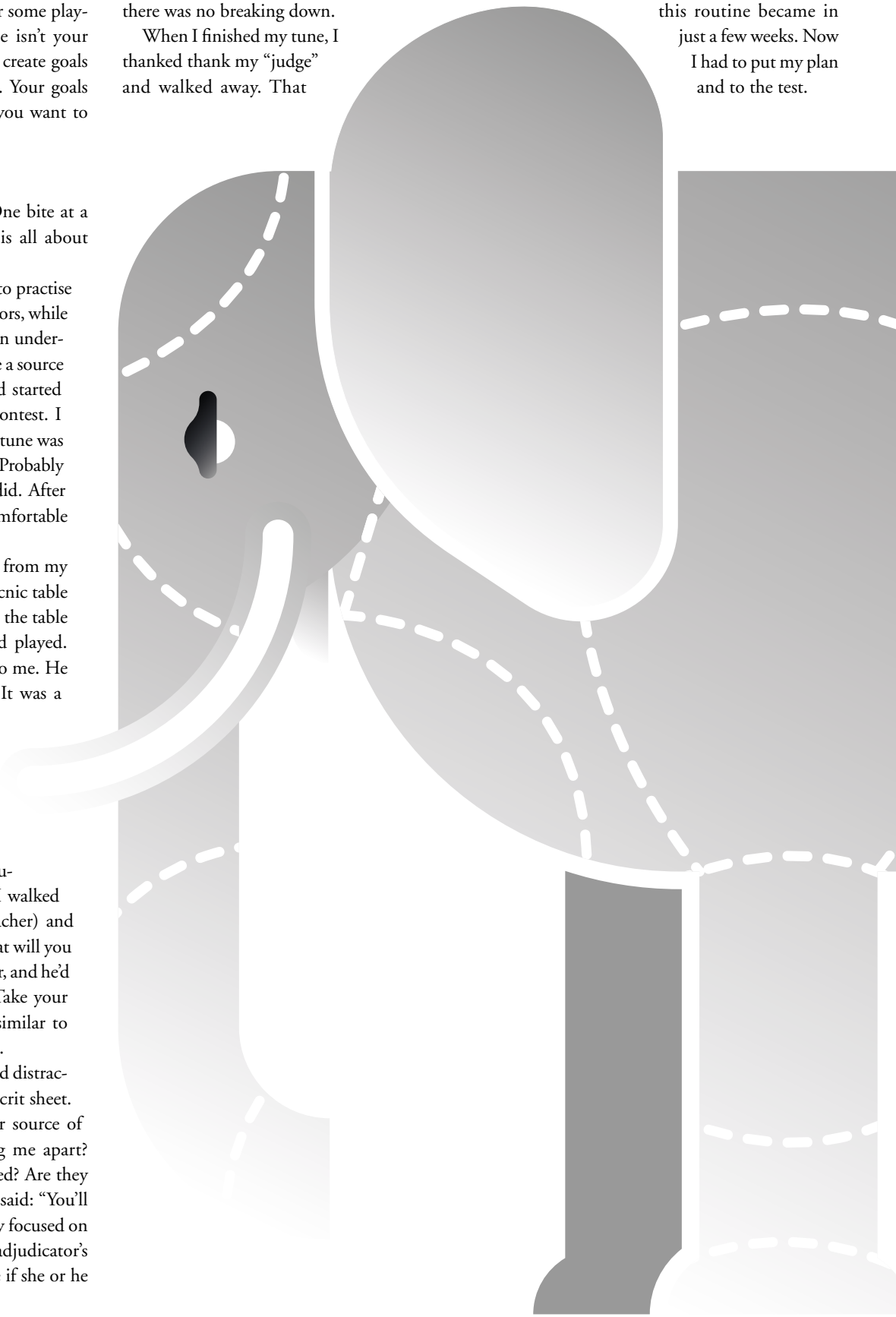
Step two meant moving lessons from my teacher's dining room table to a picnic table at a nearby park. My teacher sat at the table and listened while I marched and played. He'd critique my play by talking to me. He stopped me mid-line, if needed. It was a regular lesson in a different venue. Playing outside, I also got used to the heat and humidity that I would encounter on the day.

Finally, we completed the exposure by doing our best to accurately re-create a contest setting. I walked over, greeted the "judge" (my teacher) and introduced myself. He'd ask: "What will you be playing for me today?" I'd answer, and he'd say: "OK, anytime you're ready. Take your time." I even created crit sheets similar to those used in our local association.

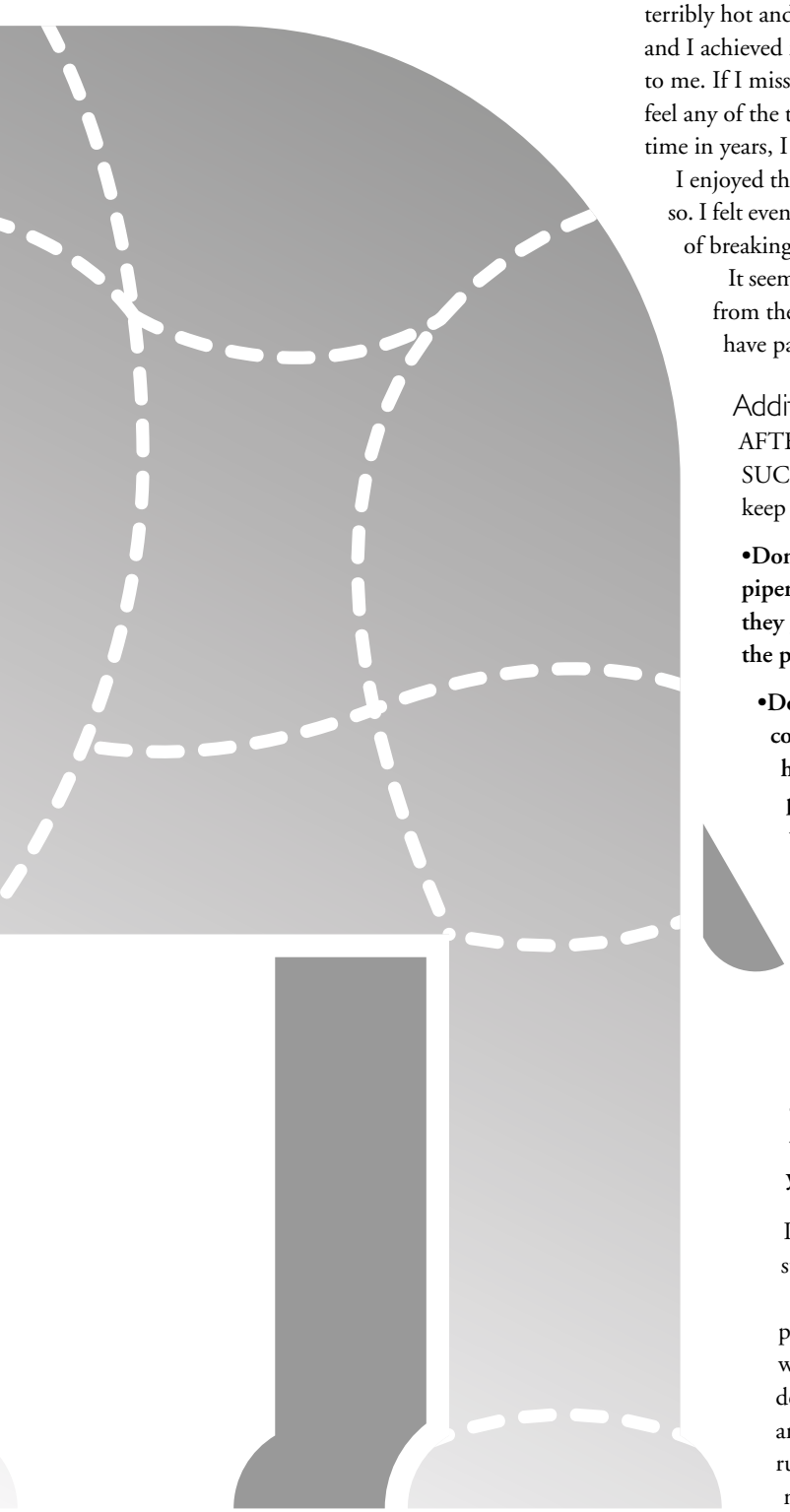
I played my tunes with the added distraction of seeing him writing on the crit sheet. This, for me, was always a major source of anxiety.Is the adjudicator ripping me apart? Did they hear something they liked? Are they making a grocery list? My teacher said: "You'll see the crit sheet soon enough. Stay focused on the tune." Now I look over the adjudicator's head when I turn so I don't notice if she or he is writing or not.

At this point, there was no stopping my tune once I'd started. This was, after all, a contest simulation. No matter how bad I got, there was no breaking down.

When I finished my tune, I thanked thank my "judge" and walked away. That gave him a chance to finish my sheet. Then he'd call me over and we'd go over it. I was surprised at how comfortable this routine became in just a few weeks. Now I had to put my plan and to the test.



*'...try eating the elephant. Make a plan and take small bites. Don't rush'*



Again, this gradual "one bite at a time" approach may be too cautious for some. Some pipers can start with their teacher playing the role of adjudicator and writing criticism on a piece of paper from day one. It falls to the individual piper to determine where they need to start.

## The proof is in the piping

MY first contest after implementing my plan was in Chicago and I'm pleased to report that this competition experience was dramatically different to any I'd had before.

I was nervous but it was the fun sort of nervous that makes you eager to play. It was a terribly hot and humid June day. My runs were not perfect but I didn't embarrass myself and I achieved my goal of getting through my tunes. Not once did breaking down occur to me. If I missed a doubling, a voice in my head said: "Forget it, keep playing." I didn't feel any of the telltale signs of a panic attack or even extreme anxiety. In fact, for the first time in years, I enjoyed competing.

I enjoyed the same success in St Louis on a very chilly October morning, except more so. I felt even more relaxed this time. I got through both my tunes without any thought of breaking down while playing well.

It seems that all the planning and the preparation, including each individual bite from the elephant and all the small, deliberate steps taken to alleviate the anxiety, have paid off. I have good, positive momentum heading into next season.

## Additional "on the day" anxiety tips

AFTER talking with my teacher and some SUCCESSFUL solo players, I've come across more ideas that have helped me keep my contest anxiety to a minimum.

**•Don't arrive too early at the park if it means you'll play too much. Some pipers arrive 90 minutes before their first event and play from the second they get there until they're called over by the steward. All that does is wear the piper out and soak their pipes.**

**•Don't run your contest tunes more than once, maybe twice, before you compete. It's too easy for a person with anxiety to get inside their own head. In addition, the tunes may sound stale if they've been over-practised. Keep your pipes going by playing something you don't have to think about.**

**•As you walk to the adjudicator's table, hum or sing your tune. It gets the tune in your head and serves as a pleasant distraction.**

**•Once the judge tells you that you may begin, take a few minutes to get settled. Play a nice slow air. Move. Breathe. Relax. There's no need to hurry up and launch into *Arthur Bignold of Lochrosque*. It also gives you one last chance to check your tuning.**

**•The only thing you can control on the day is... you. You can't do a thing about the weather, who the judge is or who's competing against you. So forget all that. Control what you can and have a great run.**

I'LL revise my goals for 2019. While I'm confident they'll be more substantial than "finish your tunes", that will always remain goal number one.

No plan for minimising anxiety will suit every musician, and solo competition isn't for everyone. There are thousands of great, talented players who don't compete as soloists. However, if you give solo competition your dead level best and find that your anxiety is worse than that of your friends and peers, try eating the elephant. Make a plan and take small bites. Don't rush. Work toward your goals. An approach like systematic desensitisation may help you have more fun and success on your solo piping journey. ●

# William Kennedy's musical legacy celebrated in style



Aoife Smyth at the young pipers concert

Paddy Keenan, Jarlath Henderson and John McSherry

**THE 25th edition of the William Kennedy Piping Festival celebrated the contribution of blind craftsman William Kennedy to Irish traditional music along with the 250th anniversary of his birth in 1768. The event, run by the Armagh Pipers Club, is not instrument-specific but welcomes leading exponents of every style of pipes, having had at least 40 countries represented over the years. All box office records were broken by the 2018 festival, which attracted hundreds of overseas visitors in addition to music fans from every corner of Ireland.**

William Kennedy was born near the village of Tandragee, County Armagh, in 1768. He lost his sight at the age of four after a bout of smallpox, and at age 13 was sent to Armagh to learn the fiddle – music then being a customary occupation for blind people. He lodged with a furniture-maker and while continuing his musical studies, acquired considerable skills in woodworking and clockmaking. This developed into a specialisation in repairing and making uilleann pipes. Kennedy had completed over 30 sets in the eight years from 1792 to 1800, the year in which he moved back to Tandragee. There he continued his trade and introduced substantial technical improvements to the chanter, the drones and, in particular, the regulators.

Kennedy's role in perfecting the uilleann pipes was marked by the unveiling during the festival of a blue plaque at the site of his

All photos: Liam McArdle



Swedish duo Dråm at the schools concert in St Patrick's Cathedral

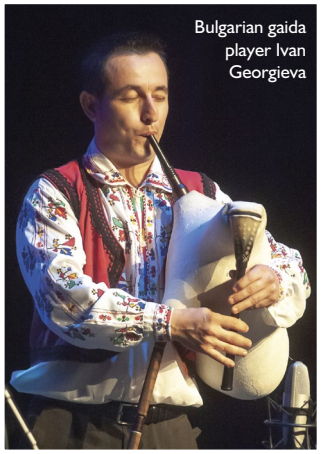


Luigi Lai from Sardinia, playing the launeddas

home and workshop in Tandragee. This rare honour from the Ulster History Circle was accompanied, of course, by pipe music – including a rendition on the uilleann pipes of *The Rollicking Boys of Tandragee*, played by Armagh Pipers Club chairman Éamonn Curran. Finlay MacDonald also played the Highland pipes, and all the way from Sardinia, 86-year-old maestro Luigi Lai gave a stunning performance on the ancient launeddas triple pipes. Lai first attended the Festival in 1995, and his circular breathing technique – enabling him to play lengthy tunes without pause – wowed his audiences just as much in 2018.

These three were among more than 60 musicians taking part in more than 40 events, half of them free of charge, during the four-day festival in November. Many of the events took place in Armagh's Market Place Theatre, with other concerts in historic buildings around the city. The theatre events included the Saturday night's *Spraoi san Amharclann*, with three simultaneous concerts inside the city's prime venue. Pubs and restaurants hosted some 14 sessions involving visiting artists and local amateurs.

Those taking part included Irish folk legends Paddy Keenan and Paddy Glackin, veterans of the 1970s Bothy Band, reunited for their first joint appearance in 20 years. Other Irish stars included Mick O'Brien, Tiarnán Ó Duinnchinn, Seán McKeon and the globetrotting group Lúnasa. The newest generation of traditional musicians was also well represented, with a special concert by young



Bulgarian gaida player Ivan Georgieva




Ross Ainslie

All photos: Liam McArdle

pipers, and participation by Pipers Club students at a singing concert, a walking "song trail" through the city, and the launch of a digital archive and DVD by the Club's Heritage Lottery-funded Musical Footsteps project.

While most of the festival artists were returning visitors, or even regulars, such as the French Duo Lagrange Rutkowski, there were first appearances from Field Marshal Montgomery's rising star Bradley Parker, the Cork piper Mary Mitchell-Ingoldsby, and from Scotland, Brighde Chaimbeul, Joy Dunlop and Ellen MacDonald. While piping in Ireland remains one of the more male-dominated branches of traditional music, Armagh Pipers Club has been doing its bit to increase the representation of women, not just through the festival but in its teaching programme. Other female artists featured this year included Ireland's Síle Denvir, Louise Mulcahy, Fiona Kelleher and Sinéad Lennon, and from Scotland, Maeve McKinnon and Síle Friel. Armagh-born singer Ríoghnach Connolly not only performed on stage with Ulaid, but took part in the song concert and in the expert workshops that have long been a feature of the festival.

The high-level Piping Academy coinciding with the Festival brought pipe students from as far away as South Korea and Australia, while online bookings showed audience participation from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Belgium, Germany, USA, France, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, South Korea, Switzerland, Italy, Israel, Spain and Canada.

As ever, a highlight of the Festival was the opportunity for musicians from many different piping cultures to play alongside one another and swap tunes and techniques. In addition to their solo performances, Georgi Makris from Greece teamed up with his Balkan neighbour Ivan Georgiev, while Galician star Anxo Lorenzo at one point played alongside José Manuel Tejedor from Asturias – bringing some audience members to their feet to dance an impromptu muñeira. Northumbrian piper Andy May had his 40th birthday marked on stage with the presentation of a cake, and went on to participate in a dazzling set with Lorenzo, Jarlath Henderson and Ross Ainslie – four completely different piping cultures playing in perfect harmony.

Following the surprise rejection by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland of the Armagh Pipers Club's main funding application for 2018-19, Club director Brian Vallely was pleased to announce that the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs had stepped in with a substantial emergency grant to sustain the education programme, currently serving some 200 students. He also acknowledged the Arts Council's sponsorship of a series of four Festival concerts, the ongoing assistance to the Festival by Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, and the support of local businesses and trade union branches. The Club is also holding a benefit concert in Belfast on Saturday, January 19, details at www.theduncairn.com.

The 25th William Kennedy Piping Festival, the most successful to date, also saw the launch of a double CD compilation of 36 of the finest live performances from the past decade. The CD and other Club publications, including its ever-popular tutor books, are available online at armaghpipers.com. ●



Asturian gaitero José Manuel Tejedor

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by Morgan Holmes

# A year of police piping in America's Heartland

## 'It's been a whirlwind'

**SATURDAY, May 5, 2018, was a bright, hot Oklahoma day. Under the vast Great Plains sky, a plucky wee pipe band made their public debut.**

Several months ago, I wrote about the inception and first, small steps of the Tulsa Police Pipes & Drums and their leader, Corporal Alexander Peiffer (*Piping Today 89*). In this article, I wanted to update you on the group's further evolution.

### Coming along and hanging in

"WE'VE come a long way," said snare drummer Larry Mark, "for people who really didn't have a clue what they were doing to where we are now. Some days we still don't know what we're doing exactly, but for the most part we're hanging in there!"

Larry's sentiment is shared widely across the band. Talking to the members at their weekly Monday evening practices, I got a strong sense of personal and collective astonishment (comingled with some healthy pride).

Lead tip Ashley Loncarich, for instance, said: "It's been a whirlwind. When we took this project on and [pipe major] Alex sucked us into his dream, I had no idea of the amount of time and dedication it would take to meet those deadlines and goals we've set. I can't believe we're so far along from our first performance."

### Memorial pipes and drums

THAT first performance as a complete band took place at the annual Tulsa Police Officers' Memorial on May 5, 2018. Each year at that event, members of the Tulsa Police Department, family, friends and community members gather to remember and honour the officers killed in the line of duty since 1917. This spring, the Tulsa Police Pipes & Drums added to the solemnity and emotion of the occasion with a full-bore rendition of *Amazing Grace*.

Ashley recalled: "Our fellow officers looked out and saw their people, their officers honouring those we've lost from this department. It was just incredible.

"The drum part of *Amazing Grace* is simple, so it gave me a chance to listen to the tune and to think about how much the pipers had put in to getting us to that point. I was just extremely proud of everybody. They played beautifully. We met our deadline."

"We know the chief liked it," chimed in piper Clay Asbill, "because actually his back was to us and as he turned around in his seat he had big grin on his face." He laughed: "And let's be honest, there's a little bit of competition: Oklahoma City PD's honour guard was there and they didn't have a bagpipe band!"

### Behind the scenes

"IN the beginning," said Ashley, "we thought we were just going to play some music. But everyone in the band quickly realised there was a whole lot of administration that goes into creating and sustaining a successful band."

Alex added: "We're not just musicians any more. We're tax experts, admin experts, marketing experts and fundraisers. The amount of things we've had to do to be able to play the music in front of others has been outstanding."

In addition to the support of their fellow officers and chief, the wider community has been hugely supportive of the band. This has



**The flag of Tulsa:** The blue field symbolizes the Arkansas River, and the many resources it has provided throughout history and today. The horizontal line represents the 1901 discovery of oil, the "black gold" that brought substantial growth and commerce to the land. The shield represents the Native American tribes forced to relocate to the region. It is also a nod to the Oklahoma state flag. Within the shield, the red circle represents the blood shed and lives lost during the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre that destroyed Black Wall Street, the most prosperous African American community in the country. The beige star at the center represents Tulsa's bright future. A nod to Tulsa's Art Deco architecture, it shows that the city has healed from past wounds and continues to flourish as an icon of a uniquely American city. The beige field represents the warmth and community commonly found in Tulsa.




Photo: Suzanne Johnson

Tulsa Police Pipes & Drums from left to right: PM Alexander Peiffer, Scott Scepanski, Ashley Loncarich, Brandon Watkins, Chris Forrest, David Moore, Clay Asbill and Larry Mark

included snapping up T-shirts and hoodies the band designed and sold to raise money, as well as generous donations from within the police service and by community members.

Alex said: "The financial backing has been critical but beyond that, all the 'thank yous' have also been so sincere and important to us. And the guys from the Tulsa Metro Pipe Band who show up each week to give us free instruction – they are true friends."

## The march forward

"EVERYBODY came together, set the goals and obliterated them," said Alex. "Better than I could ever have hoped."

The young pipe major's brows furrow and his eyes brighten as he talks of the future. He said: "2019: increased stamina. 2020: play for The President. That's not a joke; we might actually have a line for that. All we need to do is get to Washington for National Police Week and join the big parade. This has been a rocket-ship kind of year. If we can maintain and do stuff that means things to members, we'll get through."

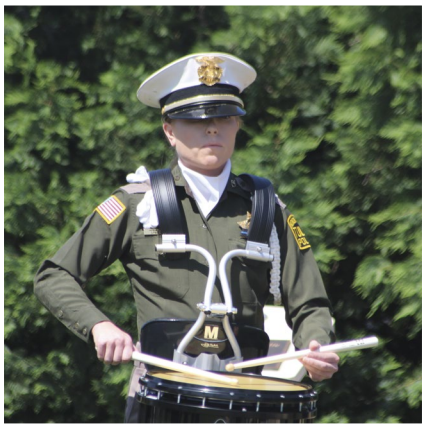


Photo: Marcie Brannon

Lead tip Ashley Loncarich at the Tulsa Police Memorial

In an effort to ensure such momentum, Alex encourages each member to bring forward tunes they love for inclusion in the band's repertoire.

Ashley was the first to take him up. She said: "Last year, I brought *The Fallen* to Alex. It was written for the firefighters who died as a result of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

"Alex learned the tune and played it for me. And then this fall our band performed *The Fallen* for the Tulsa firefighters' 9/11 charity stair-climb. It was incredible."

The band are now working on a tune that Clay brought to the table, *The Bells of Dunblane*, a piece many *Piping Today* readers will recognise as having been composed by Robert Mathieson to commemorate the 1996 school massacre in Dunblane, Scotland.

Clay said: "I first heard it in 2013, during the funeral for Chris Kyle. (A Navy SEAL who survived four tours of duty in Iraq, Kyle and his friend Chad Littlefield were killed at a shooting range in North Texas by a former Marine reportedly suffering from PTSD.)

"It's one of those tunes that's in the middle of happy and sad. I just think it sounds really cool. It's not a real sad one; not like *Amazing Grace*. And it's not a hard tune to play."

# Oklahoma's newest police piper

**TRAVIS Carr is another bandmate of mine in the Tulsa Metro Pipe Band who has combined his role as a police officer with his love of piping. A former Arabic linguist in the United States Army, Travis this year became the official piper for the Broken Arrow Police Department, in which he has served as a patrol officer for the past 13 years. (Broken Arrow is a bedroom community of about 100,000 people located next door to Tulsa.)**



Photo: Suzanne Johnson

Travis Carr, wearing his Tulsa Metro Pipe Band uniform (Anderson tartan)

"It came about in an odd way," Travis said. "I had offered several years ago to fill in as a bagpiper if the force ever needed one. The head of the Honor Guard probably thought I was joking. Anyway, it didn't go anywhere.

"But then a couple of years later, one of the majors was at the police gym and he noticed that our chief Brandon Berryhill was working out to bagpipe music of all things. It turns out the chief loves the pipes. So, the major took it upon himself to speak on my behalf and said, 'Well, you know, Travis is getting pretty good on the pipes.' And the chief replied, 'What's it going to take for Travis to be the bagpiper for the Honor Guard?' The major answered, 'I imagine it's going to take a set of pipes and a new kilt.'"

Three months later, Travis became the proud caretaker of a beautiful new stand of David Naill pipes. For his kilt, which he received in early November, Travis chose the Weir tartan. He said: "I went with that pattern because I haven't seen any other band who have it, and I also thought it would look good because the Honor Guard uniform is dark blue with gold piping – much like the Weir tartan."

Similar to Alexander Peiffer a year ago, Travis made his first public foray during ScotFest. This September, Oklahoma's annual celebration of all things Highland and Celtic took place in Broken Arrow. It was fitting, therefore, that as the massed bands, athletes, sheep and clans sweltered in 100F heat, it was Travis who performed *Amazing Grace* at the opening ceremonies. In slow, pitch-perfect measures, Travis's bold sound shimmered out across the field and into the surrounding groves of pecans, oaks and catalpas – a memorable and auspicious debut for our state's newest police piper. ● **BY MORGAN HOLMES**




Tulsa Police Pipes & Drums on the march at ScotFest 2018

Photo: Suzanne Johnson

## Like a bagpipe player

READERS of the first article about the freshman days of the Tulsa Police Pipes & Drums might recall Clay's comment that squeaking out a few bars of a tune was, to him, like "trying to choke a grizzly bear".

Piping alongside Clay, Alex and the rest of the police contingent at September's ScotFest Highland Games I felt a little sorry for that old grizzly. These players had developed some serious musical muscle.

Clay said: "It may sound weird but I actually now feel like a bagpipe player. Not a very good one but a bagpipe player nevertheless.

"I really enjoyed ScotFest and I loved the massed bands. I don't care how it sometimes sounded and how disorganised we might have been. It was just really fun being with all those groups marching and playing."

It's that kind of infectious enthusiasm that, no doubt, is sustaining the Tulsa Police Pipes & Drums through all the ups and downs of busy careers and family life. Alex said: "One of the crazy parts is nobody's got the spare time for this. Yet, they're making it happen.

"Ashley keeps calling it my dream but I've come to realise every funeral, every memorial, every event wasn't the result of my dream. I just started this thing. It's actually the department's dream. The band are something the whole department's wanted but it just hadn't happened yet. We filled a hole no one knew was there until it was filled." ●



Photo: Marcie Brannon




Bentley and had a posse of servants. In 1927, the UK's first trans-Atlantic telephone service was established. So if, say, the winner of that year's Oban Gold Medal, John Wilson, wanted to ring his pal DC Mather, in Montana, and let him in on the news, well, a three-minute chin-wag via long-wave technology would set him back £15 – about £870 in today's money. Think about that the next time you post to the world on Instagram your Tenerife selfie – all at no cost (loss of privacy aside).

Today, everyone has a smartphone; amazing little machines that hold more fire power than any computer used in NASA's Apollo space programme. And we text. Anywhere. Anytime. And yet the first text, or SMS (short message service) message, was sent a mere 25 years ago (it was "Merry Christmas", by the way).

The digitisation of almost everything (the conversion of pictures, text or sound into a form that can be processed by a computer) has laid the groundwork for the ascendance of the internet. The internet: the world's social club, information and research archive, entertainment hub and shopping mall. It's cheap to use and for anyone with a secret to keep, the worst place to hang out.

It's the internet where so much immediate, near-to-home change can be felt. Think of the many economic impacts on piping, some positive, some not. On the "not" side, recording and book business profitability have taken a hit. Streaming services and mostly free sites like YouTube, social media and "pirate" sites have kicked the stuffing out of recording and music book sales. The cost of music ownership is equal to the cost of an internet connection. The production of a commercial record or "album" is rare today – in the piping world, especially. Where once we might have seen a score of piping projects in any given year, today there are few.

The internet is heaving with archives of a vast storehouse of recorded pipe music. And not just that, the internet is uber-democratic: anyone can record and upload their rendition of any tune any time. With no Master File Curator, it's up to the consumer to decide what has merit – and there's no shortage of choice.

While the internet has supported, if not transformed, the whole idea of distance learning (think self-paced e-learning modules and face-to-face video lessons) it has spurred on a wave of self-helpers. More and more I find myself meeting pipers who, in lieu of available teachers, seek out YouTube video performances of tunes they want to learn. In place of a teacher's direction, voice and body language learning is by cold rote. I suggest that what works for learning the periodic table of the elements is a good way off from what it takes to play *In Praise of Morag* well. The act of parroting, or copying anything for that matter – especially art – prevents a person from developing a real understanding of the form, no matter what it is.

I do believe that the open archive that is the internet stands as a force for good. But the potential for it to support the development of a routine sameness to the music makes me stop – and think. When we seek to precisely trace our tunes from the same template, as in copying recordings, we risk homogenising the music. We'll all sound the same.

The always quotable Pablo Picasso said that computers are useless because they only give you answers. His point, I think, makes us look to the warmth and value of humanity – say, to teachers – and the heartlessness of the digital. But to think what I would give to have had all those years ago a good YouTube video: "How to keep your cane bass drone from stopping". :-) ●

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THE NATIONAL Piping CENTRE
INCORPORATING THE COLLEGE OF PIPING

# Grey's Notes
by Michael Grey


Photo: John Slavin@designfolk.com

# *In Praise of Morag* (and teachers)



**I CAN remember the near-precise moment I was hit with a serious dislike for cane drone reeds. I was last on in the Gold Medal contest at Oban and it was at the start of the last line of the crunluath a mach of my tune – maybe 20 seconds from the finish. I'll let Seumas MacNeill, one of the judges of that year's event take it from there: "The strongest challenge to this fine piper was coming from Michael Grey … playing a quite magnificent *In Praise of Morag*. As so often happens in such a competition, everything went well until almost the very end, when disaster struck in the form of a stopped bass drone. Michael, and many more of us, will grieve over this for years to come."**

And so I have. Sort of. At the time of my ill-fated *Morag,* synthetic reeds were in beta testing stage and just not good enough to be plugged into a pipe that needed to sound pleasing. As soon as the first reliable set of synthetic reeds was available, I was elbows-out and at the front of the shop queue. In my many years using synthetic reeds I have never had a drone stop in mid – or late – performance.

The technology of the bagpipe has come a long way in a relatively short period of time: bags, reeds, bagpipe manufacturing, tuning meters and apps, these things are among those that have raised the overall level of bagpipe sound produced today across all experience levels. Today we have choice: natural or synthetic. Count your blessings.

***'Shaving or waxing blades, rolling reeds, burning fingers, resealing reed ends, springing tongues. Oh, and waxing and tying bridles. Ugh. I can feel the sweat starting to pour down my brow; a flashback looms'***

I occasionally wonder at the untold hours of tune-playing I might've experienced – if not enjoyed – had I not had to fiddle with cane drone reeds. Shaving or waxing blades, rolling reeds, burning fingers, resealing reed ends, springing tongues. Oh, and waxing and tying bridles. Ugh. I can feel the sweat starting to pour down my brow; a flashback looms.

The speedy evolution of technology that supports an easier piping life, of course, has a broader parallel. The transformation of the developed world, especially, over the last 90 years, is nothing short of remarkable. Technological change has impacted every corner of society. Just as the invention of the wheel, the compass and the printing press changed the worlds of their time – and so ours – technology, and information technology, in particular, has changed how we interact with each other, how we buy stuff, what we buy, what we eat and how we make our way in the world; that is, how and what we do to earn a living.

The technology changes that have happened almost overwhelm. Consider the phone, the one that used to be wired to a wall. It wasn't until the 1960s that the telephone became a common sight in the average home. And calling a friend who lived a long way away? Forget it – unless your family owned a

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