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Championships**

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Euan MacCrimmon
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Murray Blair
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NYPBoS newsletter No.16

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COVER: WILLIAM McCALLUM of Bearsden won his record eighth overall Glenfiddich Piping Championship at Blair Castle, Perthshire, on October 29. As in 2004, he won both the piobaireachd and the march, strathspey and reel sections for a hands-down overall win — a phenomenal achievement. William McCallum first won the de facto world solo piping title in 1990. This year's runner-up was Angus MacColl from Oban, with Greg Wilson from Cambridge, New Zealand, in third place. Annie Grant of Dunoon, who has played a vital role over many years in establishing the teaching of piping in schools, was the recipient of the 2005 Balvenie Medal, awarded for services to piping.
Photo by Derek Maxwell

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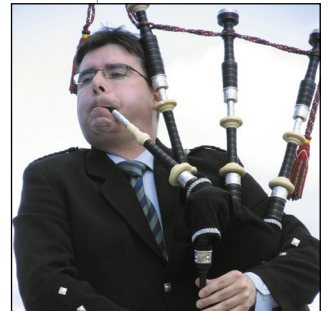


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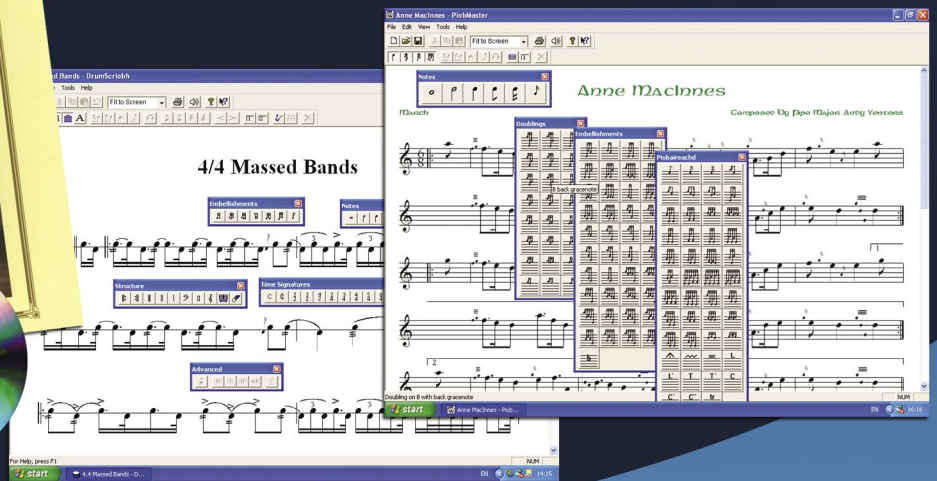
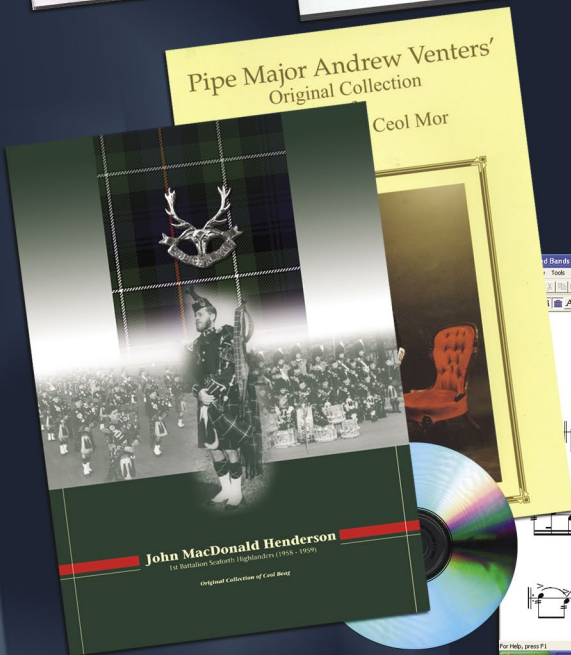
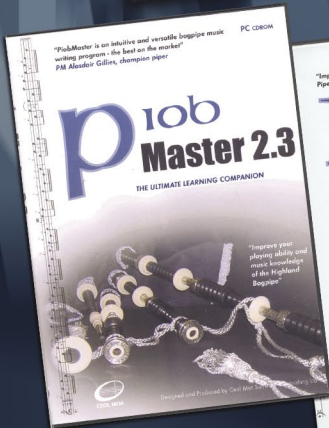
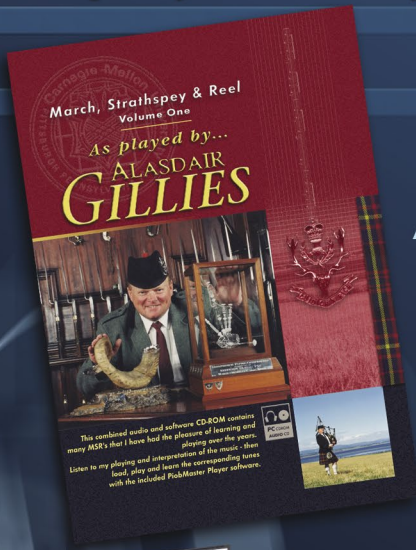
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Piping's high impact

HAVING just received an independently commissioned report on the *Piping Live!* festival, I was delighted to read that already the festival (in only its second year) is already having a significant impact.

The document sets out the results of an economic impact survey and gives a detailed assessment of the profile of visitors to *Piping Live!*, in August, along with the expenditure generated in the Glasgow, Greater Glasgow and Scottish economies due to the festival being held in the city.

Significantly, the study found that slightly more than half of the visitors at *Piping Live!* came from outside Scotland; a quarter said the festival was their "sole reason" for coming to Scotland and one in five said it was their "main reason". A further 40 per cent said it "one of several reasons" for coming.

The quality of events was rated and around 70% of those surveyed rated events as "very good" or "quite good".

In terms of its "contribution to Glasgow's atmosphere and community", nearly two thirds of the visitors interviewed said the festival gave them a greater feeling of pride in Scotland. Among the majority of festival goers who came from outside Glasgow, there was general perception that the festival had made a significant contribution to the enjoyment of their trip to the city: (87 per cent said it added "a lot" to their enjoyment) and to their likelihood of returning (75% said "a lot") and recommending the city to others (79% said "a lot").

The study estimated that 25,000 people attended *Piping Live!* events — 6,369 of them coming only for and because of the festival. The economic impact of this is hugely significant. Multiplier values from the 1991 Scottish Tourism Multiplier Study would suggest that it brought £854,000 of new spending to the Glasgow City Council area, and a further £675,000 to Scotland, activity representing 16 new jobs to Scotland.

Given the level of public funding for *Piping Live!* and the returns identified by the study, one would hope that the public bodies involved feel confident that they made a wise investment, given that the festival is only two years old.

In November, I visited the William Kennedy Piping Festival in Armagh run by the Armagh Pipers' Club. This festival is now in its 12th year, and its success is thanks in no small part to the tremendous work that's been done by Brian Vallely. In his message in the festival programme, the Mayor of Armagh reports that the William Kennedy Piping Festival is now one of the most prestigious events in the town's Arts Calendar, bringing trade and economic benefit to the City.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable festival which offered a hugely diverse and entertaining programme with a tremendous cast of solo pipers and groups from Scotland, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, Sweden and Algeria.

What was apparent at all of the events and sessions I attended was a healthily relaxed atmosphere — it seemed everyone had come to enjoy the music, to be entertained and to learn from each other's music.

Some of the most fun times for performers were daily concerts for school children (apparently nearly 6,000 of them in total). There was no shortage of enthusiasm from the youngsters who stamped their feet and clapped their hands as loudly as possible for each piper and group — even for the slow airs.

It was great to see piping get so close to the local community and to be making such an obvious impact on the hearts and minds of the people in that community. My heartiest congratulations go to the Armagh Pipers' Club for yet another successful festival, along with my thanks also for their willingness to share and contribute their knowledge and expertise to help the future development of *Piping Live!*.

The future of both festivals looks bright and this can only be great news for piping and the host communities of these festivals.

by **RODDY MacLEOD** MBE, BSc

Principal, The National Piping Centre



The National Piping Centre gratefully acknowledges the support of:



Travels with pipes



Dr MARTIN LOWE, OBE, a National Piping Centre Board member, Honorary Secretary of the Royal Scottish Pipers' Society and former Secretary to the University of Edinburgh, above enjoys a tune on Rombaksfjord, near Narvick in Arctic Norway.

Though retired, he continues to organise regular seminars on university management issues involving Swedish and British university secretaries and registrars. Venues alternate between Sweden and Scotland at two-yearly intervals — and the 2005 event was held on the border between Sweden and Norway.

“On this occasion, I was specifically asked by our Swedish colleagues to take my great Highland pipes,

which I don't normally carry on trips like this. We had a hike down to the fjord and then travelled on a small former fishing vessel to Narvick,” he said. “In the fjord, you can still see the wrecks of German battleships sunk by the British early in the Second World War.”

Retirement, he said, was allowing him time for recreational as well as professional travel — “and I find that my pipes fit quite neatly into my backpack for jaunts such as this. If I think there will be interest where I'm going, then it is easy to carry at least a set of Scottish smallpipes in the top of my cabin bag, to be played as the occasion demands.”

He has struck up his Highland pipes in Africa (once on the summit of 19,340ft Mount Kilimanjaro), India and North America. Travelling with Highland and country dancers, he also takes his Highland pipes to European folk festivals — in recent years to festivals in Germany, the Basque country of Spain and Slovenia.

“But you have to be rather sensitive about where and when you play Highland pipes, whereas smallpipes tend to be instantly acceptable, particularly indoors.”

Martin Lowe often plays in Sweden and in Denmark, his son-in-law's home-

land. A regular visitor to Sweden — not only for the seminars — he has formed a musical friendship with two nyckelharpa players in Uppsala.

“We usually have a tune or two together — and once even performed publicly,” he said. “Their instrument was almost lost until the post-war folk music revival and is now popular. It has 16 strings, four of which are played with a bow and pegged keys, while the other strings resonate and produce a wonderfully rich sound.

“My smallpipes in A make a nicely balanced combination with them, although sadly there is not a lot of their very attractive repertoire that my chanter can accommodate.”

Hardies on the table

THE GLASGOW-based Gaelic Themes group of companies, which has for some years manufactured and supplied clan crested products and Highland wear, and includes St Kilda Bagpipes and Piping Themes, hired key staff from the business of R.G.Hardie & Weatherston which went into liquidation in early October.

Premier Percussion, a Band Room creditor, announced its acquisition at that time of “all rights to products manufactured under the famous R. G. Hardie, Peter Henderson and Airtight brand names.”

At press time, the two companies were in negotiations aimed at resolving areas of mutual interest and ensuring the supply of the popular Airtight seasoning, originated by Hardie's, and continued production of the high quality bagpipes associated with the Peter Henderson and R. G. Hardie names in Scotland.

Gaelic Themes' Scott Chalmers told Piping Today

that R. G. Hardie and Co. Ltd is a wholly-owned subsidiary of his Gaelic Themes group and that he has employed Duncan Campbell, the long-serving master pipe maker at Hardies “We have also taken on Cassandra Martin, the long-serving sales administrator, and Alastair Dunn who is with us at St Kilda Bagpipes.

“The core of the Hardies staff are now employed by the group,” he said. “The first product back into production is the Airtight seasoning — made to the original recipe by the original staff.”

He said the recent history of the Hardie interests and its involvement with The Band Room, which went into liquidation in September, had contributed to complexities in securing the future of the well-known products, and that rumours in some sections of the piping media had been “less than helpful.

“But I think we'll see everything coming back to an even keel when we and Premier have been able to thoroughly work through the issues involved.”

New York, London CLASPs

TWO further Competition League for Amateur Solo Pipers (CLASP) events have been added to the calendar: in Long Island, New York, on Saturday, 25 February, and in London, England, on 18 March.

“These are exciting additions to the calendar,” said Margaret Houlihan, CLASP administrator.

Some details of the New York event are still to be confirmed. The venue for the London competition is Waverley Abbey, a large junior school on a five-hectare site of playing fields on the outskirts of the village of Tilford in Surrey.

Further information, along with entry and registration facilities, are available online at: www.theclasp.co.uk

The Competition League for Amateur Solo Pipers (CLASP) was introduced this year by the National Piping Centre to provide more opportunities for adult amateur pipers to perform and develop their playing in a graded, enjoyable and less pressured competitive environment.

Overall winners at the recent CLASP competition at Madras College in St Andrews were Douglas Gardiner in grade 1, Gerard Hughes in grade 2 and James Kenny in grade 3.

As well as the New York and London events, competitions are coming up on 14 January at the Tulloch Castle Hotel in Dingwall, Scotland; on 18 February at the Ballyearl Theatre in Newtonabbey, Co. Antrim, Ireland; on 22 April at the Best Western Pery's Hotel in Limerick, Eire; and on 17 June at the Army School of Piping, Inchdrewer House, Edinburgh.

Drumming classes

THE National Piping Centre's second 10-week evening drumming courses are scheduled to begin on 28 January.

Small groups will be formed at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. At the beginner level, tenor and bass instruction will be included. Intermediate and senior levels will be for snare drummers.

The course is being led by Gary Potter of the grade 1 ScottishPower Pipe Band who also has played with the grade 1 Auckland and District Pipe Band in New Zealand and the Benoni MacTalla Pipe Band in South Africa.

“We're also looking to offer a pre-season pipe band drumming course, primarily for grade 3 and 4 bands.” Said Gareth Rudolph, co-ordinator of the evening class programmes. “It will be a four-week course for whole drum corps and, over two-hour sessions each week, Gary will help them get the drums tuned up and put it all together, and work on ensemble as well as the sections.”

Interested people should visit the Evening Classes pages at the National Piping Centre website: www.thepipingcentre.co.uk

Aviemore again

THE 2006 Northern Meeting Piping Competitions will be held on Thursday and Friday, 31 August and 1 September, at the MacDonald Highland Resort Centre, Aviemore.

With the Eden Court Theatre in Inverness, venue for the competition since 1981, undergoing refurbishments and extensions, and after a thoroughgoing investigation of alternatives in the Highland capital, this year's Northern Meeting's piping events were held at the Centre in Aviemore.

"I think it was a resounding success," said Richard Cameron, convenor of the Northern Meeting Piping Subcommittee. "That is the view of players, audiences, management and my committee.

"We were delighted to have found a place like the MacDonald Highland Resort Centre and have booked it again for next year — and there is every possibility that we will be back there in 2007, given that we do not know whether Eden Court will be available to us as an option in 2007."

Teething problems, of the sort to be expected with a move to a new venue, were minor and soluble, he said. "Some people at the back of the auditorium experienced problems in relation to air conditioner noise and temperature control, and we were consistently discussing this with the engineering staff at the Centre and they got the system settled down. But none of the players had complaints.

"The auditoria were first class for players, and we had the best tuning rooms we've ever had: a suite of comfortable, convenient rooms, and easy for our stewards. I'd had some anxieties about stewarding in a new venue, but there were no difficulties there at all."

Signage to the Centre will be improved next year, said Richard Cameron, "and we'll be paying closer attention to advertising and publicity."

The Thursday-Friday scheduling in 2006, he said, was intended to make attendance easier for competitors and audiences.

"We've even been looking at weekends," he said, "but the weekends available to us in 2006 clashed with other major competitions, such as the Royal Braemar Highland Gathering. And we didn't want to do that.

"The Thursday and the Friday seemed to suit competitors I spoke with.

"The Wednesday and Thursday schedule sees a lot of young people rush away on the Thursday afternoon or early evening to get home to be ready for work on the Friday. It seems to have been a tradition that originated in something to do with the competitions' relationship with the Northern Meeting Balls that were held.

"The Thursday-Friday arrangement seemed to us to be preferable from a number of perspectives."

Band regradings

THE 2005 GRADE 2 world and European title winner and champion of champions Drambuie Kirkliston Pipe Band has been promoted to grade 1 for the 2006 season.

But, with Drambuie's sponsorship terminating on 31 December and the band likely to drop "Kirkliston" from its name for a new sponsor, it will be playing under a new name in the coming season.

The band, formed in 1990 won promotions from grade 4 through to grade 2 under its former pipe major, Martin Wilson, and is now led by Ian Duncan.

Four bands move up from grade 3A to grade 2: Seven Towers (2005 grade 3A outright champion) from Ballymena (pipe major: David Reid); Marlacoo from Co. Armagh (pipe major: Isaac Grant); Coalburn IOR, formed in 1894 (pipe major: D. Williams; and Strathclyde Fire and Rescue.

Promoted from Grade 3B to 3A are Annsborough (champion band), Linlithgow & District (champion drum corps), Bo'ness RBLs and Battlehill Pipe Bands.

Bands entering grade 3B from 4A in 2006 are Cumnock and District (champion band), Wallacestone and District (champion drum corps), Castlerock, Sgt Walker Memorial, Auchintober, Rothesay and District (by request) and Milngavie (by request).

Stepping up into 4A from 4B are the University of Strathclyde (champion band), the Welsh Piping Society (champion drum corps), Pitlochry and Blair Atholl, Drumlough, Cullybackey, Cleland Memorial, Raffrey and the Thomas Davis Memorial Pipe Bands.

Novice juvenile to juvenile promotions are Kintyre Schools (champion band) and George Watson's College (champion drum corps).

Perth and District Pipe Band has been relegated from grade 4A to 4B.

Young Folk stars

GILLIAN Chalmers, a first year student on the BA (Scottish Music – Piping) degree is a finalist in the BBC Radio 2 Young Folk Awards.

From the north-east of Scotland, she assembled the group Bodega: six 16-18 year-olds from all over Scotland who met as students at the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music at Plockton High School.

Drawing on Gaelic, Lowland and Northern Isles traditions, Bodega features songs in Gaelic and Scots and sets of tunes, some of which were composed while they were at the Centre.

The young musicians launched their band during a

tour in 2005 and went on to outshine 47 other acts to play at the finals on 9 December in Newcastle.

The band's line-up is: Gillian Chalmers (playing Border, small and great Highland bagpipes, voice, whistle and fiddle), Norrie MacIver (lead singer, accordion, guitar and djembe), Tia Files (guitar, bass and voice), Sandie Forbes (fiddle and voice), Ross Couper (fiddle and voice) and June Naylor (clarsach and voice).

Norrie MacIver is now studying for a degree in Scottish Music at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. June Naylor and Sandie Forbes are studying at Strathclyde University on the BA (Applied Music) programme, and Ross Couper is in Newcastle, also studying music.

Bodega will play at the *Celtic Connections* festival's Highlands and Islands open stage in Glasgow on 21 January.

ScottishPower P/M

CHRIS Armstrong, a gold medalist solo piper and established composer, is taking over leadership of the ScottishPower Pipe Band, following the retirement of Roddy Macleod as pipe major.



It is a very different prospect from the one he faced two years ago when he took over responsibility for the David Urquhart Travel Pipe Band and had to re-build a grade 1 pipe corps from scratch.

"For a number of years, there have been very few major competitions at which ScottishPower hasn't featured in the prize lists," he said. "To take on a band in that position is a very great challenge, a big responsibility and a very exciting opportunity."

Chris Armstrong's hope is that he can make a primarily musical contribution to ScottishPower's ongoing development. Several players are following him from David Urquhart Travel, including Scots Trad Music Instrumentalist of the Year Award nominee Finlay MacDonald.

"There are a lot of excellent pipers with ScottishPower — it's a top quality, well-established and highly committed group of players. And I'm looking forward to working closely with leading tip Barry Wilson and his corps."

Chris Armstrong said he had already considered resigning from David Urquhart Travel prior to being approached about the opening at ScottishPower. He admits some disappointing placings with David Urquhart Travel, "although we had some good results as well, given the circumstances."

Gig with Harry Potter

THE PIPING that turns the new *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* movie's Hogwarts Yule Ball sequence into a truly memorable moment is the work of BA (Scottish Music — Piping) Honours graduate and BBC Radio Scotland's 2005 Young Traditional Musician of the Year, Stuart Cassells.

While the number concerned — *Do the Hippogriff* — is seen performed on screen by a computer-generated giant piper and people like Pulp's Jarvis Cocker, Radiohead's Phil Selway and Jonny Greenwood, the magic music actually emanates from Stuart Cassells' pipes.

Stuart Cassells also features on the newly released studio album of hot British stadium rockers, The Darkness: *One Way Ticket To Hell... And Back*.

New challenge for Army

ARMY PIPING AND DRUMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS 2005



Photo: Mark Owens

MAJOR GENERAL Euan Loudon, who commands the Scottish Division, presents the Army Piping and Drumming Championships' trophy for the overall champion piper to Private Andrew Carlisle of the 2 Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment.

ANDREW Carlisle, from Ballygown, Northern Ireland, has a brand new title to add to his solo achievements.

A past winner of Champion of Champion, Ulster and All-Ireland titles for march, strathspey and reel and piobaireachd, he is now also the British Army's champion solo piper.

In October, at the Army School of Bagpipe

Music and Highland Drumming in Edinburgh, he notched up top aggregate points to take the overall solo title at the two-day inaugural Army Piping and Drumming Championships.

As well as his solo successes, Private Andrew Carlisle of the 2 Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, a former member of the Broom-

hedge and Ravara Pipe Bands, also plays with the past world champion Field Marshall Montgomery corps.

"I'm delighted to have won against such strong opposition," he said. "This was a good competition and I'm looking forward to coming back next year."

Pipes and drums are currently maintained

pipers and drummers



Photo: Mark Owens

CORPORAL Neil Sloan of The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders won the top award for drumming.



Photo: Mark Owens

JUBILANT Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities Officers' Training Corps (UOTC) pipers and drummers with the Edinburgh Military Tattoo Silver Plate — held by Pipe Major Willie McIntyre — the trophy they won as the overall champion band at the inaugural Army Piping and Drumming Championships in October.

by 13 Regular Army and six or seven Officer Training Corps and Territorial Army units. Another four Regular units are working towards establishing bands.

Open to all Army players, the championships took place in the grounds of Inchdrewer House over the weekend of 8-9 October: the first Army-wide competitions to have been held in recent times.

The Director of Army Bagpipe Music, Captain Stuart Samson of the Highlanders, who instituted the event, said he was happy with the interest the championships attracted, both from within the Army and from the wider public.

“These annual championships are intended to provide a focus for all Army pipers, drummers and bands: a stage and an opportunity to gain experience and confidence for other competitions,” he said. “We hope this in turn will help to demonstrate something that we know: that positive and rewarding careers in piping and drumming are still very much

available in the modern Army system.

“As well, the competitions help to showcase the wealth of talent we have within the Army,” he said.

More than 100 Army pipers representing 16 Regular and TA Regiments took part in 14 separate events over two days.

The piping adjudication panels included two former Directors of Army Bagpipe Music: Major (Retired) John Allan, MBE, and Major (Retired) Gavin Stoddart MBE, BEM; former Scots Guards pipe major, Pipe Major Brian Donaldson; Colin MacLellan, former pipe major of the Lothian and Borders Police Pipe Band and son of the first Director of Army Bagpipe Music, Captain John MacLellan; Robert Wallace, principal of the College of Piping; Walter Drysdale, a senior civilian solo piping judge; and senior Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association judges Robert Shepherd, MBE, and Harry McNulty.

Drumming judges were Alistair Aitken,

OBE, and Jim Baxter; and the bugling was decided by Warrant Officer 2 (BSM) Colin Meldrum, Band Sergeant Major, The Highland Band of The Scottish Division.

The overall champion band — and first winner of The Edinburgh Military Tattoo Silver Plate — was the Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities Officers' Training Corps (GSUOTC) Pipes and Drums led by Pipe Major Willie McIntyre. “We thought that we had a chance but there were some good bands in the competition and we are glad to have won,” he said when the results were announced.

The Saturday's programme included all of the solo piping, drumming and bugling competitions.

A “novice” competition — strictly for pipers with very little experience — was won by Fusilier “Mitch” Muir of 1 Battalion The Royal Highland Fusiliers, whose family had all turned up to lend their support. “It is a great

thrill to take part in the first competition and get my name on a trophy," he said.

A "confined" class (for pipers who have yet to gain the Army Pipe Major's Certificate) attracted an unexpectedly high entry of 47 players — most of them new to competition — and had to be got under way very early to ensure the contest could be concluded by lunchtime.

"The standard was reasonably good throughout for this level," said Colin MacLellan, who adjudicated the event, "but there were two players who stood out from the others." The winner was Junior Under Officer Jamie Forrester of the GSUOTC with a solid performance in both the march and the strathspey and reel events. In second place was another GSUOTC piper, Junior Under Officer Fraser Allison.

The championships' "senior" events were contested by holders of the Army Pipe Major's Certificate. Here, Lance Sergeant Ross McCrindle, of the Scots Guards, won the piobaireachd competition, which had attracted a strong entry of 18 players, with *The MacDougall's Gathering*; Private Andrew Carlisle was runner-up.

"The prize winners played excellent tunes," said event adjudicator Robert Wallace, principal of The College of Piping.

The day's champion drummer was Corpo-

ral Neil Sloan of The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who put in a near perfect performance of *The Highland Wedding*, *Susan Macleod* and *Mrs MacPherson of Inveran*. The champion bugler was Private Carlisle (not the piping winner) of 3 Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment.

In the afternoon, the first prizes for the senior march and senior strathspey and reel events were shared by Lance Sergeant McCrindle and Private Carlisle. The points both gained meant that the overall accolade was decided by the hornpipe and jig event that was open to all.

Private Carlisle won the event with a technically accurate and exciting performance on a good instrument the aggregate prize and the 'Army Champion' title.

The confined piobaireachd was won by Lance Corporal Andrew Stainthorpe, 1 Battalion The Highlanders, playing *The MacFarlane's Gathering*. At the time, he was studying for his Pipe Majors' Certificate at the Army School of Bagpipe Music and Highland Drumming and was surprised but happy with the result: "I didn't think I stood a chance as I was very nervous, I can't believe it," he said.

Walter Drysdale, who donated the trophy for this event, also adjudicated: "well set pipes and a solid tune, he has potential and is wor-

thy winner," he noted in relation to Corporal Stainthorpe's performance.

Commenting on the day's events, Major Gavin Stoddart, past Director of Army Bagpipe Music, said that, in his 37 years of Army service, "the standard of military piping was never higher than that which was on display today... excellent technique, well set-up instruments and wide-ranging tune selections: a great success in all respects".

The climax of the weekend, and big draw of the championships, came on the Sunday, with mini-band march, strathspey and reel and medley competitions.

More than 150 spectators packed into the Oak Room at Inchdrewer House for the start of the MSR event to hear sets from the Scots Guards (Pipe Major Stuart Mackenzie), The Royal Highland Fusiliers (Pipe Major Neil Hall), the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Pipe Major Marty Huxter), the 51 Battalion Highland Regiment (Pipe Major Andrew Downie), Tayforth University Officers' Training Corps (Pipe Major Angus Clark) and the Glasgow Universities Officers' Training Corps (Pipe Major Willie McIntyre).

Said Pipe Major Neil Hall of Cumnock whose Royal Highland Fusiliers ensemble took first prize: "it's fantastic to win and a great boost for the younger members of the band; the rest of the Army can see that we are taking things seriously in the RHE."

The first band on for the medley competition was the mini-band from the 2 Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, the eventual winners. But, with second place in both mini-band events, it was the Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities Officers' Training Corps that was declared the first 'Army Champion' band and winner of the Edinburgh Tattoo Silver Plate.

Prizes and trophies were awarded at the end of the day by Scotland's senior serving soldier, Major General Euan Loudon, General Officer Commanding Second Division, who congratulated competitors on the standards set, and emphasised the importance of the heritage and traditions attached to the arts of piping and drumming in the Army.

The next Army Championships is scheduled for 7-8 October, 2006.

Said Captain Stuart Samson: "It's all good experience and taking part is just as important to the continued development of higher standards as winning..."

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Photo of Edmonton by Don Wilkie

Canadian MacCrimmon

DESCENDANTS OF DONALD RUADH

AFTER Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon flitted Skye following a fall-out with his MacLeod patron, he refused to pass his piping down to the family, such was the vehemence of his feelings.

His ancestors had for several centuries been hereditary pipers to the Chiefs of MacLeod, and highly esteemed as players and teachers, not least by their fellow pipers. And they played a huge role in the development of Highland piping and piobaireachd repertoire.

Donald Ruadh's older brother, Iain Dubh, also served MacLeod of MacLeod as a piper and retained a lease at Borreraig but, as the 19th century dawned, the MacLeod tradition of piping patronage was nearing extinction and the MacCrimmon name became associated in oral tradition with a lost golden era of piping.

In the circles of those who cared deeply about piobaireachd, the MacCrimmons became legendary figures. When, more recently, the legends and more elaborated stories were called into question, sometimes highly-charged, sometimes hair-splitting debates blossomed as attempts were made to pin down the MacCrimmons' real accomplishments and discover precisely how their music, and piobaireachd in general, should be understood and performed. None of that should, however, be allowed to detract from an awareness that the likes of Donald Mor (c.1570-c.1640), Padruig Mor (c. 1595-c.1670), Padruig Og (c.1645-c.1730), Malcolm (1704-1760), Donald Ban (1710-1746), Iain Dubh (1731-1822) and Donald Ruadh (1743-1825) were exceptionally gifted musicians whose collective contribution to Highland piping was vast, potent, defining and transforming.

But the view of Malcolm MacCrimmon of Edmonton, Canada — a direct descendant of Donald Ruadh — is probably correct: "The interest in piping worldwide is unbelievable.



MALCOLM MacCRIMMON in 1939: a piper with the Calgary Highlanders, 2 Canadian Division.

*MALCOLM MacCRIMMON...
"People come to me and say they want their young children to take an interest in piping, and if they'd only play them some good music and talk about it, the children would get interested and do it. Young people need to hear it."*

But I don't know that there's much awareness of the MacCrimmons," he said. "I don't think the majority of pipers know much because the music they are hearing and playing is mostly marches, strathspeys and reels, and they're playing pipe band music. They may know *MacCrimmon's Lament*, but a lot of them wouldn't know how to spell piobaireachd, let alone know what one is.

"I love some piobaireachd," he said, "but I can't say I follow all of them."

Malcolm MacCrimmon, who this month (December) celebrates his 87th birthday, is the proud patriarch of born-again MacCrimmon piping in Canada, and the custodian of his family's genealogical research.

He has been piping for a phenomenal 78

years: last month he played at the City of Edmonton Awards, an important annual civic engagement that he has been fulfilling for the past 20 years. For 50 years, he played regularly for Royal Canadian Mounted Police headquarters functions and, a few years ago, was invited to help the 'Mounties' establish a pipe band — "but I really didn't want to get involved with a band. I decided I didn't need to get on a treadmill at my age."

Malcolm MacCrimmon's great grandfather was Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon's son, Roderick.

"When Donald came from Skye in about 1820, he brought his son Roderick, who was then six years old, with him — that's my great grand-

...s piping again

father, and he had a sister and two brothers.

“They stayed on in Canada but none of them played the pipes,” he said. And, for several generations, none of their families found an interest.

“My grandfather, Roderick’s son, was born in Woodville, Ontario, near lake Simcoe. He spent his whole life building railroads across Canada and had the contract for the last section in the Rocky Mountains where they drove the last spike to link Canada’s east and west coasts — and nobody talks about him but me.

“I managed to get a small park named after him in Edmonton so I felt I’d accomplished something. His first language was Gaelic but he lost it later because there were so many different nationalities working for him on the railroad.”

But, until 1926, none of the Canadian MacCrimmons had touched the bagpipes. That year, Malcolm MacCrimmon was a young boy growing up in North Vancouver on Canada’s Pacific coast. And, one day, he heard a piper playing.

“I went over and asked him if he could help me learn that instrument he was playing. He told me he was sorry, he was busy with his work, and he couldn’t take any more pupils. Then he asked me, ‘what’s your name, son?’ I told him and he said, ‘well, you can start right now.’” The piper was Donald MacLean from the Isle of Lewis.

“I’m thankful for my grandmother who was always after me once I started on the pipes,” said Malcolm MacCrimmon. “She was Flora MacArthur from Bunessan on the Ross of Mull, and she was crazy about pipes. I turned out to be her favorite grandchild because I played the pipes. The MacArthurs, of course, were great pipers too.”

When he was old enough, Malcolm MacCrimmon took lessons with the Seaforths in Vancouver under John Gillies, an ex-Scots

Guards pipe major. “He was familiar with the history of the MacCrimmons but I doubt very much whether most of the pipers in that band would have known much about them.”

Soon afterwards, in 1930, the family moved to Alberta. “Our people were always associated with horses,” he said, “and my father wanted to go back to the prairies where he was born. He was asked to take over a big farm at Fort Saskatchewan: 4,800 acres. And that’s where I grew up, and my father eventually purchased half of the farm.” Malcolm MacCrimmon, who had then been playing for four years, joined the local boys’ pipe band where John Robertson was the pipe major.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Malcolm MacCrimmon enlisted with the Calgary Highlanders and was immediately made a member of the pipe band. The regiment sailed for England and was stationed at Aldershot.

Malcolm MacCrimmon’s uncle, John Arthur (Art) of Bon Accord in Canada, had been researching the family’s background and, in doing so, had come to know a George Poulter, a member of the Clan MacCrimmon Society of London and a researcher of MacCrimmon history who lived in Surrey, not far from Aldershot.

The two — George Poulter and Malcolm MacCrimmon — were brought together. Years of painstaking genealogical research had convinced George Poulter that the young Canadian soldier was indeed a direct descendant of Donald Ruadh.

So, in 1942, Malcolm MacCrimmon traveled north to Dunvegan Castle to meet Dame Flora MacLeod of MacLeod, becoming the first piper in the family of Donald Ruadh to return to Skye in over 120 years. The outcome of the meeting was a verbal agreement establishing Malcolm MacCrimmon as the 9th Hereditary Piper to

the Chief of the Clan MacLeod. Thereafter, once the war was over, Dame Flora Macleod always included the MacCrimmon family in her entourage at public appearances whenever she visited western Canada.

“I’ve often wondered why an Englishman wrote up the history of the MacCrimmons,” said Malcolm MacCrimmon. “I have a chart of the MacCrimmon family research done by George Poulter and it’s 48 feet long; he did an immense amount of work.

“One reason he got interested was that he was the friend of a Dr MacCrimmon serving in the Royal Navy and stationed in London. This Dr MacCrimmon was the nephew of Dr Calum MacCrimmon, a descendant of Iain Dubh, who gave the Bratach Gorm (*Blue Banner*) trophy to the Piping Society of London.

“I never met Dr Calum, though. He lived in the Island of Walsay up in the Shetland Islands but he came from Skye originally.”

As a Calgary Highlander, Malcolm MacCrimmon was taught at the Army School of Piping under Pipe Major William Ross. He later transferred to the Scots Guards — a rare move for a Canadian soldier — and, again, was entitled to attend the piping school, then housed in rooms at Edinburgh Castle.

“I had three sessions there with Willie Ross.

“On one occasion he said to me, ‘I have a young piper coming and I have to go away on Saturday... would you mind giving him his lesson? His name’s John Burgess.

“I’d already heard that John Burgess at 12 years old was a boy wonder — and I said, ‘who me? I couldn’t teach anybody’. I was just in the billets and had nobody there to visit, and I guess Willie Ross thought I had the time and should give John Burgess a lesson, but I never did.”

Before the end of the Second World War, Malcolm MacCrimmon had met Mairi Chisholm

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from Gravir on the Isle of Lewis. They married and returned to Canada where Mairi teaches Gaelic classes to this day.

They set to work on the family farm. “We were there until 1952 when we moved into Edmonton and I worked for the Edmonton Exhibition Association and helped my brother, John, at his rope factory.”

Malcolm and Mairi’s children — Padruig, Flora and Iain — all showed an encouraging interest in music.

“I think they became interested in music because of my love of the Highlands, and that of my mother and my wife. The music in our house is nothing but Scottish music, mostly Gaelic music and piping. People come to me and say they want their young children to take an interest in piping, and if they’d only play them some good music and talk about it, the children would get interested and do it. Young people need to hear it.

“Padruaig (Paddy) and Iain began taking

piping lessons with an ex-Gordon Highlander, Harry Lunan. But, although he was interested, Paddy just couldn’t pick up the music quite as quickly as Iain, and Harry Lunan was very strict. After a while, Paddy walked away from him.”

But Iain MacCrimmon took avidly and naturally to piping.

“Piping in Edmonton is very big,” said Malcolm MacCrimmon. “We have at least eight pipe bands. The boys’ pipe band is the one I grew up in and the one Iain grew up in.”

From the Edmonton Boys Pipe Band, Iain MacCrimmon progressed on to the grade 1 Viscount Park and Alberta Caledonian Pipe bands and the Clan McBain Pipe Band in Calgary, studying under many of the leading pipers of his day. He gained a strong reputation on the Canadian piping stage, served as a grade 1 pipe major and produced his first two volumes of pipe music.

Tunes like *Morison Avenue*, *Maxwell’s Bonnet* and others have found their way into the rep-

ertoires of bands around the world, including several world champion corps.

On his most recent album, Angus MacColl plays *Morison Avenue*. “Iain wrote that tune because of his fondness for his aunt back in Stornoway — she lives on a little street named Morison Avenue,” said Malcolm MacCrimmon.

“She appreciated the tune. One night when we were visiting, she came in and I looked at her hands; they were bleeding. And you know what she’d done? She’d taken a screwdriver and wrench and gone down the street, and taken the street name down off its setting, and she gave it to Iain to take home to Canada: a metal plate about three feet long.

“Many years ago, Iain wrote another tune he called *Triumph Street* for a Vancouver pipe band and the pipe major didn’t think it was a good pipe tune; so Iain changed the name to *Bonnie Jean Chilton* after Ed Chilton’s baby. And bands have picked that tune up too.”

In September, 1978, when John, MacLeod of MacLeod, visited Calgary, he formalised his association with the MacCrimmon family by appointing Iain MacCrimmon to succeed his father and become the tenth Hereditary Piper to the Chief of the Clan MacLeod.

Iain MacCrimmon moved to Scotland 13 years ago and played for a time with the Dundee Police Pipe. He now teaches at three schools in the Dundee area.

“Iain’s wholly involved with his piping,” said Malcolm MacCrimmon. “He’s a very good teacher and a good composer. He’s published four books of tunes and bands all over the world play his tunes.

“And his son Calum is a very fine young piper.

“Iain and Calum are both excellent players. I could never come close to them. Even if I was 20 years old, I couldn’t play like Calum does.

“It’s a gift and that’s what the great MacCrimmon pipers had. They could have large families and I’m sure that not all of them could have become pipers.

“Certain ones had that gift.” ●

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Playing outside the circle

PERFORMANCE PIPING TO THE FORE

DESPITE making a showing in junior competitions that others would envy, Calum MacCrimmon stopped competing when he was 15. But his playing ability gained him admission to the BA (Scottish Music) degree programme at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, and he graduated with Honours in 2004. By then, he was already shaping a career as a full time professional musician.

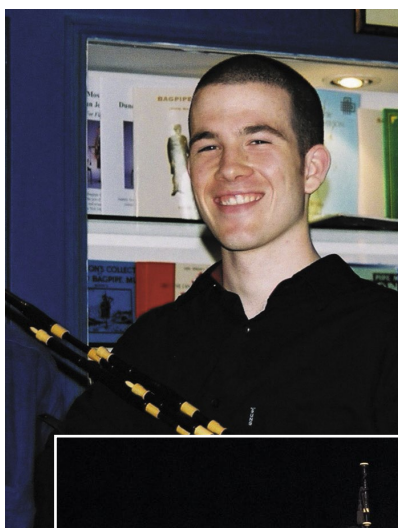
“I just didn’t enjoy the competitive side of piping anymore. I was doing all right but I lost interest in it,” he said. “I was more interested in playing for enjoyment and performance.”

He is not alone. And opportunities for pipers to pursue performing careers are widening, not only in Scotland. Already, piping has frequently taken Calum MacCrimmon abroad: to Greece, Germany, France, Canada, Denmark, Norway... and his travel itineraries keep widening.

In November, he was winning acclaim in Armagh, Northern Ireland, with the Glasgow-based ensemble Breabach and with Hamish Moore’s eight-piece piping ensemble Na Tri Seudan at the William Kennedy Piping Festival.

It is with fellow Breabach members — fiddler Patsy Reid; piper, whistle player and step-dancer Donal Brown; and guitarist Ewan Robertson — that Calum MacCrimmon has become increasingly busy as a performer, especially following their winning of the 2005 Danny Kyle Open Stage Competition at Glasgow’s *Celtic Connections* festival.

Students when they got together, though originally from scattered parts of Scotland,



*CALUM MacCRIMMON...
“It’s a chain reaction and, hopefully, performance will become just as important to pipers as competition. I think it will, and within the next 10 years.”*



BREABACH in concert at the 2005 William Kennedy Piping Festival in Armagh, Northern Ireland.

Breabach’s line-up forged their musical relationship in Glasgow’s thriving folk and sessions scene. Their original arrangements of strong traditional tunes have given Breabach a distinctive sound and a clear musical identity.

An album is being recorded in the spring, then Breabach will make a summer tour of Canada.

“Things have been a little slower with Na Tri

Seudan recently,” he said, “but the wheels are moving again now and we’re getting Highland pipes in A — Hamish said he’s made about seven sets so far, so it won’t be long before he has us playing them. It’s an exciting opportunity because they’ll be the only ones like them in the world... and we get to have a go on them.”

Getting the work as a professional musician, he said, is essentially a longer-term challenge.

Photo: Paul Ellsberg

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“It’s about establishing yourself in the oral networks and getting known — to play with bands, you need to establish a reputation as somebody who’s reliable, a good person and a good musician, and your reputation nudges you forward until you find yourself playing all the time.”

Versatility helps, and Calum MacCrimmon plays whistle, guitar and smallpipes as well as his Highland pipes. He also has arranging and musical direction skills.

A direct descendant of Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon and the MacCrimmons of Skye, Calum MacCrimmon was born and was introduced to the pipes in Edmonton, Canada, where a family friend and local pipe major, Arnie Stone, gave him his first tuition.

In 1991 — while he was still on the practice chanter — his family moved to Monifieth in Angus, on the Firth of Tay, near Scotland’s northeast coast. His father, Iain MacCrimmon was well known and highly regarded as a piper in Canada, and had been made the honorary hereditary piper to John, Chief of MacLeod. He now teaches piping at three schools in the Dundee area.

In Scotland, Calum MacCrimmon began furthering his piping with Lindsay Ellis. Other teachers he has had over the years include Anne Spalding, Norman Gillies, John D. Burgess and Allan MacDonald of Glenuig.

“It would have been nice, but I never got too many lessons from my dad — he thought we would argue too much,” he said.

But Calum MacCrimmon was brought up with a keen awareness of his family’s close Highland links and its extraordinary piping heritage.

“Is the MacCrimmon heritage a weight on my shoulders? I don’t know to be honest,” he said. “Personally, I don’t feel that way about it — I try not to anyway — but a lot of people seem to think I should.

“To me, it’s something to be proud of, not something I accept as a set of expectations.

“I have pretty much done in piping what I’ve feel is right for me, It’s something I feel is very probably right for a lot of people too,

many of whom maybe haven’t had a chance to discover it because they’ve been led along the one well-trodden path.

“That’s where I was headed, almost from day one: straight towards the competition scene: there was no choice.

“But, if you consider that the ancient MacCrimmons were basically playing music and teaching to live, following and hopefully developing the music, and working within an oral tradition — then maybe what I’m doing isn’t really all so terribly different. Time and tradition move on.”

Calum MacCrimmon hopes that what he is doing now is helping to give other pipers encouragement to experiment, have fun with the instrument and explore music more widely. And, further, that he can help piping shake off the stereotype that’s become attached to it.

“The stereotype is a perception that’s grown in the minds of people who may rarely if ever have heard the pipes played in a way that invited them to listen.

“I like to think that the things I’m enjoying doing will help piping reach out to wider audiences — and send out a message that, ‘you know what, you’re going to enjoy this because we’ve made this more exciting for everybody: the people onstage as well as everyone in the audience’.

“We need to move past the situation where, to most people, we seem so segregated from everyone else in the music world that they’ll say they can never tell whether a piper’s good or not.”

On of the things he values most about his time with the Scottish Music programme at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama was the constant opportunities it gave him to mix, talk and play with other musicians.

During his studies, Calum MacCrimmon spent a couple of years with the grade 2 Pipes and Drums of the 52nd Lowland Regiment under Pipe Major Gordon Walker. “Gordon was the reason I got involved,” he said. “I wanted to be around him for a while for the inspiration. But the basic military training is what killed it in the end for me; it wasn’t my cup of tea.”

Far more attractive was the life around the Academy and the Glasgow folk and sessions scene. “I was able to mingle with all of these other musicians and instruments, and get to know so many fantastic musicians; it’s inspiring. I wanted to learn how the folk music industry works, and discover whether there’s a space for pipers in it — and there is.

“That’s the most important thing I got out of the course,” he said. “It was brilliant — meeting people that pipers by and large don’t have a chance to meet, or speak with and learn from. There’s an exception, maybe, among pipers from the West Highlands who grow up among fiddlers and accordionists. They know the deal with that stuff but, elsewhere across the country, that really doesn’t happen very much. Pipers are cut off, and I was the same.

“You’re lucky if you’re on the Isles: you have choices straight away — there’s so much music around and you still have an oral tradition. Where those things don’t exist, if you want to play the pipes you pretty much have to compete. Your choice is whether you do it with a band or solo. I just lost a taste for competition. I felt I wasn’t progressing as much as I might because I wasn’t being allowed to enjoy it as much.

“Now I feel I’ve got a healthy relationship going with other folk instruments and with people who’ve developed with much more open musical attitudes. I’ve met people who hold similar views to me who play the fiddle, the accordion or sing. And it’s really healthy,” he said.

“My experience had generally been that pipers spoke only with other pipers; they were all competing so that’s all there was. In Glasgow, I started meeting all these other instrument players, and they weren’t pushed through this competition thing... and I think that’s starting to rub off on pipers.

“There seem to be more pipers around now who are in piping simply for the music. It’s basically the ethos of the folk music scene. And it’s growing: these guys have managed to get on stage and play for fun, although it’s all still quite alien to a lot of the competitive

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Photo of Skye by Ryan Kelly

pipers I know.”

Calum MacCrimmon is currently working on a project for next year that he is calling *Outside the Circle*. It will involve pipers like this — professional players who have found their place in the folk scene — all on stage together. So far, he has recruited 12 musicians, all with Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama or National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland backgrounds. “It will happen,” he said. “And it’ll be great.”

“At the moment, I’m playing with several folk bands and I’m enjoying being outside the pipe band scene purely because I’ve been able to replace it with something else, which is folk music — and it’s turned out great; I’ve really enjoyed the past year.

“And I very much enjoy the teaching: that’s become a big part of it for me and it’s great. I wouldn’t stop that.”

He has been involved with the Feisean movement’s Gaelic music programmes, the National Piping Centre and various summer schools, but highlight experiences come from his Youth Music Initiative involvements, a large part of his work over the past year.

“It’s a programme that has musicians go into primary schools and introducing children to traditional music. It’s now a requirement in Scotland that every pupil receives this before they leave primary school,” he said.

“The children love it. A lot of the teaching I’ve been doing with the programme has been up north, in Inverness. I was in Dundee recently, and I’ve done work in Glasgow — and everywhere, at primary age, the pupils think it’s just amazing.

“They all love the bagpipes and it’s something that, at that age, they’re all open to. If you put the right people in to teach them and play to them, they think, ‘I want to do that too’. And they really get into it.

“They’re not old enough to have formed a stereotyped view of piping. They haven’t formed a view for it, but nor have they formed one against it; they are totally open and most of the time they are really, really

excited by it.

“They see you actually make music on a real instrument, and that’s a big part of why they enjoy it. It’s live music, they get to see it being done and hear the resonance of the instrument.

“This programme has provided a lot of employment for musicians who otherwise might have been working behind bars. It’s great; you’re working but it’s not taking up all of your time so it’s giving you the chance to make your way as a performing musician.

“The hardest part of being a performing musician is that the work’s unpredictable; you don’t know when you’re going to get gigs or where, or whether you’ll have any at all in two weeks’ time. So the tutoring is an essential thing; it’s something that can be relied on and it’s enjoyable.”

Calum MacCrimmon also gets considerable satisfaction from his involvement as a producer, co-producer and backing musician with the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland, directed by Paul Warren.

“To have become involved with that is a dream come true for me,” he said.

“When I was in my early teens, I had a lot of ideas about things that the pipes could do — about other instruments playing along with them, different tunes, and so on. But there were no opportunities to put anything like that together so you tend to get shunted aside as a silly child who really doesn’t know what they’re talking about. The NYPBoS is the opportunity I dreamed about when I was younger.

“It may be a few years on, but I’ve had a chance to get involved: getting other instruments in there, blending things, taking in tunes that aren’t considered traditional and using ideas and techniques that aren’t considered typical... trying to do something exciting and take the pipes and drums in some interesting new directions.

“For the young people who are involved, that’s their dream; they’re getting it at the time in their lives I wanted it in mine. For them, that must be the most exciting feeling in the world.

“A lot of them compete as well,” he said, “but they have the talent and room for both. And they have a lot of say in what gets done. Even after I’ve put sets together and arranged things, if they have ideas, they’re taken into account and we all work as a team. It’s actually quite scary how efficiently it works — the professionalism involved is incredible.”

NYPBoS members, he said, are young pipers and drummers who “aspire, and have been inspired”... youngsters with huge amounts of creativity and talent: “the pipe majors and lead drummers of tomorrow.

“Their talent is not just going to stop,” he said. “It’s only going to strengthen.

“They’ve been picked as the most able, willing and talented young players in the country and they’re going to continue to be among the best in the country. So, of course, they’re going to be taking over bands, and they’re from all over the country: you can imagine what’s going to happen when these guys are adults out there. They’re going to be in charge because they’re very, very talented — and they’ve had this experience of performance and tasted the amazing feeling you get from performing.

“It’s a chain reaction. Not only is it going to be their influences that are expressed in the future, but the guys in charge right now — they’re watching this happen and they’re thinking ‘wait a minute, we need to be involved in this, this is great stuff’. There are all these albums coming out now, they’re getting to hear it, and that’s getting through to competitive pipers.

“I know some pipers feel a bit intimidated by it all: they’re not in the centre of it, so they feel a bit scared of it — they understand competition, and they’re happy with that.

“But I think a lot of the most influential people — I actually see them doing this — they’re talking about how they want to get smallpipes and Border pipes in, and experiment in ways they’ve heard things being done. It’s a chain reaction and, hopefully, performance will become just as important to pipers as competition.

“I think it will, and within the next 10 years.” ●

2005: golden year for

EUAN MacCRIMMON

THERE are times when being a direct descendant of Iain Dubh MacCrimmon (1731-1822) is really very pleasant: such as being able to holiday at the family home at Borreraig in Skye, and practise your pipes with the view across the loch to Dunvegan Castle spread before you.

“We still have the family croft and house at Borreraig,” said Euan MacCrimmon, winner of the 2005 Highland Society of London Gold Medal at Oban, “and that is where my dad grew up.”

“There’s been a house there for a few hundred years. The present house is the third to be built on the site. I go back there a few times every year for holidays, so it’s fantastic to have the link.”

When he was growing up in Inverness and competing on the junior circuit, however, there were times when his identity as a scion of the great piping dynasty felt ‘more like a millstone’.

“Of course, I learned from pretty early on about the MacCrimmon pipers and knew what it was all about. But, 20 years ago, it was almost unheard for a MacCrimmon to be competing... it was quite a novelty for people,” he said.

In fact, Euan MacCrimmon attributes his initial affinity with piping rather more to his mother’s side of the family. “She is a MacColl, another family with good piping traditions, and her father, my grandfather, played the pipes. He didn’t teach me, but he certainly played, and I think that’s where some of my music’s come from.”

Euan MacCrimmon was nine years old when he was introduced to a practice chanter by his school’s piping instructor, Alastair McAffer: “He’s originally from Australia, but he’s been teaching pipes in Inverness schools for quite a few years now.”



Photo by Derek Maxwell

EUAN MacCRIMMON... “ You get a real buzz when it’s all going right; it’s a great feeling. I love competing. And I love playing piobaireachd; I get a lot of enjoyment and satisfaction out of learning some of the bigger tunes and playing them on a good pipe.”

a MacCrimmon

Since his teens, Euan MacCrimmon has been taking tuition from Iain MacFadyen, travelling to Kyle every few weeks for lessons while he was still at school in Inverness, and afterwards from Aberdeen, where he spent four years at university and qualified in surveying. For the past eight years, he has been making the much longer journey from his home in Edinburgh.

Meanwhile, he progressed from a string of successes in Scotland's junior contests on to the senior competition boards. There, he quickly moved into the silver medal grade and then to acceptance for the gold medal events at the Argyllshire Gathering and Northern Meeting.

Competitive piping is a passion for Euan MacCrimmon: "it's great socially, as well as a great hobby to have," he said. "But I think it's the buzz you get off it when your pipes are going 100 per cent and you're playing really well in a competition. That's what I strive for. You get a real buzz when it's all going right; it's a great feeling.

"I love competing. And I love playing piobaireachd; I get a lot of enjoyment and satisfaction out of learning some of the bigger tunes and playing them on a good pipe.

"One of my big piping moments was winning the Dunvegan Medal in 1999," he said. And, as the Dunvegan Medal winner is invited to the next Silver Chanter competition, he played in the 2000 Silver Chanter competition at Dunvegan Castle, in the hall where his famous forefathers had played. "And that was quite an emotional experience for me."

Five years later, as the 2005 winner of the Highland Society of London Gold Medal at the Argyllshire gathering in Oban, he was invited to play in the Glenfiddich Piping Championships at Blair Castle in Perthshire, solo piping's de facto world title event.

"The Glenfiddich was fantastic," he said. "You feel very much at the top of the tree when you're there. They do a great job of looking after us; it's fantastic. It's one of those occasions you never know whether you're ever going to be back, so you savour the experience.

"Once you get on and get going it's fine. But it's quite nerve-racking when you step out there into the ballroom and look around at some of the faces in the audience; you see people with their Kilberrys open, all ready to frantically follow the tune — but it's good fun and a good bunch of people.

"Of course, my ambition now is to get back there: when you taste that, you definitely want to get back and do it again."

That will require him to win the other gold medal, a clasp or "former winners", or gain distinction in light music amongst the world's very best players.

"It would certainly be nice to get the other gold medal in the next few years," he said. "It's a difficult competition these days but I'll certainly give it my best shot."

With entries limited to 30 for the gold medal competition at the Argyllshire Gathering, and 25 for the Northern Meeting event, even getting onto the boards for these events is an achievement.

"And, when you do, the standard is so high at gold medal level these days that everything has to go for you on the day," he said. "I sit and listen to the competition and it's such a fine line; the margin of error is negligible.

"You have to get a tune you're happy with, your pipes are going to have go extremely well and you can't miss a thing — your technique has to be flawless. These are very difficult things to achieve in a particular competition on a particular day — which makes the gold medal

events very difficult competitions to win.

"I was very pleased to get *MacLeod of MacLeod's Lament* at the Argyllshire Gathering: it's a tune I've known for the past 10 years or so and that makes it a bit easier to bring out the music. But, although I'd submitted it for competitions previously, judges had never picked it until Oban. It was the first time it came out of the hat for me. It's not always a set tune for the gold medal, of course. But I've offered it at various other competitions.

"So, it was a bit of luck: a lovely tune with a great melody in it but quite difficult technically because it has a lot of high-Gs in it, and high-G's a tough note to get 100 per cent on your pipes in a competition."

Euan MacCrimmon also has been making the prize lists regularly in A-grade light music competitions around Scotland, including the A-grade competitions at the Argyllshire Gathering and Northern Meeting.

"I'd like to get more practise into my light music," he said. "I certainly enjoy playing light music and it's something that I want to concentrate on more for next year." Finding the time is the problem.

"I'm a chartered surveyor and, after the time I spend working and travelling to and from my work, I barely have time for my piping. I've got a busy work life which pays the bills, but I'm leaving for work at half seven in the morning and don't get back until maybe the back of seven at night, so I'm lucky to fit in an hour of practice a day. But I do a lot of driving and it's a quite useful way to learn tunes; I learn a lot of my tunes from tapes in the car."

Although many of the players in piping's highest echelons today are employed in roles that give them a more or less full time involvement with piping, they do not necessarily have

T H E M a c C R I M M O N S

a lot of free time in which to practise, and Euan MacCrimmon is happy to continue in his career with piping as a keenly pursued hobby.

“It’s good seeing piping getting to that level where people can have a job and a decent living in it,” he said. “But I like to have a different career and come to my piping fresh, rather than teaching it all day and then getting the pipes out again.

“I do a lot of chanter work but, when summer comes, it’s a case of trying to squeeze as much time in on the pipes as possible, and it’s not that easy.

“When you don’t have time to get your pipes out in the evenings and do the practice, it’s the light music that suffers more than anything else — so the project for me next year is to try to put a stamp onto my light music.

“That’s a pretty tough challenge,” he said. “It’s a difficult discipline to get down to, and there are so many really talented young players coming through into adult competition and playing unbelievable tunes. You’d think they were at it all day long, the way their fingers are going.”

Professional-level open piobaireachd competition is hardly less of a challenge.

“At the top end you have the Willie McCallums, the Roddy MacLeods, the Angus MacColls and Murray Hendersons — they have been there for a while and they’re the people whose level of playing you aspire to: they’re setting the benchmarks,” said Euan MacCrimmon.

“If you want to emulate them, you have to try to beat these guys, and it’s great to compete alongside them. I’ve been looking up to them since I was in junior competitions. The standard is immense... and the tunes they come out with. Willie McCallum played *Lament for Donald Ban MacCrimmon* at the Glenfiddich this year: a 20-minute, massive tune, and he played it with immaculate technique from start to finish; it was stunning.

“It’s fantastic to hear these people play. It shows the standard they have attained and the standard to aim for. I like the challenge.”

The music itself holds strong interest for Euan MacCrimmon.

“I’ve always had a real interest in the Highlands and Highland history and Scottish history, and I think that’s something that has fed my interest in the stories and history of the tunes. And it’s fascinating too, the way different tunes are put together: the different styles of piobaireachd... a lament, a gathering, a salute... and the challenge is to put your own stamp on individual tunes.

“There are some big, big tunes out there and you really have to do something slightly different with them to win the prizes. And it’s the challenges of playing some of these big tunes that got me into it,” he said.

“That’s where good tuition comes in, where someone can maybe point you in the right directions in terms of phrasing and bringing a bit more life to some tunes. But I’ve got an open mind in terms of other styles of it, other settings and so on.

“There are different interesting styles to explore. The Donald MacDonald style is interesting, and what Allan MacDonald has been doing is really interesting — but, looking at piobaireachd as it is, there’s a road to go down and there’s knowing which side of the road to go down.

“If piobaireachd has developed into a particular form, I feel that, although it once may well have been quite rudimentary, it has developed into something pretty amazing. The way the competition process has moulded it is good in that you need to have the technique backed up by an amazing-sounding pipe to make the music. All of that brings the whole thing together and makes it into the music it is. I like the way people are playing at the moment, although I think you can take too much from the written score.

“When you see people following the score as you’re playing, it’s almost like they’re there wanting to see how many mistakes you’re going to make. In my opinion that’s a bit sad, but that’s the way it seems to have been for quite a while now. Yes, you have to have a high level of technique and accuracy but one missed grace note isn’t going to detract seriously from a musically well-handled tune.”

HAVING entered the history books with his 2005 gold medal win, Euan MacCrimmon is finding fresh excitement in the new competitive environment he faces.

“It’s almost a relief to have finally got the Oban gold medal,” he said. “I think it will take off a bit of the pressure I’ve felt when I’m competing. I’ll maybe enjoy some of the bigger competitions a bit more, rather than being uptight on the boards and maybe trying a bit too hard just to get into the prize list.

“So, yes, I’m looking forward to playing in the clasp at Oban next year. Playing in the clasp is playing with the best.

“There are only so many competitions with the legendary status of that competition, and it’s amazing to get to play in it. I’ve got quite a lot of tunes to get going for next year, but that’s a nice task to have and there are some big tunes I’m looking forward to getting my head around. But I can see myself relaxing a wee bit next year and enjoying the occasions, which will be nice.”

The new Northern Meeting Piping Competitions venue — the MacDonald Highland Resort Centre, Aviemore — he said, is a good facility: “very modern, and there’s plenty of room to move about, plenty of tuning rooms and all the rest of it.

“But I’m local to Inverness, so it was quite strange moving away for the Northern Meeting this year. Personally, I’d like it to see it back at Eden Court: I think Eden Court has something extra about it, and it’s nice for the town of Inverness. But the Aviemore venue was good and I enjoyed it.

“I’m certainly looking forward to next year’s Northern Meeting.”

But neither his interest nor his family heritage has yet prompted him to attempt composing a piobaireachd.

“I think you have to be a real student of piobaireachd to compose and I’ve got a bit of work to do before I put pen to paper. I’ve composed a number of light music tunes but nothing of the stature of a piobaireachd. I have a bit more learning to do yet.

“But you never know... one day.” ●

In pursuit of the perfect sound

PIPING ALBUM PRODUCTION

MURRAY Blair is the producer behind a succession of widely acclaimed piping albums. People are noticing and looking for his name on CD credits; he has a reputation for being able to burn a fuller, truer “pipey” sound into the polycarbonate.

“In our genre,” he said, “it’s catch-up time.

“There’s room for a heap of improvement in piping recordings, probably mostly on the production side of things, taking it to the next level where commercial music should be, and applying those skills and resources.”

He is talking about an aspect of piping that has grown markedly over recent years. Technological development, social trends and a burgeoning market for piping music have made the idea of commercial and semi-commercial recordings increasingly attractive to growing numbers of pipe bands and solo players.

“But the effort that goes into recording piping could be upped a bit,” he said. “There’s a lot of tolerance of things like the sound impurities of a bad hall, for example... things that really don’t need to be there. For other music, those flaws aren’t acceptable and I don’t see why piping should be any different. Even if it’s called ‘folk music’, it’s music and music should be recorded, archived and kept to the highest possible standard. It’s a lot of effort, but it can be done.”

Murray Blair acknowledges that, while recording is an activity where studio time and quality equipment produce decidedly better results, the costs involved are prohibitive for many.

There are options.

“A hall or a lecture theatre that is not too sound-dead can be a good place for a band to record: one with a medium height to the ceiling so there are not too many reflections bouncing off each other, and probably one that’s not totally wood-lined; one where you can get some isolation between the snare drums and bass drum and the pipe corps, but



not so much that they can’t still keep good time together...

“You can do things like hanging blankets around to control reverberation. That can help; egg cartons don’t.

“And, definitely, get the pipe major onto carpet. Pipe majors invariably get excited with their foot-tapping, so don’t have them stand on a wooden floor. A wooden floor can be good for the pipes, then you can put the drum corps on carpet, but it all depends on the characteristics of the hall, and you need to consider how you can best work with it. And you don’t really want to use a hall that’s under an airport approach.

“Churches are a traditionally thought of as places where pipes sound great but they can be

a bit of a nightmare to record in because there’s typically so much reverberation bouncing all around the place.

“It’s important on any recording to try to acoustically replicate the environment that the music is naturally performed in, because that’s how it’s heard,” he said. “Here, there are so many different variables, including things you can’t control, like the home stereo and speakers people play their music through — but the biggest variable is our ears: everyone hears things differently and it’s a challenge to get a good balance.”

But recording technology does not respond to sound in quite the same way as the human ear, so achieving a “natural” sound when recording a pipe band is not quite as straightforward

as it might seem, he said: “A pipe band can be thought of as an acoustic orchestra within which there are many different elements that different people will be listening for, and that you have to try to capture in the recording.

“You have snare drummers who generally like a nice bright snare drum sound. Pipers want a big drone and nice, clean chanter sound... it’s a case of trying to obtain a balance. It’s a challenge because the musicians generally all play at the same time; other, mainstream acts record different instruments at different times but, with a pipe band, that never really seems to work out,” he said.

The placement of microphones is an issue.

“For a live band recording, you have a bass drum that’s generating a low frequency which fills the room, you have the snare drums at a much higher frequency cutting through everything and then you’ve got these nice drone microphones up in the air which are picking up everything... so it’s trying to work specific frequencies, and getting it nice and clear onto the CD,” he said.

“In solo piping, a challenge is the piper’s pacing backwards and forwards, but it can be good to hear the piper moving because that replicates what’s happening in front of you, especially in the case of live contests and recitals — the movement of sound from left to right and back on the speakers is what the piper is doing.

“If you’re a band playing a live performance for a PA (public address) system, the microphones will be quite close in,” he said. “But, if you’re doing a studio or hall recording, there’s not the same need to close-mic because, even though the pipes and drums are each generating their own sound, the instruments are relying on that room to add flavour and texture to the sound, and that’s something we want to try to capture as well. Getting in close is not as important as capturing the timbre and flavour of the whole experience,” he said.

“If I’m doing the job for a band as its recording engineer, though, I just do what the pipe major says. If I’m the producer, I’ll be working more to my judgement. A producer traditionally has an influence on the music, the content of a CD, the make-up of it all and works very closely with the performer or pipe major — a recording engineer just does what he’s told.”

Murray Blair said it is technically easy enough to mix added instrumentation to a recording before the album is mastered — “but pipers and a drummers as a rule don’t play to click

tracks (metronomes) when they’re recording, and that can make it difficult for someone else who comes in afterwards and has to follow what the pipers and drummers have recorded, listening to it on headphones. It’s a little trickier... especially if you’re recording medleys because of the tempo changes.

“But there are some great session musicians about — in Scotland, certainly. You never see their names on album covers and they normally just come in, do the job then leave. Their equipment is up to scratch, they are quick at picking up things and it’s easy to do.

“So you can do a lot of things as add-ons afterwards, but you have to plan for it, knowing that the guitar will fill out this or that area, and making allowance for that in the arrangements. Before you go in, be sure you have the big picture clear... draw it all out.

“It’s interesting ... so many piping enthusiasts buy CDs, and they tend to buy a lot of live CDs. I’d suggest a reason is that they feel, with a studio recording, they possibly lose something of the ‘vibe’. In a good studio with a good budget, you can get that ‘vibe’, but a lot of these recordings are constrained by budget.”

The key to making a successful album, he said, lies in good preparation. “And to record commercially, you need to be able to back it up by getting out there and playing you music and doing a show.

“So preparation’s not just an issue in relation to your playing,” said Murray Blair.

“For soloists, if it’s a studio recording, preparation includes things like getting comfortable with standing in one place so you’re not moving about, and practising through your whole sequence... how you’re going to start, how you’re going to stop, keeping a tuner close by, monitoring your pitch so there aren’t inconsistencies through the CD.

“It involves working on your sound and the instrument, knowing how it will perform under six or seven hours of recording, and keeping relaxed during recording.

“If you’re a band, it means everyone keeping their cool and being really focused on the job. One of the biggest problems we have recording pipe bands is the band will say, ‘okay, recording’s from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m.’... then the band turns up at noon and two hours have already gone. It’s time that, in a lot of circumstances is taken up with technical set-ups and so on. It takes a bit of effort to place microphones in the right position and work on finer attention

to detail.

“Monitoring pitch is important for bands, and practising starts and stops — and don’t get to the studio and start saying, ‘let’s try this here’, ‘let’s try that there and we’ll sort it out in the mix’... sorting it out in the mix is hard to do sometimes.

“Drawing up a schedule and knowing what you’re doing helps, and that schedule tends to adjust a bit as you get further into a recording.

“And it’s a good idea to have a few people around to assist you. Generally a pipe band is a community group and everyone wants to get involved. You have to understand that people will want to come in and see the recording process and, if the band can remain focused on what they want to do, it’s good. It’s good that people want to get involved because they’re a part of the whole team.”

ALONGSIDE more than 12 years’ experience as a professional sound engineer and producer in the music industry, Murray Blair has a wealth of piping experience to apply to the challenges of faithfully recording pipers and pipe bands — a combination of skills and insight that have come into constant international demand.

He grew up on southwest coast of Victoria, Australia.

“Piping was ‘in the family,’” said Murray Blair. “My father, Donald Blair, is a farmer but I’d say farming takes second place in his life; piping is his number one passion.” So Murray Blair and his sisters were all were taught their piping by their father. “My sisters and their partners play in the band; my nephews play; my step-brother Mark Saul, of course, he plays. And I was in the local band until I finished high school.

“I remember the family sitting around on Christmas Day and there’d be big debates going on about piping tunes and things like that. Everything new to do with piping that came out of Scotland, my father would have, sometimes before the local shops. He kept up with the magazines and we had links with family back in Glasgow. He had a big passion for pushing us in solo piping as well which was really important.”

When he was 17, Murray Blair moved to Melbourne to study sound engineering and joined the grade 1 Victoria Police Pipe Band under Nat Russell. “I shared a house with other pipers which was quite an experience, and we

had a couple of drummers in the house too.”

After four years in Melbourne, when he qualified, Murray Blair was invited to join the Victoria Police Pipe Band, also based in the city, as a full time piper. “I was classed as a ‘specialist constable,’” he said. “Our role was within the public affairs department, specifically in the public relations role serving the community of Victoria.”

In all, he spent nine years with the band, and Nat Russell involved him in the band’s recordings... “a great experience. And it went on from there,” he said.

“One of the first recordings was with Brian Lamond, a good friend. We recorded a CD in the house and it started to sound pretty good. It was a project for a buddy, and he’s a great player. There were a few different techniques for recording the pipes we wanted to use, and the sound engineering diversified from that as well.

“Something we noticed on a lot of recordings was that engineers tend to eliminate certain frequencies that pipers really get off on. So it was an opportunity to include those frequencies on recordings.”

Other bands in the region involved Murray Blair in their recording projects and he began to get assignments in Scotland — “and, as it is for anyone from outside Scotland, to get flights over and to be asked to do these jobs was very handy.

“There were two main areas that opened up opportunities for me. One was the Victoria Police connection because they had a big following, toured and successfully competed. A couple of CDs we produced were quite popular and a lot of people wanted to know how the process and the band created the sound.”

The other was a challenge set for him by a friend, Athol Chalmers who, as well as being pipe major of the Canberra Burns Club Pipe Band, was also a senior executive in the Australian telecommunications provider Telstra.

“We were in a restaurant one night and he said to me, ‘wouldn’t it be great to see piping television of the Worlds’. Telstra was getting into broadband development at the time, and Athol was quite up with it all. We nussed a few things over and he put this challenge to me: ‘see if you can if you can deliver online video and audio around the world of piping, and see how it goes’.”

The result was a website called Hype TV. “We managed to do it,” said Murray Blair.

“We had Don Bradford play down the telephone line from Scotland straight into a studio, presented it nicely, and put it out on the web. And we did the same with the St Laurence O’Toole Pipe Band... and an online webcast of Field Marshal Montgomery in concert, which was another big challenge. It was pretty cool, and it’s amazing the number of people who tapped into that from around the world”

But Murray Blair was getting as much recording work as he could handle — in places like Japan, New Zealand and the United States. And the website was generating more audio work. “I was just too busy to continue with Hype-TV but everything’s still sitting there.”

Several CDs were fundamental in making Murray Blair better known in Scotland: Roddy MacDonald’s *A Good Drying*, the Manawatu Pipe Band from New Zealand’s *The Calling* and Mark Saul’s *Myxolidian* album — all of which went onto the Greentrax label.

“Brian Lamond relocated to Scotland and I got a job recording for Shepherd’s *Douglas Music* label, and then a call to work on Shotts’ *La Boum Ecosse* CD which was a massive production and a big technical challenge, working with a Breton band that didn’t really speak a lot of English, and it snowballed from there.

“My partner is a scientist and, for her work, we moved to Holland from Australia for four months. At that time, I was coming over in Scotland, to work with Phil Cunningham on the ScottishPower Pipe Band’s *Cathcart* album, then opportunities arose in Scotland for us both so we moved on to Edinburgh and it’s been good ever since.

“And, for many years, I’ve had the advantage of assistance on larger productions of Sandy Lobban who has a great understanding of what’s required — his input and work is invaluable, and I always feel at ease when Sandy’s on a live recording with me.”

By the time he settled in Scotland, Murray Blair had produced 30–40 albums and was getting more and more involved with the commercial piping labels. His most recent productions include Simon Fraser University Pipe Band’s *On Home Ground* CD and the Vale of Atholl Pipe Band’s *Live in Frankfurt* album.

“It’s always a learning curve,” he said. “There are always advances in recording technology and techniques, and unorthodox techniques. That’s what’s good about it, it’s why I like it — you’re always learning and it’s a challenge. Every album is different and it’s good to work

with a lot of different artists.

“There’s a learning curve; you go to school to learn the fundamentals, and what you do with those fundamentals is your own choice. The fundamentals are about getting a good sound and getting that sound down onto a recording.

“As to how far it goes, I think it’s endless,” he said. “We haven’t explored the boundaries yet. There’s some really wild stuff you could do.

“In piping traditions other than Highland piping, they’ve gone further in exploring those boundaries — some of the Asturian and Galician pipers, for example. And, without a doubt, Martyn Bennett, who’s been one of my huge influences, really explored some boundaries in terms of what you can do with pipes and it was groundbreaking, inspirational. If you know what you’re doing and you’ve got the right gear, like Martin, you can achieve a lot from home.

“The studio sound and live sound are converging strongly. In other music they’ve been doing it for years and years; the technology is there and, by using that technology, you’re delivering better music to the listener, and that’s what it’s about.

“Piping is getting so big, it can be done.

“In piping, though, there’s a mindset to be overcome — the notion that something involving electronics is somehow inherently ‘false’... although we’ll happily go and see someone in concert like U2, who are heavily electronic-based in the background, and it’s acceptable. Everyone’s favourite group, there’s no doubt, has some sort of enhancement going on in order to deliver a better product. Even when they play live, there are things like auto tuners on singers’ voices and, while it might be great to hear singers who don’t need that, I don’t think many take the risk.

“We have a bit of a way to go to get that fantastic piping recording down but it’s coming closer and closer all the time. Production is advancing, things are getting better, and innovations are coming to the fore...”

And there is room for much more piping recording activity, he said.

“I don’t see it as competition — different people get different sounds and I think that’s a good thing. We all learn from other CDs.

“The important difference is that it’s pushing everyone to strive for a better product, and the recordings that stand out will be the ones where the production and the musical qualities shine through.” ●

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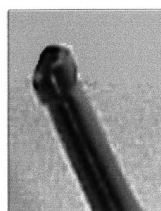
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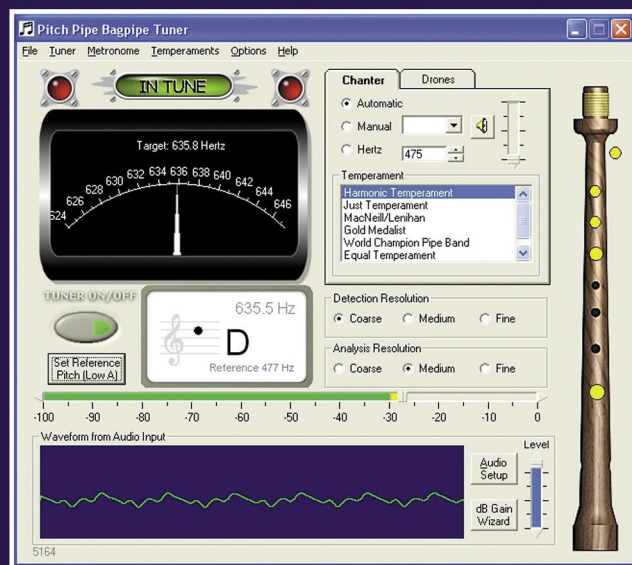
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Youngstars

The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland
Newsletter No.16

NYPBoS pipers stage a fiery show

FRENCH artist and performer Michel Moglia's 1,800-kilogram 'Orgue a Feu' — fire organ — is not exactly a sitting-room instrument but, neither really, is the great Highland bagpipe.

On Sunday night, 27 November, a crowd of 15,000 people heard the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland pipe corps play in ensemble with Michel Moglia's unique instrument at the spectacular finale of Glasgow's first Festival of Light, *Radiance*, at Glasgow's Rottenrow Gardens.

The event was exciting and memorable, with three 20-minute performances, at 5.30 p.m., 6.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Michel Moglia, a sculptor and classical flautist, became fascinated with the sounds produced by heat in a hollow tube and began building fire organs some 20 years ago. "It is not an esthetic of the flame that interests me," he told an interviewer, "so much of as the effect that it produces when there is a column of air vibrating through it."

The fire organ is a complicated pyramid-like

arrangement of about 300 stainless steel, titanium and glass tubes of different dimensions. It is played by moving gas burners of varying intensity around the openings of the tubes.

Basically, the rich-timbred sound is generated by vibrations set up by cold and hot air as they interact in a pipe at a partial barrier near the top of the tube. The diameter and length of the pipe determine the note that is produced. But the notes are acoustically complicated by other sounds that come from other sources within the organ and are not altogether predictable: "Imagine a mix of songs produced by whales, Tibetan trumpets, African flutes and jet engine reactors," said one reviewer.

In Glasgow, J.D. Twitch of Optimo, was working with Michel Moglia and his team and the NYPBoS pipers. And the fire organ was programmed so that additional light and sound sequences could be synchronised with an array of visual effects.

The NYPBoS pipe corps took the stage in three groups to *La Boum*. The fire organ began this se-

quence and was then joined by a specially arranged soundtrack that built up over the 20-minute sequence into a blazing closing presentation led by the NYPBoS pipers playing Mark Saul's *The Hell Bound Train* with the percussion backing track.

After a technical rehearsal at the Rottenrow Gardens on the Saturday evening, the pipers had just the Sunday morning to get down Jonathan Quay's arrangement of the tune.

"This was an unusual and exciting opportunity, a great challenge for the pipers involved," said NYPBoS director, Paul Warren. "It is too bad that our drummers weren't called for on this occasion, simply because of the way the whole show was presented, but it is the sort of high profile public performance that will help us to secure further interesting engagements.

"We were able to bring something very special to this festival and, in return this is an stimulating, enjoyable and very different kind of event to be involved with: just what we in the NYPBoS are about." ●



Photo by Ashley Coombes

NYPBoS lead tip takes world title

DAVEY ROSS

WINNING the 2005 Juvenile World Drumming title was a tremendous thrill for Davey Ross — leading drummer of the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland and a member of the grade I Dysart and Dundonald Pipe Band drum corps — and for his parents who was there to see their son compete.

“Getting the world title was very emotional for me and my mum and dad,” he said. “It meant a lot to me and my family.

“I didn’t get much of a chance to hear many players because I was last on, which probably made it worse — I had no idea how anyone else had played.”

In the lead-up to the event, he worked at his drumming hard — every evening. “I tried to spend as much time on the drum as possible. And mainly trying to focus my mind onto the job, as I had a lot going on in my life on the run up to the worlds, between university and work and so on.

“I gave it everything I had, mainly because this was my last year in the juvenile championships. I had never been placed in the Worlds before,” he said.

But he had cut an impressive swathe through local competitions in Scotland. And, as well as cutting it as a grade I pipe band drummer, had become a valued senior member of the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland. And, in his spare time, he plays drum kit with a rock group and percussion and guitar with a small folk band: “Many of my friends are musicians of some kind,” he said.

For him, the “buzz” started early. He was hardly much more than a toddler when he and a young friend would “play” along with Runrig recordings. “We’d pretend we were playing in the band — and I was always the drummer,” he said.

Eric and Catherine Ross recognized their son’s early interest and, when the family moved from Glasgow to Dalgety Bay in Fife, Catherine Ross took David, then four and a half years old, along to the Inverkeithing and District Pipe Band. “My parents have always been very supportive,” he said. “I really could never have gone very far with my drumming without them.

“To be honest, when I first started learning the drums I was so young that, really, my lessons and playing in the band were more of a social thing. I thought of it more as a club where I made friends. It wasn’t until I was a little older that I began to appreciate drumming.”

After a year with the Inverkeithing band, Davey Ross moved to the Burntisland Pipe Band where he met and began to learn drumming with Mark Gibson.

“This is where I learned most of my skills as a drummer, and as a musician,” he said.



“Mark is a brilliant teacher who has turned out some brilliant drummers — people like Scott Birrell of Boghall and Bathgate’s grade I corps, John Henderson at Dysart and Dundonald and others... not to mention a number of drummers he has taught who’ve gone on to play very successfully in rock bands.”

Davey Ross stayed with the Burntisland band for nearly 10 years — “some of the best years of my life” — and, playing with the novice juvenile corps, had his first taste of winning serious events: world, British, European, Scottish and Cowal Championship titles were all taken by the youngsters from Fife. More titles were won by his juvenile corps. “Throughout my time there, I was taught by Mark Gibson. I have respect for all of the main guys in the drumming world, of course, but I don’t think I have a particular ‘hero’. But Mark Gibson is someone I looked up to as a youngster and he has been the most influential

figure in drumming for me.”

At the same time, Davey Ross was emerging as drummer of exceptional talent and as a valued corps member — as an identity in his own right.

He moved on to the grade I Drambuie Kirkliston corps under the leadership of Alex Dudgeon, with whom he won the Scottish drum corps championship title.

He also won selection, in 2003, as a founding member of the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland.

“My experience with the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland has been brilliant,” he said. “I can’t speak highly enough of it,” he said. “I have made friends for life in the band, played alongside brilliant musicians and in the most amazing places. The trip to China was a life changing experience.

“The NYPBoS has shaped many of its members’ futures, showing them that a career in their instrument

would be something they would want to pursue.”

In 2004, after two years with the Drambuie Kirkliston band, Davey Ross moved on to Dysart and Dundonald.

“Dysart has been a very influential band throughout the years of my childhood, as it is my local grade 1 band, and my tutor Mark Gibson played for them. When I moved to Dysart, it just made sense, and I always wanted to play for them as a youngster.

“Under the current leadership of Brian Purvis, my playing has come on by leaps and bounds, and I feel a lot of the credit for my progress must go to the all the drummers in the band who have helped me.

“You reach a point at which you begin to feel appreciated by fellow drummers and musicians on the basis of your ability ... drumming is a gradual progression as well: you are always learning something that can be added to your skills. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly when it was that I felt first like a ‘real’ drummer, but teaching has a big part to play in that. It makes you realise what sort of a drummer you are.”

Teaching is something Davey Ross has come to feel as a vocation.

“For a long time, my vision has been to have my very own drumming school back in Fife: something along the same lines as the National Piping Centre but for drumming — and not just for pipe band snare drumming but for percussion drumming as well.”

Several years ago, he began offering drumming tuition at Inverkeithing High School. “That’s where I really learned about myself and my teaching abilities; I got so much out of teaching there and realised that this is what I would love to do,” he said.

“I saw the demand among youngsters, young people wanting to learn but with nowhere really for them to go.

“Few bands now invest much time in teaching youngsters, which is a real shame.

“Unfortunately, when I moved through to university in Glasgow, I had to give up my commitment at the high school — but right now, I’m doing a business studies degree at Glasgow Caledonian University with the hope that it will help and equip me when I try to set up my own drumming school.”

Pipe bands and pipe band drumming are areas he sees having vast new areas still to explore.

“People like Jim Kilpatrick and Eric Ward have pushed the boundaries, which is great. But there is more to be done. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly what, because I’m not sure, however I think people will have to be open for more dramatic change if it is to take place.

“As I started going abroad and winning titles there was a lot more respect. I have many ideas on this, and could speak about it all day.

“The key to successful pipe band performance is the situation where the pipers and drummers work together on the music, instead an old way of doing things where the music was often thrown at the drum corps to get on with.

“The gap that has existed between pipers and drummers can probably be put down to a mutual lack of understanding. Pipers and drummers should probably learn more about how each other’s instruments work, and why things happen and sound like they do.

“Pipers could usefully try to learn a bit more about drumming and how rudiments can complement the tunes, and how this can develop the band’s ensemble performance. And the argument applies the other way for drummers.

“My experience has been that pipers have often looked down on my instrument, which is probably due to a lack of understanding. Although a snare drum clearly does not have the same range of pitch as the pipes, talent and experience are needed to play the

drums too, and to understand the music,” he said.

“Currently I see people like Jim Kilpatrick, Eric Ward, Barry Wilson and Paul Turner leading things very well on the drumming front; and Richard Parks and Robert Matheson in piping. However, I think that the next decade will see a massive influx of new people willing, ready and able to fill these people’s shoes,” he said.

“Pipe bands are being far more inventive with the construction of tunes and medleys, and I see them beginning to get greater recognition for their capacity to present quality musical performances as opposed to simply standing there playing sets of tunes.

“But I’d like to see pipe bands in general become more aware of their audiences — people pay money to see the bands play and, if it means facing outwards in the circle or whatever, fine.

“Greater audience awareness is an issue too when it comes to concerts performed by pipe bands. Seeing bands simply march on and play their sets doesn’t do it for me, especially when I have paid £15 to see them perform. In this regard, I have always been impressed with the 78th Fraser Highlanders of Ontario, Canada, which, at the moment, is one of the few bands to really make an effort to put a ‘show’, as opposed to a ‘performance’.

“But all bands should be trying to put on a better show for the public. For example, I wouldn’t rule out the idea of bands working with dancers more often than they do. Highland dancing is a large part of our culture and does work with pipe bands as I’ve seen on stage in concert with the National Youth Pipe Band.

“For a long time I’ve nurtured a goal of making pipe band drumming ‘cool’. As I grew up — I wasn’t wound up about it — but people just envisaged my drumming in the context of a very traditional pipe band. It frustrated me.

“Change is needed.” ●

NYPBoS courses planned

THE NATIONAL Youth Pipe Band of Scotland was looking forward at press time to mounting a full edition of its acclaimed *Making the Change* show at the Partick Burgh Hall on 4 December as the grand finale concert of the 2005 Partick Folk Festival.

The show, a part of which was presented at the 2005 *Piping Live!* festival in Glasgow, was also to be the culmination of a challenging development and leadership course at the National Piping Centre that is intended to bring less experienced members to the fore, and give everyone opportunities to step up the level of their involvement.

“It will give those who are coming on an opportunity to shine,” said NYPBoS director Paul Warren. “I’m obviously hoping senior members will come along and support the concert but they will be in the back line.

“It’s quite a challenge for everybody. Even those who are auditioning will perform: everyone who takes

part in that band camp.”

Paul Warren said he was also planning to introduce a new *NYPBoS Training Course* — a pre-audition course for young players

“A lot of young people have come on courses, find them quite hard but have high expectations of wanting to be in the band — but they are just not ready for it and the rejection involved is hard for me to do and sometimes very disappointing for them,” he said.

The new course will have many of the features of an audition course but be a preparation for audition and a taster of the NYPBoS experience.

“It’s designed to expand the experience and understanding of those who come,” he said.

“It will look at the subjects we generally cover in the NYPBoS in terms of wider musicianship skills and help to prepare those who are interested without their having to formally audition.

“It will be a fun and learning experience,” he said, “and, while it will not include an audition with its at-

tenant pressures, it will better enable me to identify people who seem to be ready for the more pressured audition courses so they can attend with a realistic expectation of success.”

Paul Warren said the course would also help to establish a wider network of potential members... “and a better idea of the talent out there.

“It’s an important development.”

NYPBoS courses and camps scheduled over the next eight months include:

- 13-14 January: New Year band camp
- 12-14 February: NYPBoS courses 1&2
- 19-21 February: NYPBoS courses 3&4
- 8-11 March: Outreach tour (to be confirmed)
- 26-28 March: NYPBoS courses 5&6
- 9-11 April: NYPBoS courses 7&8
- 16-18 April: NYPBoS overspill courses
- 28-30 May: NYPBoS course 9&10
- 6-8 August: NYPBoS Summer Band Camp (t.b.c)



A big New Year's in store

CELTIC CONNECTIONS 2006

CELTIC Connections, now in its 13th year, is the biggest winter festival of its kind in the world and there's a lot to achieve when we take our full-on *Making the Change* show on stage in the at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall's Strathclyde Suite on Saturday 14 January.

Celtic Connections features artists from around the world alongside the very best Scottish talent in 12 venues across the city — so to be in the concert hall this year puts the NYPBoS in the spotlight and I'm delighted and thankful for it.

We play at 2 p.m. — a great time for a winter gig like this — and, following us at the Royal Concert Hall are some popular festival highlights including *Danny Kyle's Open Stage* hosted by Gibb Todd and, that night, the *Musical Ark* show with the likes of Aly Bain, Phil Cunningham, Ale Möller, Brian McNeill, Findlay Napier and Karen Tweed.

We'll be in good company indeed, and I know we'll meet everyone's highest expectations with a great show that has already had a test-run and into which we have put a lot more work and development.

The most exciting aspect of it for me is the energy and creativity that you have put into this show — it is your creation — and our *Celtic Connections* performance is where it will be seen by a big audience, and in full bloom.

Tickets are already on sale at the Glasgow Royal Concert hall box office and, thanks to outings like the *Piping Live!* concert in August, *Radiance* and the Partick Folk Festival, we have a higher profile in Glasgow than ever before — we should all expect to turn on our "best yet show" to a full house (and, if your friends and family want tickets, encourage them to get in soon).

What this all means is that — no matter how large

and up front or small your role — keep practicing, and keep focused over the Christmas-Hogmanay break. Those first two weeks of 2006 will pass very, very quickly and we'll be tuning our drones for *Celtic Connections* before you know it. We have to put our very best foot forward on 14 January, and we can be confident that our absolute best is very, very good indeed.

Another reason to keep your levels high is a yet-to-be-confirmed possibility that we will have an opportunity to play with Carlos Nuñez on Wednesday, 11 January.

Galician star Carlos Nuñez is a great friend of the NYPBoS and, if this comes to pass, it will be a thrill for our players to be back on stage with him.

MEANWHILE — let me wish you a very Merry Christmas and a brilliantly successful 2006! ●

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by **DUILIO VIGLIOTTI**
 Secretary, Bagpipes Italian Group
(with the translation assistance of Sonia Scioli)

Italian Gathering diary

BAGPIPES ITALIAN GROUP

AFTER three long days of rain, a very unusual event in Italy, the sun shines upon the third Bagpipes Italian Group (B.I.G.) Gathering, held 23-25 September in the small medieval village of Cannara, Umbria.

In the not too distant valley, you can clearly distinguish the cupola of the Basilica of Saint Mary of Angels that within its walls holds the tiny church — the “Porziuncola” — where St Francis of Assisi’s great adventure began.

Across from us, gently placed on the side of a hill, shine the white lights of the old city of Assisi, with its fortress and large basilicas, also dedicated to the saint, that guard the tomb of the “poor man from Assisi” and hold Giotto’s priceless frescoes; they always impress despite the wounds and scars inflicted by the earthquake of a few years back.

It’s 4 p.m. when I arrive in Cannara and I can distinctly hear the first sounds of the bagpipes in the distance marking their players’ early arrival. More than the street signs, these sounds are an excellent compass, which at that moment indicate our true “north”.

With me is Bill Livingstone, pipe major of the 78th Fraser Highlanders Pipe Band of Ontario, and his wife, Lillian, from Canada; they have followed me to Cannara along with my entire family and a dear friend who, aside from helping with my uncertain translation, wanted to share this new experience with us all.

Since April, the interest surrounding this Gathering had become uncontrollable. Even more so since the announcement of the participation of Bill Livingstone. This situation became even more agitated when news that Allan MacDonald, Barnaby Brown and the Breton piper Bruno LeRouzic were also joining the group.

You can imagine the satisfaction and challenge for the piper leaders of B.I.G., Alberto Massi and Franco Calanca.

I had barely enough time to prepare the secretary’s table when the flow of pipers began. Among them appeared the unmistakable figure of Allan MacDonald.



The flow continued among the greetings of new arrivals and the hugs of those who hadn't seen each other in over a year, practically since our second Gathering; the party spirit was in the air.

People had come from Sicily to participate, from the Aosta valley and from the Venetian



region... practically all of Italy was represented in the small city of Cannara but, among many dialectal inflections, the language spoken was only one: that of the great Highland bagpipe.

Unfortunately, a series of last minute unlucky and unforeseeable events made the participation of Barnaby Brown and Bruno LeRouzic — two great friends of B.I.G. — impossible, and Franco Calanca from Bologna was also missing.

After getting settled in at the beautiful and very clean “hostel” that graciously welcomes us, the first day ends with a dinner during which souvenir plaques are offered to our guests.

By this time it is 2 a.m. Saturday but, in a

small closed hall, some still insist on blowing their bagpipes.

On Saturday morning the activities begin a little late but, at 10 a.m., we are all ready for the first workshop led by Alberto Massi on the theme of “piping interpretation during the last century”.

There are 50 of us listening, and Bill Livingstone and Allan MacDonald have also joined us, and are following with interest and participate actively.

I take a look around and take a few photographs ... it's incredible. Only a few years ago no-one could have imagined that such a thing could be possible in Italy.

Alberto Massi, with the help of recordings of performances from as far back as the 1930s, makes clear to us how and how much the sound of this instrument has changed in terms of “pitch” and in the interpretation of musical pieces, in terms of speed and expressiveness.

At the end of this very interesting workshop, the pipers divide into three groups: the beginners start a lesson specifically organised for them by Alberto Massi; the others are directed by Bill Livingstone and Allan MacDonald who, with great humility and spirit of participation, look after the work of preparation for the massed performance the next day.

In the sun-filled courtyard I see dozens of Italian pipers of all ages, sitting in a circle holding their practice chanters in their hands, musical scores in front of them and, in their midst, two world-renowned piping giants that explain, listen and correct them; it hardly seems possible.

After lunch (and what a lunch), there is the presentation volume 3 of the B.I.G. CD-Rom Tutor — prepared and produced by Alberto Massi, Duilio Vigliotti, Franco Calanca and Mario Tomasone — which concludes the part of the series dedicated to the “light music” and its technique. Now, we only have Volume 4 left to prepare: a volume entirely dedicated to piobaireachd.

The series involves a considerable amount of work and is very much appreciated by the Gathering's participants who have obviously understood the importance of this sort of didactic support, both for its production in Italian and for the quantity and value of the information it contains.

Bill Livingstone, who already had a chance to see Volume 2 of the series in Canada was so impressed with the quality of the CD that he

proposed its translation into English, and its commercialisation of it worldwide, and offered his help and personal interest in it.

We next go back to practise but this time not with the practice chanter.

Again, everyone forms a circle, first to tune the bagpipes and then to try the pieces for the massed band. And, again, we watch the great work of Bill Livingstone and Allan MacDonald.

After two hours of music, we return to the hall where we are to take part in one of the most magic moments of the Gathering.

The workshop is entitled *Piobaireachd and its musical interpretation* and it is here that our two eminent guests take the podium to give us an excellent lesson — and an experience that is absolutely unique.

Everyone knows the work done by these two great pipers and everyone knows that they hold positions regarding the way they interpret piobaireachd — but no one could have foreseen what next takes place.

Bill Livingstone begins with the analysis of a great piobaireachd *MacIntosh's Lament*. He enters into the depths of the musical score, allowing us to capture the sense and beauty of it. We are still fascinated by what we have just heard when we are transported by the music and voice of Allan MacDonald who, playing his smallpipes, offers us “his” version of things. We are already feeling goose bumps and are ready to delve deeply into the emotion of the music when suddenly the voice of Bill Livingstone joins that of Allan MacDonald to enrich the already extraordinary beauty of canntaireachd and pipes.

You can't hear anyone breathe, many have their eyes closed — and when the music ends the applause is enormous. Many of us look around astounded, and some say that the Gathering could end at that moment and it would be fine.

The same happens on *Struan Robertson* and a few minutes later on *Glengarry's March* played by Allan MacDonald.

We recover a grip on our emotions with the help of a great dinner and many bottles of good local wine.

It is 9 p.m. and time is running out. It is time for the concert.

Our friends of the City of Rome Pipe Band and those of the Cannara Pipe Band are already ready in their uniforms.

The square of this small town is already

brimming with people waiting.

At the signal the drums roll and from afar comes the sound of the pipe band that has integrated Alberto Massi, Bill Livingstone and Allan MacDonald for the occasion.

The public applaud, visibly surprised and happy about what is happening.

The enlarged band goes up onto the wide stage and plays some sets from their own repertoire.

Now it is Alberto Massi's moment to entertain the audience and offers us a rare example of his musical ability and his ability to broadcast using a type of exhibition that is particularly congenial: the concert-conference.

With exceptional ability he performs *Monte Catarelto*, *Banjo Breakdown*, *Glasgow City Police Pipers*, *Hector the Hero*, *Highland Brigade at Anzio*, *Lady Loudon*, *Smith of Chillichassie* and *A Call from Afar*.

During the interval some souvenir plaques are presented to the Mayor of Cannara, the President of Cannara's "pro loco" association and to the members of the Cannara Pipe Band – four friendly men with big hearts, and with noteworthy musical capabilities demonstrated to us since they are also members of the Musical "Morlacchi" Band.

Received with grand applause, Bill Livingstone goes onstage and, in a general silence which heightens the suspense, he carefully tunes his bagpipes for a great interpretation of some classics: *Ashes on the Afton*, *Duchess of Edinburgh*, *Delvinside*, *The Grey Bob*, *Fair Maid of Barra*, *Lucy's Frolics* and *Old Wife of the Mill Dust*: superb technique that matches the greatness of this man who is responsible for some historic moments, especially in North American piping.

Most likely the larger part of the audience is not capable of capturing the beauty and depth of this difficult and cultured music but this doesn't seem to matter... everyone seems to be in seventh heaven and accord Maestro Livingstone a proper ovation.

The job to conclude the evening is given to Allan MacDonald; it doesn't seem like an easy task after all that we have seen and heard until that moment.

Allan MacDonald begins playing *Willie Gray's Farewell to the Glasgow Police* and *The Cameron Quickstep* and continues with some of his own untitled waltzes and reels that become faster and more intricate.

An incredulous "beginner" sitting next to



me, with his eyes wide open, points to Allan MacDonald who is playing and asks me: "How many fingers does he have... 18?" The question, clearly rhetorical, perfectly expresses the sense of what is going on onstage.

Applause brings the house down for Allan MacDonald. But things aren't over yet. After having pleased us also with his version for great Highland bagpipe of the aria "libiamo nei lieti calici" from Verdi's opera, *La Traviata*, he gives us again a piece composed by himself — *Lament for the Gael* — that he declares to have composed to underline the pain he feels in seeing the slow disappearance and death of his great Gaelic culture: notes and sounds never

heard before, vibrations that come straight from the heart.

It's the end. When the sounds evaporate in the night, the audience happily applauds but we pipers are left with a deep sense of emptiness.

I go back to my hotel with the clear understanding that I have taken part in an event that will not repeat itself.

It is already very late but it doesn't seem to matter to most. Only a few in fact actually go back to their rooms.

Most of the people present enclose themselves in the same hall as the night before and, not to be outdone, among reels and strathspeys, a bottle of Chianti and a grappa, continue on

till about 4:30 a.m.

I must admit that waking up Sunday morning was very difficult.

At 9 a.m. we are ready for breakfast and after a few coffees we are again "on the road".

Everyone returned to the hall to listen to Bill Livingstone who introduces his latest recordings, *A Piobaireachd Diary*, also talking about his life in piping, his childhood, his teachers and his experiences.

We also have time to listen carefully to some of his pieces taken from his four CDs.

Bill Livingstone closes his live commentary with his bagpipes, anticipating part of a piobaireachd that will be included on one of his next albums: the famous *War or Peace*, following the setting of MacLeod of Gesto.

We are all very attentive to this presentation and to the music that this great "maestro" offers but we feel a certain excitement in the air...

We are getting closer to the time for the massed band performance.

It is nearly noon, and there are about 50 of us. The bagpipes aren't perfectly tuned but time is getting short and the people of Cannara are waiting for us in the square and in the streets of the town.

Alberto Massi shouts and tries to convince us to wait a few more minutes to get our instruments ready but he is stampeded by mutineers who, at this point, don't want anything else but to vent their desire to play, desire that until that moment had been repressed.

It is an indescribable spectacle: 50 pipers in a massed band on the crowded streets of a town with medieval architecture.

Surely the sound wasn't the most limpid but we had one heck of a great time.

The people had made friends with us all and Bill Livingstone and Allan MacDonald were the victims of many glasses of "prosecco" (white sparkling wine) offered by total strangers.

At 12.30, everyone moved into the great hall of Cannara's municipal building where the

Mayor thanked us for our presence and offered us a final "toast" (yet another glass of fresh, fizzy white wine).

The 2005 Gathering was coming to an end.

Only one last, difficult and extreme test remained: the farewell lunch.

And on this subject it is best to lay a shroud of silence.

A bit of relaxation, not for me of course, because I had to take care of the final payments for the hostel, more chatting and some people were already saying goodbye and leaving.

When the time came to say goodbye to Allan MacDonald and Bill and Lillian Livingstone I think I saw a few teary eyes, but not because of the wine.

The phrase that I heard the most and that I still hear in my head and in my heart was:

"It was magnificent ..."

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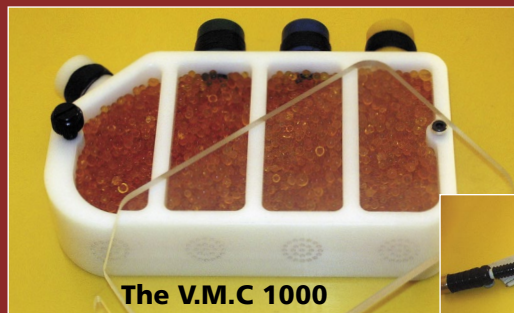
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Air Force piping stretches its wings

RAF PIPES AND DRUMS

IN new uniforms, and with eye-catching performances at events such as the Royal Air Force themed 2005 Edinburgh Military Tattoo, the Tattoo's *Salute to Australia* in Sydney's Aussie Stadium, the Isle of Man Tattoo, the Netherlands National Tattoo, air shows at home and abroad and State occasions, the RAF's volunteer pipers and drummers are attaining a rising public profile.

Unofficial, semi-official and voluntary pipers and pipe bands have been associated with the service's squadrons and bases more or less since the RAF's formation by Lord Trenchard in 1919. It was from the wide range of semi-official corps of drums, brass bands, military bands and pipe bands throughout the RAF from which the service's present system of voluntary bands was developed.

Wing Commander Adrian Lewis, who has twice served as chairman of the RAF Pipe Band Association — 1997-1999 and, following a tour of duty in Australia, from 2002 to 2005 — recalls that, when he enlisted with the RAF in 1970, there were as many as 25 small, unit pipe bands, each with its own tartan.

He joined the No.1 Bomber Group Pipe Band based at RAF Waddington, which drew players from a clutch of other stations around the Lincolnshire area. An aerosystems engineer who deals with front line fast jet aircraft, Adrian Lewis has played pipes for most of his 35-year service career, and currently plays with the grade 3A RAF Halton Pipes and Drums, last year's RAF champion band, based in Buckinghamshire.

The RAF has four other regional pipes and drums corps: at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire and its Kinloss, Leuchars and Lossiemouth stations in Scotland.

"Each of those stations takes in players from a clutch of other stations," said Adrian Lewis, "as well as ex-servicemen, Ministry of Defence employees and civilians who are in some way attached to the RAF. We have a good spread across the whole of the United Kingdom."

And, although there are fewer bands than



there have been at times in the past, resourcing is on a sounder footing, piping and drumming is more effectively administered and encouraged, and standards of playing are more consistent.

"The RAF's pipers and drummers are all volunteers, so you make your own time and you take your own leave," said Adrian Lewis. "Your primary duty is obviously the technical job you have within the RAF, but the pipes and drums provide a great, break. You can fulfil that love of piping and participate in the piping world whilst maintaining a very good career profile. But it doesn't affect your career profile at all, as far as promotions go, as it might in the Army.

"As long as you can dissociate your RAF rank from what happens when you enter the pipes and drums, it's a great way to maintain your links with piping and work together with other players regardless of rank.

"So, while I joined as an aircraftsman and have come through to wing commander in my technical branch, I've always been able to enjoy some sort of association with pipe bands and

**WING COMMANDER
ADRIAN LEWIS...**

"it's a great way to maintain your links with piping and work together with other players regardless of rank."

piping, and I'm happy to be a piper down in the back rank, but I also have a job to do, and it's mainly for State ceremonial that I will be peeled out for the pipes and drums."

The RAF Pipe Band Association was formed in 1984 to oversee the bands' output and co-ordinate policy, finance and participation in major RAF-sponsored events. It also organises events such as the annual RAF Pipe Band Championships.

"And we've had better and better support over the years," said Adrian Lewis. "We come under the RAF Ceremonial Office and seek funding for the support of the bands on a regular basis. We put in a bid for the money we would like to see come in — we're talking about £5,000-£6,000 per band a year for maintenance. And we were fortunate that we were able to obtain funding centrally to kit out the whole of the RAF Band in time for the 2004 Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

"Our bands are well supported in terms of accommodation, kit and instruction. And, when we do what are called 'Category 1' (State ceremonial) jobs, we get the transport and

accommodation support we need as well,” he said.

“From the point of view of the military support, a pipe band is always seen as a very military thing, great to watch, a great crowd puller. There is no doubt about it, the pipes are very difficult to ignore,” he said. “I think it’s almost primeval the way the hairs go up on the back of your neck.

“Scots have been around in the Air Force for so many years, playing in RAF squadrons, so piping in the RAF has been a long time in the making. Scots are all over the world and pipes and drums are seen as a part of the Air Force culture as a whole and piping is accepted as something we do.

“Sprinkled throughout the RAF are very senior officers who see the value of it in terms of team building, building cross-cultural diversities, and an outlet for people’s enthusiasm — and, on the other side of the coin, the public relations value it has, its impact on recruitment figures and so on... all the things we want to do to show that the RAF is a broad family with a social life as well as a hard working life, and that you can do both — and succeed in both.

“Piping is very well supported from the very top, from the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, through to the Commander in Chief Strike Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burridge, and Air Officer Commanding Personnel and Training Command, Air Marshal Sir Joe French ... and that is a considerable advantage.”

The five current bands travel widely and often play as the combined pipes and drums of the RAF.

“And Station bands are used for smaller engagements, as when six pipers were needed for an appearance on the BBC’s *Jools Holland Hootenanny Hogmanay Show* last year. RAF Halton Pipes and Drums did the show wearing the RAF kit. And, more recently, Pipe Major Finlay McGhee who runs the RAF Waddington Band, was invited to play at this year’s Ghillies’ Ball at Balmoral in front of the Queen and the Royal Family.”

Finlay McGhee is one of three Army-qualified pipe majors employed The Ministry of Defence as “voluntary band instructors” with an officer grade who are attached to the Air Force as instructors. Pipe Major Lennie Browne, formerly the pipe major of the grade 2 Graham Memorial Pipe Band in Ireland, is



THE RAF Pipes and Drums at Edinburgh Castle during the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, August 2004.

Photo: Sergeant Tom Goldie, RAF



Photo: Pipe Major Paul Selwood, Scots Guards

RAF Pipes and Drums, and the RAF Regiment Band (supplemented by the Cranwell College Band and Central Band) with drill instructor (right, foreground) march the Queen's Colour Squadron Drill Display Team onto the Esplanade at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo in August, 2004.

at RAF Halton; and Pipe Major Ian Hughes — who last month led his corps to top honours at this year's RAF Pipe Band Championships at RAF Cosford — is at Leuchars in Fife;

"They've all gained the Pipe Major's Certificate at the Army School of Bagpipe Music and Highland Drumming and are known for their ability to set up bands," said Adrian Lewis. "They each have the teaching skills and methods we employ throughout the RAF today.

"They go out and compete with the bands and they take up the essence of the organisation. So, when we do the Edinburgh Military Tattoo for example, Pipe Major Ian Hughes runs that from his end of the country. We were in Breda for the Dutch Tattoo recently and Finlay McGhee was the organiser for that with Lenny Browne leading our participation in the Isle of Man Tattoo."

Each of the five bands has its own tartan associated with its parent station and the local area. The exception is the Pipes and Drums of No 2622 (Highland) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment at RAF Lossiemouth that wears the Douglas Grey set authorised for use by the Royal Auxiliary Air Force by King George V in 1937.

Adrian Lewis said that it used to be the case that station and squadron bands turned out regularly at their own bases for Air Officer Commanding parades — "all of the squadron and station personnel knew that there was a pipe band associated with the RAF in the local area.

"However, operational tempo means that we no longer do those parades, so the RAF Pipe Band Association maintains a website on the RAF Intranet, and we've now launched a

website on the Internet as well.

"These are ways, along with publicity in RAF publications, in which we try to get the message out so people, know we're there and they can be in touch if they want to join a band, or use the pipes and drums for an event.

"The Association tries to capture pipers as soon as possible, either seasoned pipers who join the RAF or recruits who want to learn," he said.

"The individual who wants to become a piper or drummer, declares his or her intent as a volunteer and it goes on that person's service record. This then assists the manning staffs in posting these individuals to units that have a pipe band somewhere in the vicinity... that's one way that we help."

At their own stations, pipers and drummers turn out for mess dinners and social functions, various local ceremonial occasions and community events — activities that are usually arranged by their own Pipe Majors.

"And," said Adrian Lewis, "the RAF Pipes and Drums constitutes a useful augmentation for the Army's Pipes and Drums — "as we've proved at numerous Edinburgh Military Tattoos and the Tattoo in Sydney, Australia.

"We add to the numbers — it is good public relations for the RAF, and it's a great fulfillment for us to play in company with the regular bands and to be seen by them as quality players, well able to perform alongside them.

"In the case of Category 1 events, these are organised by the RAF Ceremonial Office," said Adrian Lewis. "So, when we had the unhappy duty of bringing the bodies of our casualties back from Iraq, obviously a RAF piper was detailed to pipe the coffins off the aircraft when

it landed at RAF Brize Norton. And for that sort of thing you're never going to be short of a volunteer but, because it is voluntary, you're always asked in the nicest possible way."

RAF pipers and drummers also perform alongside the RAF's voluntary brass bands.

"We have what we call our 'spit and dribble' bands," said Adrian Lewis, "the brass bands — and they have the same sort of set up with nine voluntary bands, also across the rank spectrum, and with voluntary band instructors.

"At RAF Halton, we helped when they cut a CD recently, and we do engagements like cocktail parties and Remembrance Day commemorations alongside the brass bands, and that experience helps when we come to work with the big professional military bands.

"We have a lot of history of playing alongside brass bands — not that we relish it, bringing our pitch down to their concert pitch and so on, and the arrangements. I think we prefer to keep the pipes as pure as possible.

"Because the brass bands always outnumber us, the principal director of music will always take the lead and so it will be his arrangements that are used and that doesn't always suit the great Highland bagpipes. It's difficult for a director of music who comes along with no knowledge of pipe bands; they often fail to appreciate just how technical the pipes can be and how good the musicianship within piping and pipe bands actually is. They often get a shock but, once they've been exposed to it, it's not too much of a problem.

"RAF Halton Pipes and Drums always play at the Norfolk Show, and we play there with professional Army bands and it's very well received."

As well as the training and performing opportunities provided by the bands, the RAF Pipes and Drums enjoys a good relationship with the Army School of Bagpipe Music and Highland Drumming at Inchdrewer House, Edinburgh.

“We encourage our pipers and drummers to attend their courses whenever possible,” said Adrian Lewis. “We’ve had a very strong association with the school through Major Gavin Stoddart when he was the Director of Army Bagpipe Music and now, with Captain Stuart Samson, who is also very supportive of the RAF Pipes and Drums.

“When we hold our annual RAF Pipe Band Championships, Captain Samson and his instructors come down and judge the contests and give us the benefit of their knowledge, and we have a very good weekend together.”

The RAF Pipe Band Association is now hoping to see another pipe major’s post established at RAF Cosford, the Defence College of Aeronautical Engineering — “our biggest defence training college,” said Adrian Lewis. “Hopefully, with a pipe major there, we’ll be able to attract a lot more people, and further expand the pool of our own pipers and drummers.”

“The Association finds a lot of interest outside of Scotland”, he said. “And, even when a piper or drummer is posted away from the RAF bands, opportunities to play can still be found.

“The key to air power strategy is the flexibility to move. Before the Berlin Wall came down, we were very much a fixed-base Service working from hardened aircraft shelters; now we are far more flexible. We have our Harrier squadrons deployed with the Navy onto *HMS Invincible*, we’re in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Falkland Islands — all sorts of places — and the Royal Air Force is under a lot of pressure because personnel are around the world all the time.

“So there’s always that intermixing, and the fact that we have quite a large civilian element helps us to maintain the consistency of the bands.

“But the allure of the pipes and the pipes and drums goes across national boundaries,” he said. “I’ve served in Goose Bay in Labrador, Canada, and there were pipers and drummers out there in the wilds of nowhere, among people with no Scottish heritage or links at all.

“I’ve played in the Falkland Islands and, again, I found the same thing there, but it was more among expatriates who’d emigrated down there; Argentina was the same.

“I spent three years in Australia on the pipe band scene and, again, from all walks of life and all cultures, there were pipers and drummers.

“Somehow it goes across all the boundaries because it’s such a fantastic instrument.” ●



Photos: Sergeant Tom Gollie, RAF

Air Force soloist

CORPORAL Andrew Edgar’s ‘day job’ involves servicing helicopters at RAF Chivenor (photo). As a keen solo piper in his own time, he has taken top honours in RAF solo competition for several years in a row — including winning the award of a *sgian dubh* as the ‘Best Piper in the Royal Air Force’ in 2004 (photo). He also plays for RAF Halton Pipes and Drums and the RAF Pipes and Drums. At the Edinburgh Military Tattoo at Edinburgh Castle, Andrew Edgar was one of only a few chosen to play the role of the “lone piper” high on the castle wall at the conclusion of the world famous show.



‘Better and bigger’: degree course plans

Dr SIMON MCKERRELL

HIGHER playing standards and increased international enrolments are among the priorities of the newly appointed head of piping studies at the National Piping Centre, Dr Simon McKerrell.

He took up responsibility for the development of the piping component of the BA (Scottish Music — Piping) degree programme in October. The degree is jointly delivered by the Centre and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

“The students we have on the course now are good, and very keen — but I see a main aspect of my job being to ensure that they are the best in the world by the time they complete the programme.

“One of the first things I will be doing is providing for a greater continuity of tuition and a greater range of performance opportunities for students,” he said.

Simon McKerrell is also committed to students acquiring strength in all three of the main piping options: solo competition, pipe band involvement and folk music

“And there are some additional classes I want to introduce to the degree in future years.”

“But the programme is in a healthy state.”

The number of places available on the course for British students depends on funding from the Higher Education Funding Council. But Simon McKerrell sees opportunities to develop enrolments by overseas students by gaining recognition from overseas institutions for credits earned on courses offered by the Glasgow programme.

“We need to encourage North American students in particular,” he said, “So I am hoping to establish equivalence with programmes overseas and develop exchange relationships.

“Because of the staff we have here, we have



SIMON McKerrell joins a local shehnai player at the Mehrangarh Fort in Jodpur. He spent the month of September in northern India: Rajasthan, Delhi and the Himalayas. “The shehnai is a very interesting bombard-like instrument,” he said. “It has an open fingering system, and players use the minor scales a lot.” It has a four-bladed reed — “it’s like a reed inside a reed” — fixed on a brass staple. Said Simon McKerrell: “It will play two octaves, and the way these players use their lips and tongue, and the way the holes are fingered, can give you semitones and quarter tones. It has an amazingly strong sound and it’s used a lot in temple music and at weddings.

some very real and attractive strengths and I’m very hopeful about it.”

A research-based Masters degree will soon be available through the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, he said: “a tailor-made programme for any kind of traditional musician, including pipers. But I would also like to develop a Masters programme for performance piping.”

He said Scottish applications for entry to the BA (Scottish Music — Piping) course in October, 2006, promised to be exceptionally strong. “We’ve got some of the best younger pipers in Scotland applying for the course, and that’s great.”

Simon McKerrell is also president of the Competing Pipers Association and co-presenter of the *PlanetPipe* online radio show. He

completed his PhD degree this year — his dissertation was an analysis of Highland bagpipe light music competition performance — and also holds a BA (Scottish Music) from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

During the past solo competitions season in Scotland, he won a clasp to his Dunvegan Medal, second place for the Highland Society of London gold medal at the Argyllshire Gathering and third place in the A grade march, strathspey and reel at the Northern Meeting. He also won the A grade piobaireachd at the Inveraray Highland Games and the open piobaireachd event at Airth.

“I’m really happy to be back at the National Piping Centre,” he said. “I feel comfortable here and it’s a worthwhile job to be doing.” ●

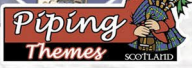
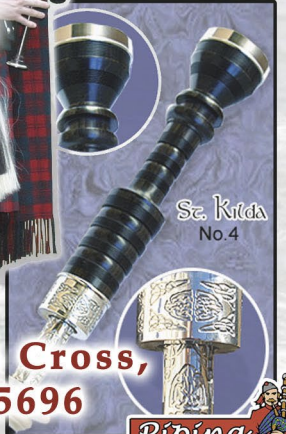
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'Canada's greatest military piper'

LT. CHARLES DAVIDSON DUNBAR, DCM: 1870-1939

HE was an orphan who grew up to become the first pipe major in Britain and the Empire to be commissioned as a pipe officer: Charles Davidson Dunbar, DCM, experienced tragedy, adversity, the hazards of war and emigration from Scotland to Canada, where he came to be called "Canada's greatest military piper".

According to the official record of his birth, he was born 17 July, 1870, to an unmarried needlewoman: Alexandrina Leith Miller, who lived at 107 Bridge Street in the Caithness village of Halkirk, in northern Scotland.

In later records, Charles used the name "Charles Dunbar" and, subsequently, "Charles Davidson Dunbar", perhaps to honor his half-brother, Alexander Davidson. He gave his father's name as William Dunbar on both his entrance records to industrial school and his marriage license.

Only one William Dunbar appears to have lived in Halkirk at the time of Charles' birth, the lessee of Braal "Brawl" Castle. But there are no documents that directly link this William Dunbar with Alexandrina Miller or her son Charles. No baptismal record has been found and William Dunbar's will does not mention Charles or his mother.

When Alexandrina Miller died on September 8, 1876, in Halkirk, she was identified as a single woman aged 48. Her parents were James Miller, a crofter, and Margaret, whose maiden name was Henderson. The cause of her death, certified by John Craven, physician and surgeon, was: phthisis pulmonary (tuberculosis), seven months, and chronic rheumatism. Her daughter, Charles' half-sister, Margaret H. Budge, was present at her death.

Charles was then just six years old, and the only child still living with his mother. It appears he then stayed with at least one of his half-siblings in Halkirk for several years before being taken to Edinburgh and registered at the original Ragged School by his half-brother, Alexander Davidson, who had recently become a policeman in Edinburgh.

He entered the school on September 13,



PIPE MAJOR Charles Dunbar, DCM...
a "a soldier and a Highland gentleman
in the highest terms."

DEBBY DUNBAR ORTMAN is Charles Dunbar's great granddaughter. She lives in rural Minnesota near Duluth with her husband and three sons. She is a consultant and freelance writer and is writing a historical novel about Charles Dunbar's life. She can be reached by e-mail at: ddo@mchsi.com

1879. He was then nine and a half and, according to the school's records, he could read but could not write. He was to be detained at the school until he was 16.

The Rev. Dr Thomas Guthrie's original Ragged School — later called the "Industrial School" — had been established in 1847 in

Discharged from the school on 1 May, 1886, two months before his 16th birthday, Charles Dunbar set his sights on joining the military. He enlisted with the Seaforth Highlanders as a piper on 6 October, 1886.

He stood only 5 feet 3 inches tall — probably the result of a scanty diet during his childhood

ken, my lad, the auld word, 'learn young, learn fair. Ye're young enough, in all conscience, but gin ye wish to gang far, ye'll hae to wark hard and keep at it. Guid luck tae ye, my boy.'

This was an inspiring time for a young lad to enter the army as a piper, and William Dunbar took full advantage of the opportunity.

After service in Scotland and Ireland, he transferred to the 3rd Royal Scots on January 1, 1894. And, after just a year's service with his new regiment, he became a candidate for the pipe major's position with the 2 Battalion, Gordon Highlanders.

Selection was by competition — open to Army pipers and outsiders.

William Dunbar won in a keen contest and, on February 11, 1895, formally joined the 2 Gordon Highlanders. He was promoted to sergeant piper and assumed the duties of pipe major on 3 March.

The regiment was quartered at Maryhill Barracks and was commanded by Colonel Oxley, who was succeeded by Colonel Dick Cunningham, VC.

According to the historian Robert Fraser: "This promotion was recognition of his stature within the army as a piper. Already in 1893 he was performing full pipe programmes of marches, strathspeys, and reels. That year he established himself as a piper of the first rank, at Inverness. He had acquired a reputation as an obliging, trustworthy, honest, and able soldier. In May 1895, he completed his second class Army Certificate which gave him a good elementary education. He was stationed in Scotland in 1895 and 1896."

While his regiment was in Scotland, he met Margaret Dolina Murray, affectionately called "Maggie". They were married on 39 April, 1896, in Edinburgh. Their marriage certificate identifies Charles Dunbar as "Pipe Major, Guard in Highlanders, bachelor"; and Margaret Murray as a domestic servant and spinster. The document also lists Charles' father as William Dunbar, general merchant, deceased, and his mother as Alexandrina Dunbar (Miller), deceased; witnessed by William A. Murray (Margaret's brother) and his fiancé Mary Hill.

Soon afterwards, the 2 Gordon Highlanders was moved to Aldershot where Margaret gave birth to the couple's first son — William Charles Dunbar — on 8 May, 1897. That same year, Charles Dunbar played for Queen Victoria when she visited the camp to inspect the Highlanders.



CHARLES DUNBAR (right) with his family in Hamilton, Ontario. From left are Percy (born in Aberdeen) and Colin (born in India), Maggie (the former Margaret Dolina Murray), William (born at Aldershot), Margaret (born in Hamilton, Ontario) and George (born in Aberdeen).

Ramsay Lane as an orphanage, primarily for boys. The building still exists, in the tiny street at the top of Castlehill on the Royal Mile, near Edinburgh Castle.

Thomas Guthrie, a preacher and reformer, had been a leader in the formation of the Free Church of Scotland and a keen advocate of "Ragged Schools".

His Edinburgh school educated, fed and provided a home for 45 of the Old Town's most destitute children. Boys were also taught how to make shoes and clothes; the girls, to be 'thrifty wives for working men'.

Here, Charles Dunbar learned to write and was trained as a carpenter and it appears that it was during his time at the school that he learned to play the bagpipes.

Not all of the school's records are available for public review and it is not known whether the school provided piping tuition. Perhaps some benevolent piper took the young orphan under his wing and taught him to play.

— but it was often said of him that he appeared taller than he was because of his stature, stance and demeanor.

Fraser's Scottish Annual records that "he was fortunate that the commander of the Seaforth Highlanders at that time was Colonel Guinness, an officer who took exceptional pride in the efficiency of his pipe band.

"Colonel Guinness saw at once that here was a keen, ambitious, stripling of parts, and, although scarcely the age for enlistment, Dunbar being just 16, he was allowed to try the piping tests, and although these were fairly hard, set as they were for men of from 18 to 21 years of age, Dunbar passed very creditably and was taken on the strength of the regiment and posted to the pipe band. It was a proud day for the slim, fair-haired boy when he went through the 'piper's initiation', and was fitted out with a uniform and kit, and a full sized bagpipe and the ivory-mounted 'feadan' (*chanter*) placed in his hands by a kindly pipe sergeant with the words: 'Ye

Within two years, the new family was on board ship with the regiment to India — where a second son, Colin Murray Dunbar, was born on 3 January 1900 but not before Pipe Major Charles Dunbar was posted away to South Africa to serve in the Boer War, his first experience in action.

The 2 Gordon Highlanders was one of the first units ordered to South Africa, where the Battalion won numerous battle honours.

At the Battle of Elandsplaagte on 21 October, 1899, Charles Dunbar piped the Gordons into battle. He was wounded in the head but continued to lead the troops onwards: conduct under fire for which he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), a decoration for valor second only to the Victoria Cross.

On three further occasions he was cited for bravery, including at the celebrated Relief of Ladysmith on 28 February, 1900.

In South Africa, he transferred to 3 Battalion Gordon Highlanders on 23 July, 1901. Constantly in action, he earned six clasps for the ribbon of his South Africa medal, each representing a significant battle. At Pretoria, with other Highland pipers, he also won a prize for piping, presented to him by Earl Kitchener.

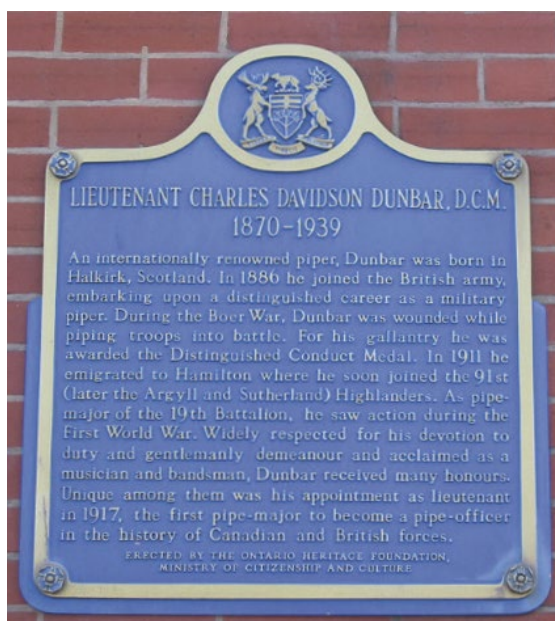
As souvenirs, Charles Dunbar took back to his family two Z Afrik Republic 1 silver shilling coins dated 1894.

Following the war, the Gordons returned to Scotland and Charles Dunbar and his family took up life in Aberdeen.

His reputation as a piper steadily grew. He was an instructor for the Aberdeen Amateur Piper's Society and often played at for parades and marches, and at Highland games. He won the Beatty silver cup, a competition open to pipers of the Highland regiments, and, in 1905, was awarded Good Conduct and Long Service Medals.

It was during his time in Aberdeen that he was given the set of silver-mounted pipes which had been bought for him by Colonel Dick-Cunningham, of the Gordons, who had been killed in South Africa. (These pipes, along with their original leather case, and his entire regalia including his uniform, kilt, medals and photos, were deposited on permanent loan with the Argyll and Sutherland Regimental Museum in Hamilton on 7 May, 2000, by descendents of Charles Dunbar; one of whom is the writer of this article.)

Two more sons were born to Charles and Maggie Dunbar in Aberdeen: George, on 8



THIS ONTARIO Heritage Plaque commemorating Lieutenant Pipe Major Charles Dunbar, DCM, is displayed on the wall of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada Armoury at 200 James Street North in Hamilton.

January, 1906, and Percy Gordon, their last, on 10 January, 1909.

Meanwhile, Charles Dunbar was still corresponding with Canadians he had met and served with in South Africa,

At their urging, he decided to leave the Army after 24 years of service and emigrate to Canada which had a reputation as a land of opportunity. In 1911, the family arrived in Hamilton, Ontario, where, shortly afterwards, their last child, a daughter they named Margaret (“Peggy”) was born.

Charles Dunbar joined a cartage business owned by one of Hamilton’s leading families, Hendrie and Company, as a clerk. The company was a pickup and delivery service using Clydesdale horses pulling flat, platform wagons that collected shipments at the railways and delivered supplies and freight to the surrounding communities. Charles Dunbar was regarded as a loyal and valued employee.

The Dunbars lived at 18 Hilton Street in Hamilton. Small by today’s standards for a family of seven, it was a home that remained in the family’s ownership until a few years before their daughter Margaret’s death in 2004.

A piper of Charles Dunbar’s renown could not help but come to the attention of the 91st (later the Argyll and Sutherland) Highlanders of Canada, Princess Louise’s. He was asked by senior officers of the regiment to join them and on 15 September, 1913, he enlisted as pipe major. It is reported that he was also solicited by the 48th Highlanders of Toronto but Charles Dunbar was unwilling to supplant James Fraser

who was the regiment’s serving pipe major.

Charles Dunbar taught his sons to play the pipes, though none attained his mastery of the instrument. They knew their father as a man of discipline. They were held to high standards of conduct and became known for their honesty, trustworthiness, respectfulness and hard work.

Maggie Dunbar was an excellent mother and household manager. She found time to become active in the Red Cross and church activities at St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church. Charles Dunbar’s life revolved around his work, his family, the regiment and the pipe band. He had high standards and was an excellent teacher although it is reported that many of his piping students had a difficult time meeting his exacting standards. Sydney Featherstone and John Knox Cairns were two of his students who did excel, and they went on to succeed him.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Sergeant Dunbar was one of the first to enlist — on 24 September, 1914, as a staff sergeant. He traveled to Valcartier, Quebec, and, on his arrival there, wired his wife to let her know what had transpired and have her send on his belongings.

He went to France with Colonel William Hendrie who was in command of the Canadian remount depot. From France, Charles Dunbar did a tour of duty in England, during which — on 15 September, 1919 — he secured a transfer to the 19 Battalion (91st unit) C.E.F., commanded by Colonel John I. McLaren, as pipe-major and immediately took command

of the pipe band.

Again, he volunteered to pipe the troops into battle.

The advent of trench warfare and the machine gun made charges led by pipers nothing less than suicidal. In Belgium and France, he and his corps piped their battalion along the weary roads than ran to Ypres and to the battlefield of the Somme. During the Battle of the Somme, fighting at Courcellette on 14 September, 1916, Pipe Major Dunbar was seriously wounded in the stomach and left leg by shrapnel.

After many months of recuperation in England, he returned to Hamilton on 4 July, 1917, and immediately rejoined the 91st Canadian Highlanders.

While he had been stationed in at Salisbury Plains in England, on 6 January 6, 1915, Charles Dunbar had been recommended for an officer's commission. On 7 November, 1917, he was commissioned as a lieutenant.

His commission was unique; he was the first pipe-major in the history of British and Canadian forces to hold a commission while retaining command of a pipe band. He held his position as pipe-officer of the regimental pipe band until his retirement in 1937.

Under his leadership, the band gained an international reputation and won many awards. Charles Dunbar oversaw the recruitment, training and outfitting of his pipers. He was known for his devotion to duty and his influence in shaping young soldiers in the traditions of duty and service.

He also won numerous prizes and medals for his piping and his dancing during the 1920s — in Canada, Britain and the United States. At Pictou, Nova Scotia, in 1923, he won three championship prizes at events commemorating the 150th anniversary of the landing of the first Highlanders. He won premier honours at Buffalo, New York and Toronto; and, at the first Highland games held at Banff, Alberta, he carried off the gold medal for piobaireachd and the Ian Beattie Silver Cup, along with \$100 in prize money. His most outstanding successes included winning the strathspey and reel competitions at Oban and Inverness in Scotland. At Banff, Alberta, in Canada, he won a gold medal for piobaireachd. Back home in Hamilton, he commanded the band that played for the Duke of Windsor, the future King Edward the VIII, when he visited the city as Prince of Wales in 1919.

He also was one of the pipers selected to play for the Governor General of Canada, Viscount Byng of Vimy, at a special dinner on April 15, 1925.

His last parade was in 1936.

His list of medals included the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the Volunteer Decoration, the Victory Medal, the South Africa 1899-1901 Medal, the Mons Star 1914-1915, Service Medal 1914-1918, Allies Medal, King George V Jubilee Medal, Efficiency Decoration, Imperial Long Service Decoration and the Canadian Long Service Decoration.

UPON his retirement as pipe-officer in 1937, Charles Dunbar was honoured by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (P.L.) with a banquet at which he was presented with a silver tea set as a token of appreciation for his years of service. At his retirement, he referred to Colonel John I. McLaren, the late Lieutenant-Colonel W. W. Stewart and to Colonel James Chisholm as having persuaded him to move to Canada and join the regiment.

Speeches were made by Lieutenant-Colonel McLaren, his Officer Commanding in France; Colonel James Chisholm, who termed him “the successor to the MacCrimmons of Skye”; Colonel C. W. Gibson and many other officers who commended his example, in obedience to the call of duty, as a characteristic that had been the making of the British Empire. He was described as a “a soldier and a Highland gentleman in the highest terms.”

Captain William Hendrie, who was at the retirement function, recounted how, when Charles Dunbar was wounded at the Somme, a silver plate from the bass drone of his pipes was lost.

Years later, when Charles Dunbar went to the French river, to visit the summer home of the Hendries, the local station master asked if Lieutenant Dunbar was with them, and handed him the silver plate, picked up by his son on the battlefield.

William Hendrie also said Charles Dunbar had been a piper for the Duke of Connaught when he was Governor-General of Canada, and played for him on many occasions in Hamilton and Toronto. “His Royal Highness liked to hear some of the old marches which he had heard in the Army, such as *Benachie*, *Dumbarton's Drums*, *The 74th's Farewell to Edinburgh* and *The Barren Rocks of Aden*.

Charles Dunbar had been in poor health for

some time but his death on 25 January, 1939, just two years after retiring from the regiment, was unexpected. At the time of his death he was known to be the only commissioned pipe major in the British Empire.

In his lifetime his regiment, the Argylls, recognized his importance. One of his commanding officers called him “as fine a type of officer as can be found in the Canadian Militia today”; another referred to him as “one of the most important officers that this unit possesses.”

Major Archie Cairns recalled that the “only time I ever saw my father weep, was when he first learned that his friend and mentor Charlie Dunbar was dead.”

His funeral service at St Paul's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton was fitting for a pipe major. The church was filled to capacity, and a large crowd lined the streets to watch the cortege pass. Pipe Major Syd H. Featherstone played *The Death of the Chief* as the casket was borne from the church. The unusually large pipe band which followed the escort and the firing party consisted of the pipers of the 48th Highlanders of Toronto, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the Toronto Scottish Regiment, the St. Catharine's band, and the veterans of the 19th Battalion from Hamilton, Toronto and Brantford.

Charles Dunbar was buried with full military honors at the family plot in Woodland Cemetery, Hamilton, Ontario, overlooking Lake Ontario. His casket was adorned with his officer's bonnet and broadsword.

At the cemetery, the firing party fired three volleys over the grave, the pipers of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders playing the *Church Call* between each volley. The lament he had so often played in honour of departed comrades now sounded for him.

An Ontario Heritage Plaque dedicated in his honour was unveiled on 18 September, 1983 at a ceremony at Dundurn Castle in Hamilton and later affixed to the wall of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada Armoury at 200 James Street North. ●

SOURCES

Sources for this article include family records; the *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography Vol II*, 1876-1924; historian Robert Fraser, who has written a pamphlet about my great grandfathers' military history and directed a tribute to Charles Davidson Dunbar in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada; the National Archives of Scotland; Gail Inglis, archive assistant, North Highland Archive, Wick Library, Wick, Scotland; Gordon Johnson, genealogist; newspaper articles; and *Fraser's Scottish Annual* of 1928.

The end of a famous line

THE MACKAYS OF GAIRLOCH

NOVA SCOTIAN scholar and researcher Dr John Gibson tracked down this photograph of Squire John Mackay: a great-grandson of the famous “Blind Piper of Gairloch”, Iain Dall Mackay, and the younger son of John Ruaidh (Red John), the last “hereditary” piper to the MacKenzies of Gairloch.

In 1805, John Ruaidh Mackay emigrated with his family — including 10 daughters (three of them married) and two sons — to Pictou, Cape Breton, aboard a brig, the Sir Sidney Smith, and settled on the East River.

Squire John, the younger son, born in Scotland in 1794, later recalled that “the East River at this time was certainly wild enough. The site of New Glasgow, with the exception of a small log shantie at the bank of the river, was then a perfect wilderness, inhabited by bears, foxes and rabbits. There were no highways, no bridges, no communication between place and place, except by paths through the woods marked by blazes on the trees. Potatoes were then the ‘staff of life’, and they were used at meals three times a day. ‘Potatoes and Pork’ were the principal food. Fish was always plentiful and cheap”

He and his older brother, Angus, were both said to have been proficient pipers.

Angus (c. 1786-c.1868) was almost certainly taught by his father in Scotland with a view to his taking up the succession as piper to the MacKenzies’ at Gairloch.

Said John Gibson: “In Nova Scotia, Angus branched out to land of his own south of New Glasgow, leaving Squire John with their old father — so the squire must have known a lot about Gairloch MacKay bagpiping, even though he quit piping early on. But he did not tell Alexander MacKenzie anything about piping when the latter interviewed him for the *Celtic Magazine*.

Squire John MacKay also learned to play but gave piping up as a young man.

“Although I had to work very hard at home (my father being an old man beginning on a new farm, and I the only son stopping with him), nevertheless I studied hard during the intervals of schooling,” he recorded in his reminiscences.



Said John Gibson: “He was keen to educate himself and was given access to the library of the local minister, the Reverend James MacGregor.

“He went on to teach for a few years.

“Like his father, he was a staunch Church of Scotland member. He was made a JP, a powerful job in those days — not life and death exactly but he was bound by the law, for example, to turn in deserters and jumpships (one of his cousins fell into this category) and they could face hanging.

Squire John — Iain mac Iain Ruaidh ‘ic Aonghuis ‘ic Iain Dhoill (am piobaire dall, Ghearrloch) — served as Stipendiary Magistrate of New Glasgow until September 1884, less than two weeks before death at the age of 92.

“It is my view that his father wasn’t really all that good as a piper,” said John Gibson, “despite Sir Hector MacKenzie’s saying he didn’t care to listen to another piper after Red John left.

“By 1805, the writing was on the wall for Gaelic tradition and patronised pipers all over the place. The last Rankin piper joined the Army; MacCrimmon was an army lieutenant... they knew their futures lay elsewhere. Squire John was one of them, in a minor way.

“His older brother, however, kept on playing, dropping piobaireachd. And he taught a number of his Nova Scotian neighbours but, try as I might, I have never been able to isolate any characteristics of anything different: it’s all gone.”

The above photograph was taken by Charles G. Mitchell (c.1839-1882), either in Pictou or Halifax. The style of the photograph led a Nova Scotia archivist to suggest that it dates from the 1860s or 1870s — early for Nova Scotia. And the backdrop suggested that it was taken in a Halifax studio.

(Squire John Mackay’s reminiscences can be read on-line at: www.parl.ns.ca/pages/resources/Greybox/reminiscences.html ●

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DVDs

Worlds on DVD

CAMERAS were set up around the grade I arena at the 2005 World Pipe Band Championships on Glasgow Green and here, in PAL and NTSC formats is what they saw and heard: and it's great.

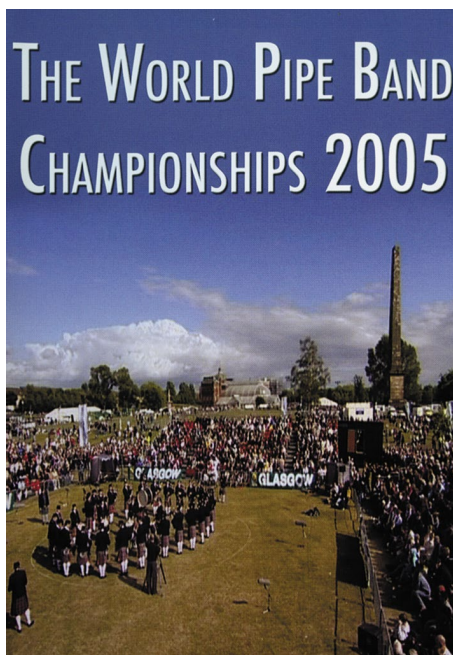
For a good, up-close look at the elite grade I bands in competition this is a "must have".

The 107-minute DVD shows both the march, strathspey and reel sets and the medleys of the big six of 2005: House of Edgar Shotts and Dykehead, Field Marshal Montgomery, Simon Fraser University, Strathclyde Police, St Laurence O'Toole and the 78th Fraser Highlanders.

Five more bands' march, strathspey and reel sets only are shown: ScottishPower, the Clan Gregor Society, Robert Wiseman Dairies Vale of Atholl and the 78th Highlanders (Halifax Citadel) Pipe Bands.

And it has the medleys only of the Boghall and Bathgate Caledonia, Manawatu Scottish Society and Ballycoan Pipe Bands.

When you are watching and hearing this sort of performance it seems not to matter for a moment that videoing a pipe band in its playing circle has about as



much cinematic excitement of filming a brick: you are witnessing the focus and the effort that makes these few minutes the most important few minutes of the year for these players. Only occasionally — when the camera tries too hard to achieve visual variety and gets a little too restless — does that feel like a distraction from the phenomenal musical output.

Do the visuals add anything? Well, for one thing, in a way that isn't experienced from the CDs, is an apparent confidence radiating from the Shotts corps, which compares with a more studied attention to precision among the Field Marshall Montgomery players. Shotts' drummers especially look as though they are actually enjoying it.

And so it goes: adding a new dimension to the comparisons anyone watching this DVD are bound to make. In many ways, it doesn't make the comparisons any "truer" but it does make for a much more intimate appreciation of what was happening out there in the circle.

And that's cool.

Total playing time: 107 minutes.

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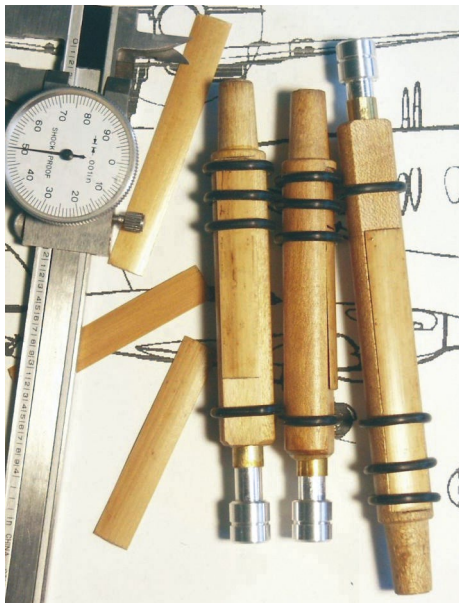
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REEDS

'Spitfire' drone reeds



TERRY Ackland moved to Montreal from England 20 years ago and specialized in hand-crafting high quality split-cane fly-fishing rods.

Something that set his rods apart was a proprietary process he developed over 10 years ago to keep moisture out of the cane — "because fly rods go all over the place if you don't keep the moisture out."

He saw a PBS television programme about the problems reed players experience with moisture and wondered whether his process might help. He contacted a local oboe reed maker and they carried out some tests — but the treated cane could not be moistened enough to provide the flexibility it needed to be readily folded double to form the reed and be

tied snugly to a staple.

Terry Ackland then worked with several pipers towards developing a drone reed for bagpipes, with mixed results until he thought about leaving the outer surface on the cane. "The rind is the most resilient part of *Arundo donax* and my real breakthrough was to leave the rind intact on the stabilized tongues," he said. "And now pipers who've tried them say they're great," he said.

His newly completed drone reed has a treated cane blade on a precision-turned maple-wood body with a brass tube insert and an aluminium tuning pin of his own design.

"I chose maple for the body because of its acoustical qualities," he said.

"To get the lift right — the gap between the reed body and the blade — and the length from the bridle to the tip you need a level of precision you can only get with specialised equipment," he said. To achieve the tolerances he was seeking, he developed a small, special purpose CNC mill and is able to produce a consistent product.

With the encouragement of pipers in the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada Pipes and Drums in Montreal, who tried and gave his reeds a "thumbs up", he has now sent samples further afield and put his Spitfire Drone Reeds on the market.

"They sound like cane reeds because they are cane reeds, but they are more stable because they don't take up water."

And they have the handsome finish of a nicely crafted cane fly-fishing rod.

Terry Ackland

179 Fairhaven Avenue

Pointe-Claire

Quebec H9S 4A6

CANADA

Phone: 1 514 694 1643

E-mail: t.ackland@globetrotter.net

Piping up a storm



IT'S great to get a taste of Glasgow's piping summer on DVD: PAL and NTSC formats on the same disc.

The focus here is on activities at or immediately preceding this year's Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association's big day on Glasgow Green, including the Highland dancing and heavy field events that accompany the World Pipe Band Championships.

The concerts, sessions, recitals, workshops, solo competitions and welter of other activity that were

a part of the *Piping Live!* programme are by-passed in favour of backgrounding shots, mostly of bands in George Square, but also including undistinguished moments like the arrival of bands at Glasgow Green, general views of the Green later in the day, a passing downpour of rain. There are brief interviews with a spokesman for the Patiala Pipe Band from Pakistan who says through an interpreter how happy they are to be there, and John Wilson on behalf of the judges. And there are quick looks-in at the Highland dancing, caber tossing and hammer throwing.

Then there are sequences from the grade I arena cameras: medleys by ScottishPower, the Clan Gregor Society, the Robert Wiseman Vale of Atholl and the Canadian 78th Fraser Highlanders Pipe Bands; march, strathspey and reel sets from Boghall and Bathgate Caledonian, New Zealand's Manawatu Scottish Society and Northern Ireland's Ballycoan Pipe Bands — leftovers from the *World Pipe Band Championships 2005* DVD.

The production ends with shots from the march past, prize giving and "grand finale".

It's good to document some of this activity, but the camera work here is untidy and unimaginative, and there are apparent lacks of intention, imagination and coherence to the whole: the separate segments stand in odd relationships to each other, a disjunction that is only amplified by the incongruous use of tracks from Chris Armstrong's *X-Treme* album behind most of the backgrounding segments.

As a result, it is hard to imagine who will feel this DVD lives up to its title: if you were there and left your own video camera at home or on the bus, this will maybe serve as a keepsake. It doesn't cut it as a documentary, or as a tourist vid. If you want to see the big name bands in action, it's the *World Pipe Band Championships 2005* DVD you want. If you weren't there and wonder what Glasgow and the Worlds are really all like, watch this, then raise your expectations a mile or two. If you want to show your gran what it was like, don't bother: she'll probably get confused and nod off.

The real message here is that, if it's worth doing something like this, it's worth doing properly: properly planned and scripted, properly composed and shot and edited (and financed)... because it is high time events like these make it into the electronic media — not least because that's where everyone else is at and piping has a lot to communicate to "everyone else".

Total playing time: 70 minutes
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CD-ROM

Italian tutor Vol. 3

ITALY's Bagpipes Italian Group has produced the third of a projected four-volume set of instructional CD-ROMs in Italian for learner pipers.

Interest in Italy is scattered, teachers are few and their time is limited; language and cultural differences limit the utility of English language resources, particularly for beginners — and the CD-ROMs are already proving a worthwhile way of facilitating and

encouraging the growing interest there in the great Highland bagpipe.

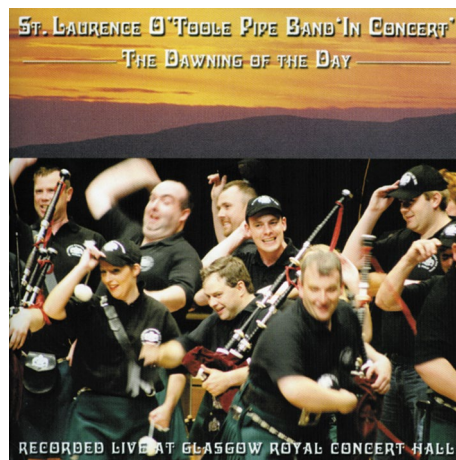
This third volume, the work of Alberto Massi, Duilio Vigliotti, Franco Calanca and Mario Tomasono, presents a lot of historical and current contextual information about piping's development and performance, including piping in the British Army, pipe bands and solo pipers, past and present, as well as pipe makers, teaching resources and institutions. It also introduces a selection of other European bagpipes. There is information about the roles of a band's pipe corps and drum corps and competing

Following on from earlier volumes, is more advice on instrument maintenance and music theory: the score and interpretation. Practical exercises take learners to more advanced gracings — and all of this is supported by sound and video clips.

The series is a work of extraordinary proportions, motivated not by commercial interest but by the dedication and evangelical enthusiasm of a handful of Italy's more knowledgeable and committed pipers, determined to ensure that Highland piping thrives in their own country.

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CDs



SLOT on stage

TERRY TULLY's St Laurence O' Toole Pipe Band is proudly loyal to its Irish roots.

It played this year's Phoenix Honda Glasgow Skye Association "pre-Worlds" concert at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on 10 August, opening with the traditional, very Irish slow air, *Dawning of the Day*, cleverly shifting the tempo into a march, bringing in the drum corps and then taking the audience away to a first class night of ensemble piping and drumming.

The 95 year-old Dublin-based band has taken a large selection of Irish traditional tunes in its repertoire, along with a number of attractive tunes composed by its own corps members including Dave Rickard, Tim Farrelly, Gerry Hanlon, and, not least, its pipe major Terry Tully.

Terry Tully is quite a composer, with three books of tunes to his credit and a number of leading bands around the world playing his music. He and the St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band, along with such bands as the 78th Fraser Highlanders from Toronto, have led the

way in making Irish jigs, reels and hornpipes acceptable and now standard in pipe band selections.

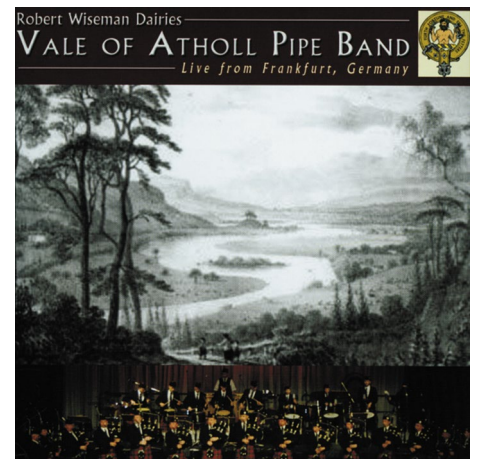
For the Glasgow show, St Laurence O'Toole recruited musicians Paul McGreevy on banjo, guitarist Aido Lawlor, Ray Lawlor on bodhran, flautist Pat Fitzpatrick and Derek Doyle with drum kit — the "Trad Lads" — whose skills helped enhance the evening's texture and colour.

And a rich, colourful, crowd-pleasing night it was — one that translates well onto CD: *St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band 'In Concert' — The Dawning of the Day*.

18 tracks. Total playing time 75+ minutes:

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Vale in Germany



'THE VALE' — the Robert Wiseman Dairies Vale of Atholl Pipe Band, which next year celebrates its centenary — is one of Scotland's best loved bands, a dedicated teaching institution in Perthshire that has produced a string of fine pipers and has long been respected for its strong, often leading-edge musical values.

In November 2004, the Clan Pipers of Frankfurt and District Pipe Band, Germany, had the presence of mind to celebrate its 30th anniversary with a concert by "the Vale". The performance was recorded, mixed and produced by Murray Blair and Sandy Lobban and has now been released on KRL's *Monarch* label: it's been well worth the wait.

The album — *Robert Wiseman Dairies Vale of Atholl Pipe Band: Live from Frankfurt, Germany* — opens with a slow air written for the occasion by musical director John Allan. It's called Karl be Grosse (*Big Charlie*), the reference being to a 7th century Holy Roman Emperor who set up his head office in the historic town.

Andy Renwick, the former pipe sergeant who took over as pipe major after Ian Duncan's departure in 2000 has taken the Vale forward in a way that is both consistent with and respectful of its reputation for being "out there" when it comes to music.

So the tunes that follow display the band's flair and versatility: from well-known high-end standards — tunes like *The Piper's Bonnet*, *Mrs MacPherson of Inveran* and J. S. McLennan's *Jig o' Slurs* — to innovative compositions by corps members Paul Mather and Callum Townsley; the popular *Last of the Mohicans* theme is there, and some earlier Vale repertoire, including tunes the band has made distinctively its

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own, like Roddy MacDonald's *Il Paco Grande* and Gordon Duncan's *Zeto the Bubbleman*, all played with freshness and style.

13 tracks. Total playing time: 50+ minutes

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2005 Worlds CDs

THE 60th World Pipe Band Championships saw the House of Edgar Shotts and Dykehead Pipe Band bring the title back to Scotland, its 15th Worlds win — appropriately enough in an year of anniversaries: not least the Royal Scottish Pipe Band's 100th and Shotts' 95th.

But the points at the top were fearfully close, with previous champions, Field Marshall Montgomery and Simon Fraser University, a whisker behind.

And the whole grade I final was played to a formidably high standard... which is great for anyone who picks up both volumes of *The World Pipe Band Championships 2005* CDs recently released on KRL's *Monarch* label.

Volume 1 has both the march, strathspey and reel sets and the medleys of the big six: House of Edgar Shotts and Dykehead, Field Marshal Montgomery (Northern Ireland), Simon Fraser University (Vancouver, Canada), Strathclyde Police, St Laurence

Clan Gregor Society, the Manawatu Scottish Society (New Zealand), Robert Wiseman Dairies Vale of Atholl, Ballycoan (Northern Ireland) and the 78th Highlanders (Halifax Citadel) Pipe Bands (Nova Scotia, Canada).

Take your pick; it's best to buy them both.

Volume 1: 12 tracks. Total playing time 67+ minutes. Volume 2: 14 tracks. Total playing time 75+ minutes

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The 'also played'

KRL's *World Pipe Band Championships 2005 Qualifying Heat* album is a concise, high-octane reminder of how widespread and how stunningly good grade I pipe band activity has become.

It presents less than five minutes each from each of the 17 bands — six on them Scottish — that had to play for a place in the final round: Robert Wiseman Dairies Vale of Atholl, David Urquhart Travel, Clan Gregor Society, Lothian and Border Police, Glasgow Pipes and Drums Dysart and Dundonald from Scotland; Ballindery Bridge and Ballycoan from Northern Ireland; Nunawading from Australia, Manawatu Scottish Society from New Zealand; Alberta Caledonian, Peel Regional Police, 78th Highlanders (Halifax

Citadel), 78th Fraser Highlanders and Toronto Police from Canada; MacTarnahans Prince Charles and City of Washington from the United States.

A lot hung on these few minutes in the qualifying arena, and the enormous investments of time, energy and money to be there in 2005 are dwarfed by the years of development work in so many parts of the world that has produced bands of this quality... and the bands who took their chance in Glasgow in 2005 were, of course, just the tip of a much vaster body of involvement "back home".

The bands featuring on the *Qualifying Heat* album all deliver performances that are worth more than passing attention. Six, of course, went on to the finals: Robert Wiseman Dairies Vale of Atholl, Clan Gregor Society, Ballycoan from Northern Ireland; Manawatu Scottish Society from New Zealand, 78th Highlanders (Halifax Citadel), 78th Fraser Highlanders. So they feature on the two-volume *World Pipe Band Championships 2005* album as well.

And a number of them, of course, have been recorded and have their own CDs. All have their level of prominence and local significance — and all deserve international significance. Here is a worthwhile sampler.

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Sharing cultures in Germany

THOMAS ZÖLLER

BA (Scottish Music — Piping) graduate Thomas Zöllner has just opened a piping academy in Florsheim near Frankfurt, in his native Germany.

The school occupies a three-room floor in a two-storey house in the picturesque city.

Scholar and gold medallist Allan MacDonald, who teaches on the degree course in Glasgow, is its patron and it has a team of resource people to call upon, including Sardinia-based piping scholar Barnaby Brown; Michael Klevenhaus, a Gaelic speaker and singer who lives in Germany and has studied with Gaelic singer Margaret Stewart; and a locally-based uilleann piper, Tom Kannmather.

“There is a lot of interest in Germany in bagpipes, said Thomas Zöllner, “especially in Scottish piping but also in French, Irish and medieval pipes.”

He will provide ‘by appointment’ tuition in Scottish Highland and medieval piping, and Tom Kannmather will teach uilleann piping.

“But we will also hold seminars and workshops every two or three months involving other people in the team: Barnaby, Michael or Allan.

“Our first one is in December: a Gaelic song and piobaireachd workshop in Bonn, and we’ll be establishing our own recording studio where students can record their work, a library and other resources.

“I began recording piobaireachd with Allan during my studies at the RSAMD and the National Piping Centre,” said Thomas Zöllner. “So far, we have done the whole of the MacArthur-MacGregor manuscript and started on the Piobaireachd Society and Kilberry books, and the idea is to record all of them so that they’ll be accessible to students of the Academy here.

“But the idea is to present Scottish and Irish piping in their contexts: to move away from cliché to content and context, and towards an understanding of culture, including song, Gaelic language and all of these things that I came to value greatly during my time in Glasgow.

“At our Bonn workshop, for example, we’ll



present Gaelic song and piobaireachd — I will teach some of the pipers the Gaelic song that Michael is teaching to some of the singers, and they can then come together and compare the rhythms of the songs with what is played on the pipes and see how the piping embellishments go hand in hand with the syllabic structure of the Gaelic language.”

Thomas Zöllner recently led a workshop for the Nuremburg Pipe Band pipe corps. He gave them a fairly serious presentation about piobaireachd and the Campbell canntaireachd. He told them about differences between the Campbell canntaireachd and the Piobaireachd Society settings... “and they were very interested,” he said. “Several have already asked to come for tuition all the way from Nuremburg to learn more about piobaireachd and get deeper

into the origins of the whole thing.

“This sort of thing is something a lot of people want to do, especially outwith Scotland I think. There is this idea of, rather than imitating something, understanding and interpreting it.

“I think an important reason for the interest here in Germany, and the number and variety of bagpipes that are being played here, has to do with the problems Germans have with their own identity: issues like ‘what does it mean if I am German?’... ‘what can I do?’, ‘what can I say?’ — because of the Nazis and Holocaust and all of these historical things. That’s still very much in people’s heads, and there has been a lot of cultural importation over the past 30 years.

“All kinds of foreign cultures were examined and assimilated and explored as people tried to create their own cultural identities through foreign cultures because their own culture was a very delicate thing to touch upon,” he said. “Even nowadays, if you go very much into your own culture in Germany, it’s seen as a dodgy thing to do.

“Pipes have a general attraction to a lot of people. They present a very strong image, and people want a cultural identity... something distinctive.

“We see Medieval Markets held in castles every weekend during the summer all around Germany. People show old handcrafts and play German pipes, and that is growing as well: dudelsaks — duday, hümmelchen, schäfferpfeife, bok.

“People are performing a lot of medieval music, and I am interested in that very much as well. For several years now I’ve played in a band, Estampie, from Munich. It plays medieval music but with an updated sound, using a lot of instruments and a variety of tempi.”

When he returned home to Germany in October, however, it was with a new musical sound altogether.

He staged concerts in Hofheim, his home town, and Speyer, of music he had begun developing during his studies in Glasgow where, with his second study teacher, classical tabla player Vijay Kangutkar, a cello player from

Germany who was studying classical music at the RSAMD, Johanna Stein, and a harp student from Alaska, Cheyenne Brown, a shared exploration opened a form of music that was new to them all.

“It was really about creating something, and not imitating something,” he said.

“It is music that draws from rhythms and scales that are Scottish, Indian or European. It fits quite well together and sounds quite interesting, I think.

“But it draws on so many different influences that I still find it difficult to describe with words. Elements from the Indian ragas are combined with medieval influences from Germany; the Gaelic language, with which Allan MacDonald grew up as his mother tongue, meeting the rhythms of Japanese Taiko drumming... highly skilled tabla playing clashing with powerful piping... jazzy guitar chords fuse with classical cello motifs.”

The concerts in Germany brought together two of Thomas Zöllner’s teachers from Scotland — Allan MacDonald and Vijay Kanguitkar — to play along with Pedro Aibeo, a guitar bodhran and low whistle player from Portugal; German percussionist Sascha Gotowtschikow; harpist Ute Rek, and Sascha Gotowtschikow, who are both members, with Thomas Zöllner, of Estampie; and classical cellist Joachim Schiefer.

“I was the only one who knew everybody before these concerts, and it was an experimental project — but it worked really well. We all really enjoyed being together and we were delighted by how well we got along as people as well as musically.”

Both concerts, in a municipal hall and a church, attracted packed-full houses of about 500 people. “The first concert had to be delayed for 30 minutes because there were so many people there they couldn’t cope with them all,” said Thomas Zöllner. And the reception audiences gave the music was exciting.

“I felt very honoured to have both of my tutors from Glasgow, Allan MacDonald and Vijay Kanguitkar, over for these concerts. They were very supportive throughout the whole of the course and I am very, very grateful to them,” said Thomas Zöllner.

“We recorded both concerts so have all the material for a master — but I haven’t listened to it yet because it’s all still with the sound engineer. But we have got the basis for an album.

“This is something that would not have

taken place had I not gone to Glasgow,” he said. “The degree course broadens your view of music in general and gives you the chance to be around with great musicians, teachers, fellow students, and we all draw from the experiences we’ve had so far.”

THOMAS Zöllner also has been engaged to provide piping accompaniment for a modernistic production in French of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* that is being staged by the Atelier du Rhin — a theatre across the border in Colmar, a city south of Strasbourg in France.

The production is already in rehearsal, opens in late January, and then undertakes a five-centre tour in the spring.

“The *MacBeth* engagement is a brilliant job to have,” he said. “And a great way to expose piping to some new audiences.”

The theatre’s director is Canadian-born Mathew Jocelyn.

“Because it’s *Macbeth*, I want very much to have the presence of this strong, harsh presence of the bagpipes, and obviously for the Scottish relationship,” he said. “There’s a strong, urban-contemporary quality to the production I am doing and, for example, the actors are being dressed in very modern versions of kilts.

“I wanted to work with a musician-composer or musician who has a sense of playing with textures and working with electronic techniques, sampling, mixing and so on. Thomas is ideal for the task. And I have somebody on our staff here who’s a very clever arranger with electronic material.”

Uniquely, the theatre is also an opera centre and houses an opera studio for the National Opera in Strasbourg.

“It is a theatre in which there’s full time opera activity for young singers and a full time theatre activity,” said Mathew Jocelyn. “My own theatre activity almost always incorporates in a fairly important way composers or musicians or some kind of musical structure.

“It doesn’t always mean having musicians on stage but it often does; so I spent some time in Scotland this past summer and met Stuart Cassells, who introduced me to the music of Martyn Bennett — and I have been listening very intensely to Martyn Bennett’s incredible virtuosity.

“There’s an exceptional sophistication to the music.”

So, yes, he said, the door may open there to admit a little more piping in the future. ●

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ISS 19



MERRY CHRISTMAS — HAPPY HOGMANAY...

Fit for life: fit to pipe

REFLLECTION on the slothful excesses that, for many of us, are a part of Christmas and Hogmanay — and the New Year advertisements for crash diets — minds me of the importance of maintaining a reasonably healthy diet and level of health and fitness for piping.

As I get older, I'm noticing wee aches and pains I don't remember having had in the past — we are susceptible to repetitive strains and we work all day, rush out to a band practice, blow for a couple of hours... we dehydrate.

You get to a competition and the first thing you do grab a soft drink and a burger or something just as greasy and, even before the tuning session's over, people's concentration and energy are starting to flag.

I'm not promoting any body image obsessions here, but we do need to think about how we keep in some sort of form for our piping.

You don't need to be a magnificently muscled Olympian on a racehorse-type diet and exercise regime in order to play the pipes or drums — but you do need to be energised to play your best when it matters.

Sleep is an issue. Quite apart from the levels of difficulty associated with yawning with a blowpipe in your mouth, it helps to be rested up before a performance or your concentration will lurch away back to your bed.

There are countless excuses. You're excited the night before a performance, you're maybe in some stimulating new place and the craic kicks

in over a quick pint and a cheap meal. Before you know it, it's four in the morning, you're still wound up, you've drunk too much, you can't sleep, you haven't unpacked properly or got your gear together for the next day and the alarm's set for six or seven. I've been around, so I've heard of bands that get onto a bus or a plane and head off to play "away" and, immediately, the trip melts down into a sleepless binge of reckless consumption.

It's not just an old hard core that needs to be told to smarten up. Young players need to get off their Playstations and away from their television sets, and get their sleep too.

I don't care how robust you think you are, if you're short of sleep and full of junk food, there is no way that you will be up to your best in the circle.

I believe it's high time that events like Highland games were urged to look at the food and drink that's available to pipers, drummers, dancers and heavy field event and athletics competitors, all of whom have levels of performance in mind. None of these people will do their best after grazing all day on greasy foods and fizzy drinks from the food stands — stuff that sits in your stomach like a sofa in a skip.

Participants ought to be at their best; that's why they came. They should be putting healthy, energising food into themselves. And it would be so enormously easy to arrange: salads, sliced lean meats, fruit... tasty pasta for energy.

It also has to be said — given a now very

outdated 'macho' culture that has helped only to give piping a bad name — that drink does no-one's talent any favours. Taking a dram or a pint before a competition or performance is simply foolhardy. Even if you manage to win a prize with an elevated blood alcohol level or hangover, you will not change my conviction that you'd have played even better with better preparation and a clear head. Where the need for a wee bevvie to curb the nerves has become a chronic habit, players risk joining the long list of pipers who've prematurely, often tragically, run their talent into the ground.

The only way to curb nerves is to get the practice in then arrive on the boards or march into the circle feeling fresh, alert and eager to play.

Once you've done your best, won your event, picked up your prizes and packed up to go home — that's the time to party.

Piping and drumming are becoming increasingly demanding musical arts. Standards at every level are rising. As musicians who care about performance, we need to take care of ourselves and set good examples to young players of ambition. To get the most from our piping, and put our best into it, we need to take regular, moderate exercise, we need comfortable amounts of sleep, we need to eat a balanced diet, and be mindful of our general level of health: we need to pursue a sensibly healthy lifestyle.

If you do, you'll make the whole of your whole life more enjoyable, not just your piping. ●

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3 - WUNDERBAR (moveable barline)

A method by which a piper, with or without conscious intent, may designate any note at random to be the first note of a measure.



Note how the tune without Wunderbars is mashed unmusically up against the bar lines. Always placing the same number of beats or fractions of beats in a measure in this way seriously inhibits the piper's own innate sense of approximate timing.



The use of Wunderbars allows freedom of movement whilst adding drama and suspense to a tune. This effect is most noticeable in pipe band corps, as Wunderbars are often placed in different locations throughout the tune by each individual piper.

GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING: Excessive use of Wunderbars by pipers may be habit-forming. Even casual use has been found to lead to hair loss, nervous ticks and bouts of insanity in drummers. Ensemble use may intensify this effect. Use care when allowing percussionists to drive after being exposed to Wunderbars. May cause dizziness and uncontrollable note-taking among adjudicators.

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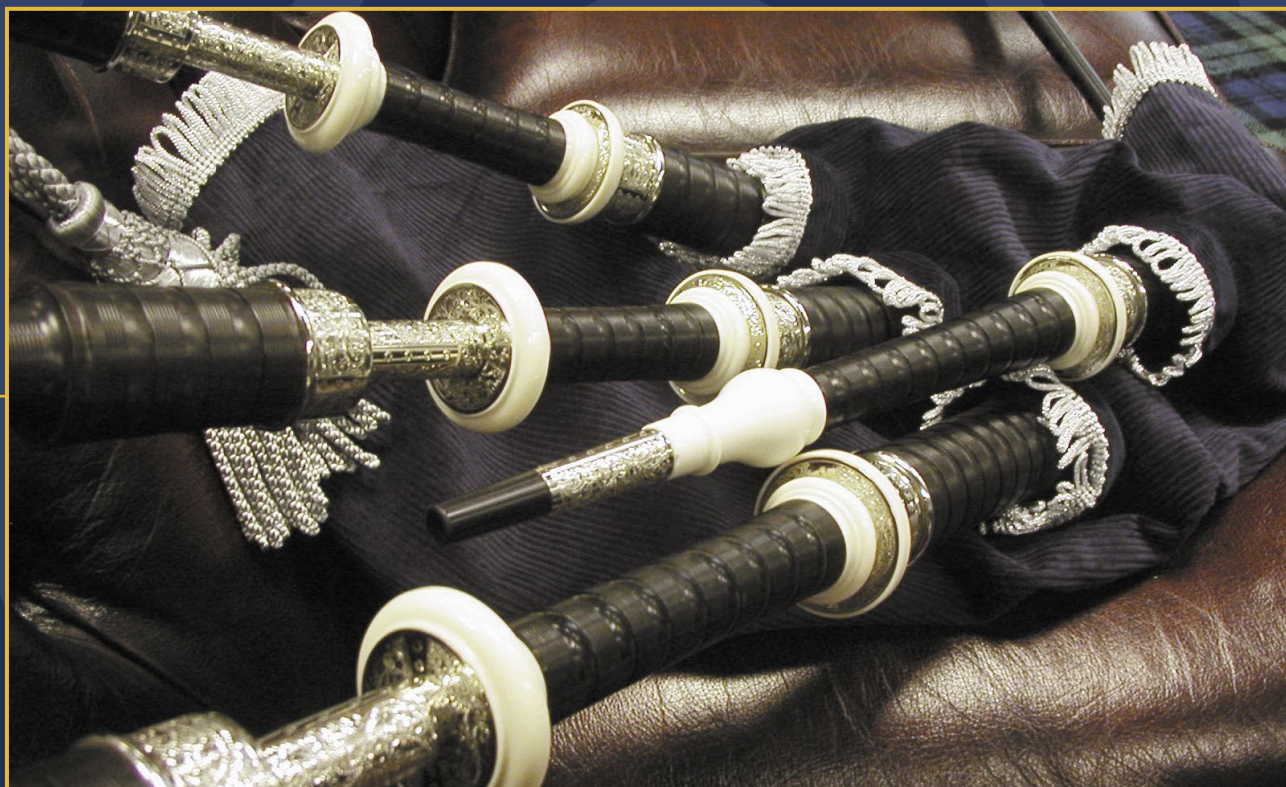
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