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NYPBoS newsletter No. 41

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FRED MORRISON talks about his piping background, musical career and new CD, *Outlands*. (Story: p.10)

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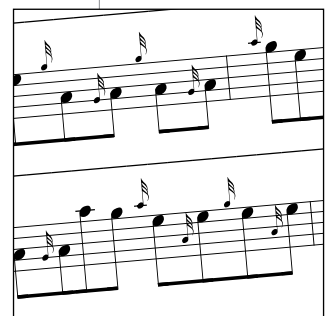
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The National Piping Centre

30-34 McPhater Street
Glasgow, Scotland. G4 0HW
Tel: +44 (0)141 353 0220
Fax: +44 (0)141 353 1570

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Editor: **Roddy MacLeod MBE BSc**

Features and all editorial enquiries:

John Slavin / Designfolk

piipingtoday@designfolk.com

Tel: 05601 140 786 • Mob: 0781 513 1116

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Busy start to 2010



On Saturday, February 13, we held our annual Junior Piping Championships here at The National Piping Centre. It is hard to believe that this in fact was the 14th competition and that the majority of competitors were not born when the event started in 1997. In total we had an incredible 87 competitors taking part with a healthy total number of 44 playing in both piobaireachd competitions.

Also impressive were the distances travelled by many of the youngsters with competitors from as far away as Northern Ireland, Skye, Inverness and the Borders. This reflects well on their dedication as well as the support they are being given by their parents and tutors. Given that proceedings finally got wrapped up about 8pm I am sure a number would have returned home very tired in the wee small hours. That said we hope that the experience of taking part and the enjoyment of meeting and making new friends in piping will form fond memories which will be held in mind for many years to come.

It was pleasing also to hear the very high standard of playing from so many. Indeed the judges for the under-15 piobaireachd event, Jimmy Banks and Stuart Samson, were so impressed that they were compelled to make a written comment on the high standard which was announced at the prize-giving.

So it would seem that the tradition is in safe hands going forward and this is further evidenced by the fantastic standard being set by The National Youth Pipe Band Senior and Development bands which have strengthened their ranks again after a round of recent auditions.

The National Youth Band recently received great praise for its performances at the hugely successful Celtic Connections festival where they appeared on stage for the opening concert performance of Fraser Fifield's newly composed suite and also with Carlos Núñez in front of a sell-out audience. We are all looking forward to the band's next performance of their *Dragon's Lair* concert to be held in Perth Concert Hall on April 3.

While talking about new music I must also mention that The National Piping Centre was successful in attaining grant funding from the Scottish Arts Council to commission a new suite of music to be composed by the great cellist Neil Johnstone, son of the late Duncan Johnstone. The suite which is called *Suite for Alan*, in memory of Neil's brother who died at the age of 21 from leukaemia, will weave together a number of Duncan's compositions with the underlying theme of the piece based on Duncan's piobaireachd *Lament for Alan my Son*.

In fact, the music will start with a performance of the piobaireachd by yours truly and then the suite is picked up by a chamber orchestra. The orchestra will consist of a combination of professional musicians and students from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama's BA (Scottish Music) course.

Most appropriately the first performance of this piece will be held on March 13 at the conclusion of the Duncan Johnstone Memorial Piping competition prior to the prize-giving. A second performance is planned for the *Piping Live!* festival in August of this year.

For me this collaboration presents a very positive opportunity for traditional and classical musicians to work together, to learn from each other and also to present pipe music and in particular, piobaireachd, to new audiences.

I hope there will be opportunities for further performances in the future and that perhaps this might act as another stimulus for further creativity, particularly, for the degree students or the many other talented young pipers that we have been hearing great things from so recently.

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

Gordon Duncan Memorial Competition



AFTER A great day of Scottish, Irish and Breton piping at The National Piping Centre, Willie McCallum won the overall Gordon Duncan Memorial Competition on Sunday, January 17, held as part of the Celtic Connections festival. Stuart Liddell was second and Sylvain Hamon was third. The final placings in each section were as follows: BRETON: 1, Xavier Boderiou; 2, Alexis Meunier; 3, Willie McCallum. MSR: 1, Willie McCallum; 2, Stuart Liddell; 3, Sylvain Hamon. IRISH: 1, Stuart Liddell; 2, Alen Tully; 3, Willie McCallum.

Premier performance at the Duncan Johnstone Memorial Competition

A NEW orchestral composition based on the work of the late Duncan Johnstone will be premiered at the 10th Duncan Johnstone Memorial Competition at The National Piping Centre on Saturday, March 20.

The piece for small pipes, flute, whistle and string orchestra entitled *Suite for Alan* has been written by Duncan's son Neil and is based on some of his father's compositions. It will be performed by soloists Allan MacDonald on Lowland pipes and Iain MacDonald on small pipes, flute and whistle and a 22-piece string orchestra led by Duncan's son Duncan and conducted by Neil.

Duncan Johnstone senior died in 1999 and an annual piping competition was set up in his memory the following year.

Suite for Alan will be premiered at the end of the competition and will also feature in a concert during *Piping Live!* in August 2010.

Set tunes

THE SET Tunes for the Senior Piobaireachd and Clasp Competitions in 2010 have been announced by the Piobaireachd Society.

They are: *The Sister's Lament*, PS 4 p109, K p41; *Nameless* (Angus Mackay's MS), PS 4 p111, K p42; *The Battle of Glensheil* PS 4 p124; *A Glase*, PS 11 p320; *Duncan MacRae of Kintail's Lament*, PS 4 p121; K p40; *Nameless* (Colin Campbell's Cantairachd MS), PS 4 p124, K p43; *The Old Woman's Lullaby*, PS 4 p113, K p39; *The Aged Warrior's Sorrow*, PS 12 p360; *Lament for Red Hector of the Battles*, PS 4 p111, K p42; *The Middling Spree*, PS 11 p322; *The Park Piobaireachd No. 1*, PS 4 p113, K p46; *The Pretty Dirk*, PS 11 p318; *Nameless Lament* (MacArthur MS), PS 13 p420 or 421, but not p423; *Lament for the Bishop of Argyll*, PS 15 p509; *Salute on the birth of Rory Mor MacLeod*, PS 4 p121, K p38; Left Hand, PS 14 p489.

Mind your Manors

THE SCOTTISH Piping Society of London is hosting a course at Urchfont Manor, Wiltshire, from Friday, April 30 to Sunday, May 2.

Tutors include Andrew Wright and Andrew Frater and organisers promise it will be a great chance to learn from the experts in the comfort of a rural manor built in 1678 with top class food and beautiful surroundings.

For more details visit www.scottishpiping.societyoflondon.com

Pipes in the top 10

RARE PIPES from a Northumberland museum have been chosen as one of the top 10 objects which sum up the North East of England, its past and its impact on the world.

The musette de cour, which some believe to be the forerunner of the Northumbrian pipes, from the Chantry Bagpipe Museum in Morpeth is part of the History of the World project between the BBC, the British Museum and a further 350 museums and institutions across the country.

Doctorate degree for Decker

A PREVIOUS contributor to *Piping Today* has become one of the first to receive a doctorate-level degree for a thesis on bagpipe music.

Decker Forrest, originally from San Diego, was recently awarded a PhD from the University of St Andrews and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama for his thesis entitled 'Ceòl Beag: The Development and Performance Practice of the 'small music' of the Highland Bagpipe c.1820-1966'

A substantial body of recordings of Decker playing early published bagpipe music were included in the thesis using a very old set of bagpipes and a chanter



copied especially for his research from one made about 1810 by Donald MacDonald of Glenhinnisdal, Skye and Edinburgh.

Decker, now living in Scotland, is the Programme Leader for the BA (Hons) Degree in Gaelic and Traditional Music at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Scotland's Gaelic college in Sleat on the Isle of Skye. He was previously Coordinator of Academic Studies/Deputy Head of Department for the BA Hons (Scottish Music) degree course at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow

His work is currently being prepared for wider publication and distribution.

New grade one indoor contest

LOMOND & CLYDE Pipe Band are celebrating their 10th anniversary by staging an international grade one indoor competition in Glasgow.

Battling it out in the first heat at the Radisson Hotel on March 20 will be: Ballycoan Pipe Band; House of Edgar Shotts and Dykehead Pipe Band; Tayside Police Pipe Band and Fife Constabulary Pipe Band. In heat two are: Inveraray and District Pipe Band; Torphichen & Bathgate Pipe Band; Robert Wiseman Dairies Vale of Atholl Pipe Band and Cullybackey Pipe Band.

The top two from each heat progress to the final, held that evening. Tickets for the heats and final can be purchased through www.ticket-scotland.com

Sound choice for gold medallist



THE Saskatchewan Pipe Band Association has revealed the line-up of instructors for Sound Advice 2010, which takes place from July 11-16 at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan, Canada.

Inverness Gold Medallist Glenn Brown from Scotland's National Piping Centre joins the team of instructors which also includes Ryan MacDonald of Cape Breton and now Victoria; James P. Troy, recent winner of the Kansas City Gold Medal light music event; Garth Neel, a past winner of the marches at Inverness; Doug MacRae, a member of the 78th Fraser Highlanders; Doug Stronach, former World Champion amateur soloist and leading drummer of the Toronto Police Pipe Band; Graham Brown, a World Solos finalist, and now leading drummer of the Peel Regional Police; and Tyler Fry, the world's best-known tenor drummer and a member of the House of Edgar Shotts and Dykehead Pipe Band. For more information see www.saskpipebands.org

Cash injection for Vegas

TOURISM bosses in Las Vegas have approved plans to spend almost \$300,000 developing a piping, drumming and Celtic festival to be held in the American city next year.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority are investing \$131,000 this year and \$165,000 next year to create the new event — reported in the last edition of *Piping Today* — which could include a military tattoo, bagpipe competition, ceilidh and Highland Games and street party.

The inaugural Las Vegas World Celtic Festival is planned for April 7-10, 2011, at various locations throughout the city.

Organisers hope it will attract at least 10,000 visitors to the area and boost the economy of the city by \$6.6million.

National Piping Centre Junior Competition



Photo: Derek Maxwell

THE FIRST place prize winners at The National Piping Centre's Junior Competition held on Saturday, February 13. Pictured from the left is Steven Gray winner of the 15/17 piobaireachd event, at back, Charles MacDonald winner of the under-15 piobaireachd, front, Andrew Brodlie winner of the under-15 piobaireachd ground only, Angus MacColl winner of the 15/17 MSR, and Bradley Parker who won the under-15 march and under-15 strathspey and reel competitions. The overall winners of each section were Cameron Wylie, Chanter; Bradley Parker, Novice; and Steven Gray, Junior.

Greenville Games tune competition for royal guest of honour

THE GREENVILLE Scottish Games in South Carolina is gearing up to welcome a royal guest to the event in May.

Prince Edward, the Earl of Wessex, will be attending the event and, apart from Braemar, it's thought to be the first Highland games officially visited by a senior member of the royal family.

Up to 40 pipe bands will be involved in the celebrations on May 28 and 29 which include a Great Scot! parade and around 80 competitors battling it out in the games in front of a crowd of around 15,000.

To honour the occasion, the organisers — in association with The National Piping Centre and R.G. Hardie — are staging a tune composition contest. They are urging composers to come up with a four-

parted 6/8 march entitled, *Greenville's Salute to the Earl of Wessex*.

Entrants should send in manuscripts to the address below. The manuscript should not have any other information marked on it. The manuscript should be accompanied on a separate page by a cover letter from the composer. Deadline for the tune submittal is April 23.

Entries should be sent to The National Piping Centre, ATTN: Greenville's Salute Tune Contest, 30-34 McPhater St, Cowcaddens, Glasgow, G4 0HW, Scotland or emailed to ascott@thepipingcentre.co.uk. Please include an email address with your contact details to allow confirmation of receipt of entries to be sent.



For regular news and result updates from the world of piping visit The National Piping Centre's website at www.thepipingcentre.co.uk

Historic reformation of the E



All photos: Libby O'Brien

All the attendees at the first meeting of the newly reformed Eagle Pipers' Society played as part of a massed band. In the front rank from the left, are Billy Stewart, Iain Speirs, Colin MacLellan, John Paterson and Euan Anderson

TUESDAY, January 19 2010, saw the revival of what was once one of the main attractions in a vibrant Edinburgh piping community in the 60s and 70s. The Eagle Pipers' Society held its first meeting at the Scots Guards' Club, Haymarket, and was afforded a fantastic turnout for the first meeting since the society fell away over 25 years ago.

Spearheaded by three of the top East Coast piping personalities of current times, the Eagle Pipers have been resurrected by Colin MacLellan, Iain Speirs and Euan Anderson – “well-kent” faces around the games circuit as players and adjudicators, as well as having spent a number of successful years with Lothian and Borders Police Pipe Band under Colin's direction.

The original incarnation of the Eagle Pipers' Society was formed on the basis that there should exist a platform for solo piping to be played and enjoyed by enthusiasts away from the pressures of the competition boards, and this is something that has been very much a feature of the new committee's thoughts. Indeed, the ideology of the initial approach was such that the original rulebook of the society has been kept 99 per cent intact — the cardinal rule being that perfect silence should be maintained during the playing of Ceol Mor.

Started originally by George Stoddart at his Lawnmarket-based shop, the Eagle Pipers were so-named because the original members would pile out of the meeting at 9.30pm to catch last orders at the Eagle Bar across the street. The owner of the bar offered the use of a back room in the pub, which the Eagles gladly accepted. The society grew in numbers and was duly formalised as the Eagle Pipers. Outwith the regular meetings of the society, big competitions were held and guest players were invited along to have a tune. Nowadays the Eagle Bar is no more (now called the Ensign Ewart, for anyone who cares to visit).

Among the early members were Colin, Iain and Euan's fathers, Captain John A MacLellan, Tom Speirs and Jimmy Anderson respectively. So it is easy to see why the new custodians hold the society, and indeed solo piping in general, dear to their hearts.

It was felt at the time of the original society that Edinburgh was not as well served as Glasgow with piping nights or top events to attend. It is with this token that after the immense popularity of the Eagle Pipers in the 60s and 70s fell away, the same thing is evident now, with Glasgow being at the hub of the international piping world. It seems however, that there may yet be some life in Edinburgh's piping scene. Ian Duncan has taken charge of the Lothian and Borders Police Pipe



Cameron Drummond, Chris Gibb and Greig Canning

Band, bringing with him an influx of new blood. The Eagle Pipers meetings have resumed and it appears to be only a matter of time before new incarnations of the Eagle Pipers' competitions are announced, further springboarding Edinburgh's piping prowess.

Another string to the capital's bow is that the attendees of the first meeting featured no less than eight current or former full time bagpipe teachers. With such strong links to schools across the east coast and beyond, one would hope to see the fruits of this tuition coming along to enjoy a tune and to learn from some of the top players today at the meetings.

The first meeting got off to a fantastic start with addresses from Euan Anderson, the Honorary pipe major, bringing the society to order. A further address was made by Colin MacLellan, the President, detailing a little of the Eagle Pipers' history and what the night should be about. All pipers in attendance then got

Passion at the he

Fred Morrison

FRED. From that one word any piper will know who you are talking about. He is one of the few people from any walk of life whose first name is enough to identify him, and it is an indication of how highly he is regarded within our music scene. He has not been a part of the competition circuit for a while, but has a clutch of solo titles to his name, including the Macallan Trophy at Lorient seven times and the Gold Medal at Oban in 1986, and Inverness in 1991.

Since that time Fred has made his living as a professional musician, working with various bands and musicians and also under his own name, playing in the traditional folk music scene, crossing musical boundaries and borders, playing and tutoring at piping events to adoring concert audiences all over the world.

Though born in Bishopston, near Glasgow, Fred's playing is rooted in his father's South Uist piping traditions, and is the heartbeat which constantly drives Fred's music and piping style. "I was brought up with a style of piping where everything was based on the music: the emphasis was placed on phrasing, and life, expression and vibrancy. The style I was taught is still the same style I use if I was playing on stage at a big festival, as that's what people want to hear: music with heart; excitement; feeling; pushing the notes out. Without that attitude you wouldn't have lasted a day with my dad and some of the older players I used to visit as a boy. They would say 'Put the pipes down. You need to do this, you need to do that' and the thing they transmitted most was passion; that was at the heart of what they taught me. They also had a lovely finger touch and interesting approaches to technique which I just don't hear nowadays.

"Uist was well known for having pipers play for dancers, and originally this playing would have been for step-dancing before Highland dancing became popular. They would have

Fred headlined the recent Celtic Connections 2010 Showcase Scotland concert



Photo: John Slavin @ designfolk.com

art of the music

‘The only time I felt myself adapting my style was when I came back to solo competition a few years ago after being out of it for at least 10 years. I noticed that I really had to slow down, as the strathspey and reel playing was so much slower’

two or three pipers going to play for a dance, and one would go for a sandwich and a dram whilst the others played, and they would keep this going all night. One of the great exponents of this style of playing was John MacDonald, also known as ‘Seonaidh Roidean’, who was pipe major of the Glasgow Police. His father was also a famous step-dance piper who used to do displays of step-dancing and step-dance piping at the Uist Games. I have heard old recordings of John MacDonald and they are awesome. They have that very straight ahead; on, on, on, on, beat in the strathspeys and that comes from the step-dance rhythm.

“I only knew this style of piping and I played the way I was taught in all the competitions I entered. The only time I felt myself adapting my style was when I came back to solo competition a few years ago after being out of it for at least 10 years. I noticed that I really had to slow down, as the strathspey and reel playing was so much slower.

“I loved playing in solo competition, I really did, but I got to a stage when I had so many other musical ideas going on in my head. I was influenced by meeting and listening to other traditional musicians who would improvise with ornamentation and style, but nobody did that within piping. I could hear what I wanted to do and knew the great scope the pipes had with its brilliant ornamentation. So for a few years I was betwixt and between and it was

hard to go either way, and was getting harder to do both.”

So not long after Fred had won the Gold Medal at Inverness in the early 90s he joined the folk music supergroup Clan Alba, and started exploring and implementing the ideas that had been going around in his head for a while.

“Working with Clan Alba, and the folk singer Dick Gaughan in particular, had a great influence on me,” said Fred. “We were in the studio for the best part of a year making the Clan Alba CD, and I learned a lot from Dick in that time. He was great at developing musical styles and ideas, and knew what rules to break for the right reasons: musical taste; choosing good material; exploring new avenues; and he appreciated the pipes as an instrument in their own right. The Clan Alba experience was a great corner for me to turn.

“However, going back to compete in solo competition has always been at the back of my mind. For the last few years I have been going out to Winter Storm in January with Angus MacColl, Willie McCallum and Stuart Liddell. Every time I come back from Winter Storm I want to get back into the solos. My problem during the summer is that I am very busy with festivals and gigs, and by the time it comes to September and the big solo competitions come around I’m on a completely different wavelength – my mindset is still in festival mode giving it yahoo! Going back to the solos really

does interest me, but what it will take is a full summer of going around the games to get me back into it.

“I really have enough gigs planned now to take me through to the end of this year. After Celtic Connections I am off to Seattle for three weeks of gigs and some teaching. The north of Spain is very big on piping and I do a lot of work out there during the summer. The audiences we get in Spain are great, and a 300-seat sell-out over there is a small gig. I played the Piping Masters festival last year in Oviedo and there were 2000 people going crazy for the music – it’s wild. I also play gigs in Germany, and Brittany of course as there is a big piping following there – and Scotland and Ireland obviously.

“The gigs have not really slowed down much this winter, and it can be hard to keep gigging constantly.”

FRED developed his own set of bellow pipes, the Fred Morrison Reelpipes, in conjunction with McCallum Bagpipes and they were featured in *Piping Today* issue 14. They are played on three out of the 11 tracks on Fred’s new CD, *Outlands*, with Highland pipes, uilleann pipes and low whistles being the other lead instruments on the album. “Bellows-blown Reelpipes are great because the tuning is very stable and when you are playing them for a gig you don’t need to spend much time setting your sound,” he revealed. “I can take them out of the box, spend a few minutes adjusting the bass drone and they are ready to go. The other benefits are that they are in the key of A which is a good key if you want to play along with other musicians, and they have good cross-fingering potential giving you C and F naturals and B flat which I like to use a lot. They are very good for playing Celtic music and have an extra kick that you just don’t get from small pipes.”

Another major aspect of Fred’s considerable talent is his prolific tune writing, and he is constantly working on new tunes. He is considered

one of the best composers from any aspect of the piping or traditional music worlds, and on his CD, *Outlands*, he composed 15 out of 20 tunes including tunes for the uilleann pipes and the low whistle. “I very rarely sit down with the intention of writing a tune, though I have done it,” said Fred. “What I’m always waiting for is a wee phrase that comes to me. It could even happen when I’m walking down the street; all it takes is three or four notes in a certain order that hit the spot — and that is the hook. I would then take that phrase and develop it, but I wouldn’t ruin it. If I had to wait two or three years to get the next part of the tune I would just let it sit. I would rather wait till the other parts of the tune fell into place and it was just right.

“I have sat down and said I need a tune that does this or that, and I push it in the right direction: tunes written like that can be very good, but they are never quite as good as tunes that start with the wee phrase that just comes from nowhere. I only ever write the music down when I have a phrase that I don’t want to forget. When I have a hook I’m working on, I will sit with the chanter or the pipes, and it can be quite exciting, and sometimes I’ll have a tune finished within 30 minutes — but if it is worth leaving, I will leave it. I’ve had a four-part tune on the shelf for a while, and I have the first, second and fourth parts and I know how the third part wants to sound but I haven’t got the right one yet. I discard hundreds of tunes: as I’m sitting playing everyday they come to me and I make them up as I go along, but unless they hit the spot I don’t take them.

I NEED to confess that I think Fred’s CD, *Outlands*, is amazing and there have been very few CDs in the last five years that have grabbed my attention and held it for such a length of time. I have long been a fan of American folk music: old-time, bluegrass and some Americana music, and it is Fred’s combination of bagpipes and bluegrass that really makes the CD so special for me. There is a real joy to be taken from Fred’s music, and when you add the infectious dance rhythms, it makes it hard to stand still too long whilst listening to it.

I remember looking around the crowded audience as Fred previewed *Outlands* at the *Piping Live!* street cafe in 2009, and the wide-eyed smiles, shaking heads and dropped jaws from the assembled piping fraternity was an obvious sign that they more than approved,

Fred played at the *Piping Live!* street cafe in August 2009, to preview his new CD, *Outlands*



Photo: John Savin @ designfolk.com

and perhaps couldn’t believe, what they were hearing.

I played the CD dozens of times when I first received it last November, and when I put it on now, two or three times a week, I can almost feel my mouth water in anticipation of the uilleann pipes playing the opening bars of the *Kansas City Hornpipe*, or the guitar and banjo playing the intro to *The Hard Drive*.

Having worked for a traditional music magazine for the past 13 years I have had the chance to listen to the best, and worst, of traditional

music CDs — sometimes as many as 40 review CDs per month. That’s a lot of music.

There has only been a small percentage, certainly less than 10 per cent, of that music which I have really liked — which I somehow connected with emotionally. That is not to say that I thought all the other music was poor, certainly not, as I could hear musical talent and quality in most of the music and singers I listened to, but they just didn’t supply that indefinable ‘something’ which made me tick. So as my love of American folk music has grown

it has got me thinking about why this so often pushes my buttons in all the right places.

Americana, and country music in general, has a big following in Britain and Ireland and I have come to believe that old-time, bluegrass, Americana and eventually country are musical developments from the tunes and songs the Scottish, Irish and English settlers took with them and added to the cultural melting pot at the time. So perhaps when we listen to a bluegrass tune or country song we are just lis-

tening to our own music filtered down through hundreds of years whilst rubbing shoulders with other European and African influences in the big American melting pot — and somehow it still manages to pull our deep hidden cultural and musical strings.

*‘I sometimes perform *The Hard Drive on Highland pipes when I’m playing a recital — and it sounds great, and does still sound like a bluegrass tune. It is all to do with the mood and intonation given to the tune’**

tening to our own music filtered down through hundreds of years whilst rubbing shoulders with other European and African influences in the big American melting pot — and somehow it still manages to pull our deep hidden cultural and musical strings.

That is only my potted, poorly researched, gut feeling on why this American music is so attractive to our ears on this side of the pond, and if there are any ethnomusicologists reading this please feel free to correct my ramblings, but when I put these notions to Fred he understood the connections I was trying to make.

“I heard a good quote attributed to Bill Monroe, ‘The father of bluegrass’, which was along the lines of ‘bluegrass is music with a hard drive to it. It’s Scotch bagpipes and ole-time fiddlin’.”

“The music I was playing before this CD, when mainly playing Scottish tunes, would receive comments from people like ‘you are playing helluva fast there’. Though I felt good playing at that speed and I was conscious that I didn’t want it to sound like I was trying too hard to play it that fast: it was sitting on that tempo well; calmly. That is a feature you also find in bluegrass, so I felt that I had a similar approach to playing music as bluegrass musicians do.

“In this era when you hear Americana and bluegrass bands the standard of playing is phenomenal and they are playing at a hundred miles

an hour, but cruising on it, and everything is immaculately in time and tune, the delivery is really strong and it sounds unbelievable — hearing that level of playing really tickled my interest.

“I stayed in Amsterdam on and off when I was younger and I lived with a musician called Billy Kelly, who sometimes plays with Paddy Keenan, and who played five-string banjo, and he would say to me ‘Fred you will love this instrument’, and he would play me bluegrass tunes. So I grew to know more about bluegrass

banjo, and learned about the great exponents like Earl Scruggs and the techniques of playing the instrument.

“I’m no authority on bluegrass, and just tried some ideas that I thought would work, but now I have researched it further and done a lot of playing, I have more ideas that I would like to explore in the future. Many of the bluegrass tunes are really simple phrases, and it is just what they do with them that is so amazing,” said Fred.

PART OF the enjoyment I get from listening to bagpipe music, particularly the faster types of tunes, is the build up of tension within a tune which helps increase the excitement, to then feel the release when the final few bars of the part kick-in and quickly unwind the tension. I hear this tension and release throughout the *Outlands* CD, and wanted to know if this was something Fred was aware of when playing or writing tunes.

“To go back to my tune composing, and the methods of waiting to have a wee phrase come, or to go pushing to write a tune. *The Kansas City Hornpipe* is an example of a tune that came to me with no effort and I had it written in about 10 minutes, with the second part just falling in to place and feeling right. Whereas the *Wildcat* was a tune that I searched for and wanted, and eventually got the phrase

which gave me the right key change that just felt right.

“I do feel the highs and lows when writing tunes, and can see the framework and where the tune could go. I will think to myself, ‘I could really push the tune at this point, or I could sit on it a bit here’ and I see the potential of it. If you listen to the *Outlands* tune at track six on the CD, it is a simple tune, but I got the hook and thought, ‘Ah, if I use this properly it could be something that could really work’.

“Also, the bluegrass tunes that I play on the Reelpipes will work on the Highland pipes and I sometimes perform *The Hard Drive on Highland pipes when I’m playing a recital* — and it sounds great, and does still sound like a bluegrass tune. It is all to do with the mood and intonation given to the tune.”

So maybe we can look forward to hearing some bluegrass bagpipes in a grade one medley sometime in the future — now that would be interesting!

FOR NOW Fred is enjoying his music and the feedback and reaction which *Outlands* has generated. The piping world thrives on debate and discussion and I have never met a piper yet who does not want to give an opinion, so I was keen to know what sort of response he has had to a CD which presents something so different to our community. “It has been really well received, and I have had messages from many top class players saying they loved the album. I’ve had much better feedback than any other CD I have ever done, and that’s the truth. With my other CDs, people I would meet would tell me they liked it, but *Outlands* has given me lots of unsolicited positive responses — constantly. It is very heartening. Sometimes as a professional musical you need to go through the mill a bit, and the CD was an idea that could have gone in the wrong direction, but it didn’t; it does work!

“Playing this music just lights me up and gives great energy and sparkle — I love it. My dad always found great pleasure and passion in piping, as I do: it is wonderful music.”

If you have not heard Fred play his music live yet, then don’t miss his next gigs in Scotland at the beginning of March, with concert dates still to be publicised for Europe and North America later this year. For those of you who have already been bowled over by the *Outlands* sound, Fred has hinted there are bigger things yet to come. ●

Quality is a point of pride

Les and Martin Cowell — David Naill & Co.

Les Cowell's interest in bagpipes started in the Boys' Brigade in London where he first learned to play. On leaving school in 1946 he thought he would like to be a bagpipe maker, and fortunately gained an apprenticeship with the famous London maker, Henry Starck, whose premises were only about a mile from where Les lived.

The Starck family had made bagpipes and other instruments in London since the 18th century, and Henry Starck's forefathers first came to England as the instrument makers to the Baroque composer George Frideric Handel.

Les spent almost 10 years learning his trade with Henry Starck, before moving on to work for a few other instrument makers, such as Rudall Carte and Boosey & Hawkes. He started David Naill & Co in Chesham, Buckinghamshire, in 1976, eventually settling in Minehead in the West Country from where they run their business today.

The company name, David Naill, came from the middle names of Les's son, Martin Naill Cowell, and David Apps who was the son of Les's business partner at the time. It wasn't long before the business was established, its reputation quickly growing along with demand, and Les's son Martin joined the company in 1980.

The day-to-day business, reputation and commitment to quality established by Les is now looked after by Martin, though Les is still very much involved at all levels with the business and is a daily visitor to the workshop, casting a craftsman's eye over all the proceedings. I met with them both in Minehead while they used a tag-team routine to answer their very busy office phone and keep the interview rolling.

The skills that Les gained making bagpipes with Henry Starck, and also when working on a wide range of high-quality woodwind instruments throughout his career, became evident as the young David Naill & Co started to gain a reputation for craftsmanship and excellence of finish which, as Les says, "did not need to be covered up with hideous black varnish.



A young Les Cowell learning his trade alongside Henry Starck

"From the very start we wanted to set new standards in workmanship, everything from wood management to our silverwork and engraving," said Les.

Martin continued, "We have a number of hand engravers, and some of them started working with us in the 70s. These guys were quite young when they started working with us. But they are now fast reaching retirement, which is a problem because their skills are not easily replaced.

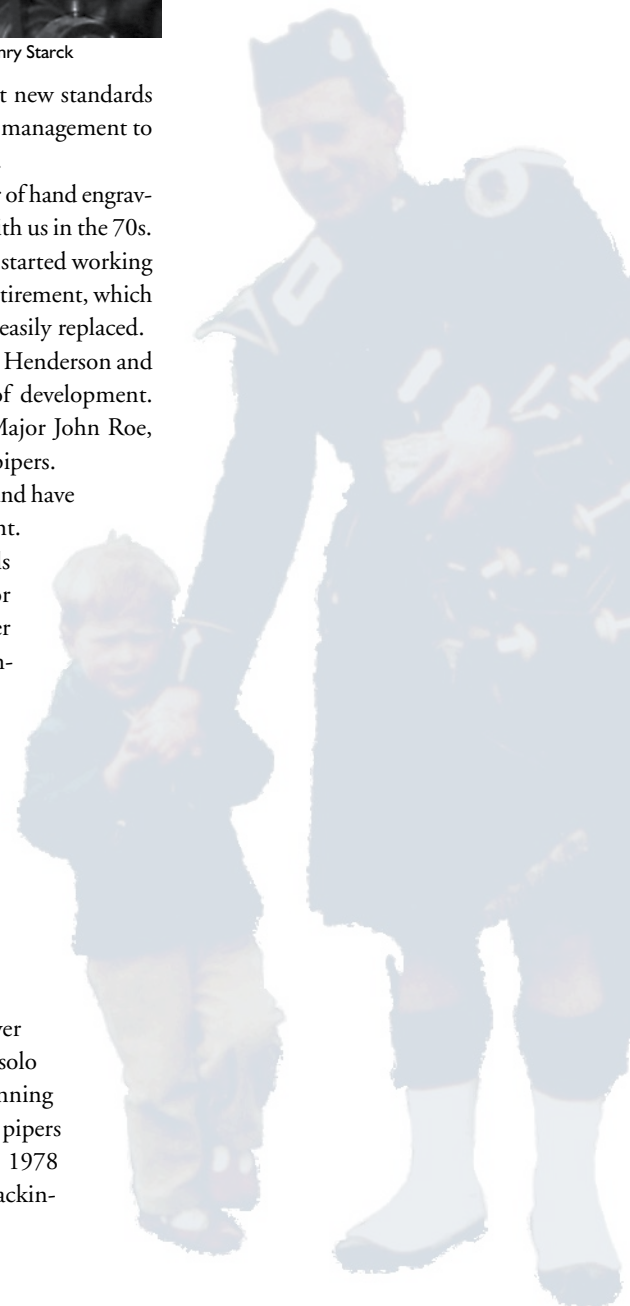
"We worked very closely with Murray Henderson and Jimmy Mackintosh in the early days of development. We also had a lot of input from Pipe Major John Roe, Tony Macdonald and numerous other pipers.

"We have always welcomed feedback and have been receptive to what other people want. If we send chanters out and someone calls up to say the E is a wee bit flat or sharp or whatever, it doesn't mean that our chanter is no good; it is all about getting a consensus, and if I got 10 people calling up to say there was a problem then I would have to take that on board.

"Our location has played a big part in driving us to set our standards high and keeping them there. As an English bagpipe maker you have got to be good, or else you are not going to sell a thing."

PART of David Naill & Co's success over the years has to be attributed to their solo chanter which has played its part in winning every major solo piping title for many pipers since the early 70s. It was way back in 1978 when Murray Henderson and Jimmy Mackin-

'There is a lot more competition in the solo chanter market and in bagpipe making in general than ever there was'



tosh approached David Naill & Co to say what they were looking for in a solo chanter, and then helped in the development of it. Since then, in 2004, Jack and Terry Lee of Simon Fraser University Pipe Band worked with David Naill & Co to make adjustments to the solo chanter. "At that time we added a threaded reed seat, the throat of the chanter was slightly altered and a few of the notes were changed. They were not huge changes, but they were made to reflect the change in pitch over the years," said Martin.

The most recent success for the chanter was at the Gold Medal in Inverness last year, when Glenn Brown, William Geddes and Fiona Manson placed first, second and third respectively, all playing Naill chanters.

"There is a lot more competition in the solo chanter market and in bagpipe making in general than ever there was," said Martin. "Modern machinery, and I'm talking about CNC turning centres and milling machines, made it a lot easier for people to make accurate chanters. That is the important thing which has happened in the last 10 years as more engineering knowledge has come into bagpipe making. If you look at a chanter it is simple engineering: to make a chanter the holes have to be a certain distance from certain points, and if you are making it by hand that can be easy to overlook. The holing down is the critical part and the advent of using CNC machines has made the market very much more competitive."

At the same time as the changes to the solo chanter were made by Jack and Terry Lee, they also worked with David Naill & Co to develop a band chanter for Simon Fraser University Pipe Band. However, SFU never made the change to David Naill chanters and the company have had a lot less success with developing a band chanter: "It is quite political, and a very hard area to crack," said Martin.

"The difficulty is getting a foot in the door, and we almost got it with SFU, but it wasn't to be. The argument is pretty much the same as with solo chanters; if someone has been playing a chanter for 20 years and winning on it, why would they want to change it? The new chanter would have to be exceptional, or at least equally as good. It is a difficult one, and a hard area to break into."

"After this disappointment we felt it was really time to take stock, and get back to the drawing board with our band chanter. We have, over the past year or so, worked closely with Roddy MacLeod to produce what we feel is now

a very good balanced and polished product. We have high hopes for this chanter and first comments have been very favourable."

WHEN David Naill & Co started out in 1976 they were using traditional hand crafting methods to make pipes, switching over in the last decade to embrace technology. So I thought they would be ideal candidates to answer some questions about bagpipe making that have been



Martin Cowell



going through my head ever since I took up the pipes. So I started with the wood itself: African Blackwood or Mpingo, to give the tree's African name.

"The Latin name is *Dalbergia Melanoxylon*," said Martin. "It is used for bagpipes and other high quality instruments as it is resistant to shrinkage and cracking, and has very good tonal qualities that people have appreciated for years."

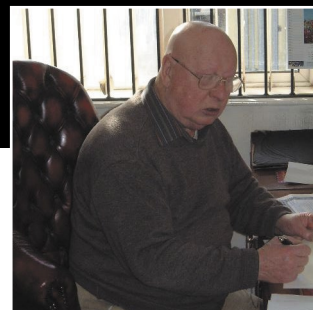
Years ago blackwood was delivered in logs and split and cut by the instrument maker, but as Les explained, "You can't buy blackwood logs any more. The wood all comes to us cut into bagpipe sections, either from Africa or Germany, though I think they have actually stopped cutting in Germany now as it gives employment to people in Africa if the wood is cut up there."

"When we take delivery of the billets of wood they are in the square and slightly over length," added Martin. "We then cut them off to the dead length, and bore each joint before storing them for up to five years. As the wood still contains a lot of moisture at this stage it is

prone to splitting as it dries, so we varnish the ends to seal the wood and prevent problems like this occurring."

Martin continued: "There are a small number of African blackwood dealers, and bagpipe makers all source their wood from the same places; whether they care to admit it or not. I could probably name half a dozen dealers, and we use a few of them."

I HAVE a few friends who have experience in guitar and stringed instrument making, and have often listened as they discussed the sound qualities of tone-woods and the techniques involved in choosing wood for high-price tag acoustic guitars. So I asked Les and Martin if there would be any similarities in choosing billets of blackwood to make a particular set of bagpipes.



Les Cowell

“Most of the choice would come down to aesthetics,” said Martin. “The way that we manufacture pipes is to turn 25 sets at a time; so we would have boards with 25 bass tops and 50 tenor tops. If I’m making a top of the range set of pipes they would get first pick from the boards to match the bass and tenor parts of the drones. All this business about making the instrument from the same tree just doesn’t work, because you don’t know where it comes from. People will tell you anything when they want you to spend money, but the fact is that the wood comes in pre-cut billets, so you can’t tell if it has come from one tree, or two trees hundreds of miles apart.

“Having worked with blackwood for so many years, I can go over a board of 25 bass tops and know instinctively what is a nice piece of wood, a certain something that only comes from experience of working blackwood.

“We only purchase musical instrument grade wood, and believe me if it doesn’t come up to scratch it goes back. There is still a lot of wastage, and that is one reason why musical instruments in general are expensive. Pipe chanters, for example, cost £250 — a lot of money, but you don’t see the ones we throw away when they don’t quite come up to standard.”

SO THERE doesn’t seem to be any tonal distinctions made when choosing wood for a less expensive set of pipes than for a high-price tag set. So in theory, you could pay a lot less and still get the quality of sound that a top of the range set would give you. So that more or less answered my next question, but I asked it anyway, and Martin had more to say on the matter.

“If you are asking me do you get a slightly better set of pipes if you are spending £5000, compared to someone spending £600, well of course you do, even if the differences are purely ornamental,” he explained.

“I’m just being honest, and I might get slated for that. However, the more expensive silver engraved set is not going to sound any better because we all know that it is the musician behind the pipes. I have been asked a few times, ‘can you make me a set of pipes like Alasdair Gillies plays?’ — ‘Yes, I can, but can you set them up like him and produce that sound?’ To my mind that only comes from years and years of dedication and hard work and not simply from making a purchase — any purchase.

“I could probably squeeze into Ronaldo’s



Piper Les Cowell pictured with son Martin in the mid 60s

football boots, maybe not his shirt, but certainly his boots. But is it going to improve my game, I’m not so sure...

“That’s not to say that it isn’t important to have a really well-made instrument and I think that we manufacture our pipes as well as any maker has ever done. I’ve seen lots of nice old sets of pipes, and I’ve seen a lot of rubbish. It doesn’t mean that just because a set of pipes is old that it is necessarily good,” said Martin.

“Roddy MacLeod plays an old set of Lawrie pipes. I’ve had a look at them, and they are a beautifully made instrument, they really are. However the tone that Roddy produces is again largely down to his own efforts and ability,” he added.

I was keen to get more of their thoughts on the very old sets of pipes played by some of the top players: is it simply down to percentage chance that a certain amount of very well made pipes with a quality sound will have survived, or has something happened over time to give the pipes special characteristics to produce such a sought after sound?

“There are lots of top players using modern sets of pipes. If you go on to YouTube and watch Gordon Walker, what is he playing on? A set of pipes that we made him in the early 90s. If players of that calibre could get a better sound from an old set of pipes, why aren’t they playing them?” asked Les.

‘I’ve seen lots of nice old sets of pipes, and I’ve seen a lot of rubbish. It doesn’t mean that just because a set of pipes is old that it is necessarily good’



A chanter made by Les when he worked with Rudall Carte in the 50s

“One of the most important aspects to instrument making is wood management: it is all about the seasoning of the blackwood. I feel there is simply not enough emphasis put on it, and people don’t really understand it,” said Martin. “It is very important to make sure that you manufacture an instrument from seasoned, stabilised wood — and by seasoning, I mean drying the wood properly.

“If you make instruments out of ‘green’ wood you get shrinkage and all the mounts fall off, or the wood warps. Cracking is a different problem, as dry wood can crack just as easily as ‘green’ wood on a new set of pipes. We spend a lot of time drying out the wood for a new set of pipes, and the first thing the customer does is blow moisture into them — combine that with central heating and air conditioning, it can be a nightmare.

“There are a lot of misunderstandings about wood. Moisture and humidity, or lack of it, are the biggest problems for bagpipes, and the bagpipe maker gets blamed for a lot which is outwith his control.

“In years gone by, bagpipe makers would generally just supply pipes within their locality so great changes in humidity would not be a problem. We make pipes in the UK which has a fairly damp climate, but send them all over the world, so need to ensure that when a customer receives a set of pipes, the mounts don’t become

loose because the wood has dried out further after leaving us.

“Though we keep our wood stocks for up to five years, the length of drying time can vary depending on how dry the wood is when it comes in to us. Some of the suppliers would persist in covering all of the wood in wax which sealed all the moisture in, but that wood could have been sitting in Africa drying out for six months if it had not been covered in wax. So if I am buying wood for 200 sets of pipes it is of interest to me to know if it is covered in wax or not.

“Another important thing is that the wood does not completely dry out till it has a bore through it and the air circulates around it. We have a meter which can test how much moisture is in the wood, but I can tell from experience how dry a piece of wood is simply by tapping it on the bed of a lathe.”

UNTIL 2004 David Naill & Co used only hand tools for making their pipes, whereas today

the bagpipe drones are now bored with a gun drill bit on a CNC lathe. The tool of choice previously for that job was called an auger. The introduction of modern technology in part of the process has made the pipe maker's job more enjoyable as it takes away a lot of the hard and dirty roughing work, but most importantly has brought a higher level of consistency and quality to the process.

“Boring drones by hand was time consuming,” said Martin. “I mean, I could get them straight, I could get them very straight, but it wasn't any better. It makes me smile when I look at an internet forum and you read comments from people saying things like, ‘well in the old days they bored for tone’. I sit reading this stuff thinking, ‘hang on a minute, a quarter-inch hole is a quarter-inch hole.’ I'm sure the wood doesn't know whether it has been worked on an automatic lathe or by a hand auger.

“The same can be said of CNC turning

centres. They are marvellous things capable of turning to very fine tolerances. I believe these advances have not only made bagpipes more affordable but, when used correctly with seasoned stable wood, they have improved the instrument.

“So the business of bagpipe making has become much more enjoyable, and the quality of pipes more consistent now that we have machines to help in all aspects of production. The traditional methods were very hard on your hands and your lungs. However, the finishing side, the way the instrument is balled and creased (combed and beaded) has not changed by us since we started in the 70s and there continues to be tasks that cannot be done on automatic machines.

“It is a point of pride: it is not just about making money,” concluded Martin. “It is important for us as a company to have an instrument that people recognise as being good and want to play.” ●

GREENVILLE'S SALUTE TO THE EARL OF WESSEX 6/8 MARCH COMPOSITION CONTEST

THE 2010 GREENVILLE SCOTTISH GAMES ARE HONORED TO BE GRACED BY THE PRESENCE OF H.R.H. PRINCE EDWARD, EARL OF WESSEX. FOR THIS SPECIAL OCCASION, R.G. HARDIE & CO LTD. AND THE NATIONAL PIPING CENTRE HAVE COLLABORATED WITH THE GREENVILLE GAMES TO HAVE A 6/8 MARCH COMPOSITION CONTEST.

RODDY MACLEOD MBE AND ALASTAIR DUNN WILL BE THE JUDGES. THE WINNING COMPOSITION WILL BE AWARDED A PETER HENDERSON BLACKWOOD PIPE CHANTER DONATED BY R.G. HARDIE & CO LTD. THE WINNING MARCH WILL BE PRESENTED TO PRINCE EDWARD DURING HIS VISIT TO THE GREENVILLE GAMES MAY 29TH, 2010.

ALL TUNES MUST BE SUBMITTED BY APRIL 23RD TO BE ELIGIBLE. THE TUNE MUST BE A 6/8 4-PARTED MARCH SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL PIPING CENTRE, ATTN: GREENVILLE'S SALUTE TUNE CONTEST, 30-34 MCPHATER STREET, GLASGOW, SCOTLAND G4 0HW. THE MANUSCRIPTS SHOULD NOT HAVE ANY OTHER INFORMATION MARKED ON IT. THE MANUSCRIPT SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED ON A SEPARATE PAGE BY A COVER LETTER FROM THE COMPOSER WITH AN EMAIL ADDRESS AND A STREET ADDRESS SO THE ENTRY CAN BE ACKNOWLEDGED. THE ADJUDICATORS WILL NOT HAVE SIGHT OF ANY OF THE COMPOSERS DETAILS UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE TUNE HAS BEEN JUDGED. THE WINNING ENTRY WILL BE ANNOUNCED ON MAY 15TH BY EMAIL OR PHONE.



FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO WWW.GREENVILLEGAMES.ORG



Celtic Connections 2010

It started out as a folk festival with big ambitions and has grown into a world music extravaganza embracing roots music from where ever it grows. It now features such a diverse array of talent that it is possible to create a mini-festival within the big picture to suit your own musical tastes. So with our Piping Today hat on, we explored the programme to see which piping talent had blown into town.

THERE'S no two ways about it. Over one hundred thousand tickets sold, grossing one million pounds is very impressive for a few folk blowing whistles and pipes, banging goatskins and scraping catgut.

It's true that the Celtic Connections of today is a different festival to the first one 17 years ago with artists such as Bobby McFerrin (yes, he of the *Don't Worry Be Happy* fame), Ry Cooder, and Beth Neilsen Chapman adding some mainstream-ish acts to the festival programme, and undoubtedly attracting new audiences. Yet at heart, the festival hasn't really changed as it still has at its core the best in Celtic music, and the bagpipe in all its various guises still makes the party rock. At this year's festival there were Highland pipes, Border pipes, gaitas, binious, and uilleann pipes. There were solo pipers, quartets, pipers with rock bands, ceilidh bands and even pipe bands. In fact this year it was harder to go to a gig and not hear pipers than the opposite. In short if you like the pipes then Glasgow in January is the place to be.

Surprisingly though one of the biggest names on the piping roster, Carlos Núñez, didn't play the gaita much during his show. In front of an impressively busy main auditorium at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, Carlos explored the links between Spain, Portugal and Brazil, and the night rocked to a Brazilian beat. The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland was on hand to kick-in when needed, and the Samba rhythms of the Scottish group Rhythm Wave added the obligatory drum beat to the whole ensemble. With Fernanda Cabral's splendid vocals the cast was complete and a terrific night of music ensued. Highlights included a pulsating version of Bolero on the gaita and a 'duelling banjos' between tambourine and bodhrán that had to be seen, and heard, to be believed. Throughout, Carlos was



Carlos Núñez



Naimh Ní Charra with Craig Muirhead of The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland



Stuart Liddell

the consummate musician and entertainer. Towards the end he had everyone on their feet (one way to guarantee a standing ovation I guess) and swaying to the Samba beat, although given the average age of the audience it wasn't so much dad dancing as granddad shuffling. A giant conga around the hall and onto the stage finished the night with some panache.

The following day saw the Piping Concert take place in the main auditorium. This year it was the rising stars of the pipe band scene Inveraray & District Pipe Band under pipe major Stuart Liddell and Pitlochry's finest the Vale of Atholl Pipe Band led by pipe major Adrian Cramb. Inveraray started the concert and played a delightful mix of material including the great Duncan Johnston's fabulous tune *Farewell to Nigg*, an MSR set, and some 6/8s including Donald MacLeod's *Donald MacLean of Lewis*. They ended the set with the classic *Clumsy Lover*. For a band that looked like most of the members should still be in short trousers and be tucked into bed at night, they have a terrific sound and musical style. Mentored by pipe major Stuart Liddell, who is the current Glenfiddich champion and one of the hottest solo players around, this band has risen through the pipe band ranks at lightning speed and are going to shake things up a little in grade one. That said, when the Vale took the stage there was a noticeable increase in the volume (roughly same number of pipers as Inveraray). The Vale also played a varied repertoire including a set of jigs, an MSR and a medley. The second half followed this pattern with both bands playing a variety of sets within their allotted half-hour. Just to emphasise the talent in the band, three of the Inveraray 'girls' did some Highland dancing as the band played the *Battle of the Somme*. Special mention also goes to 15 year-old Iain Wilson from the band who played a cracking solo set (no mean feat in front of a large GRCH audience). As a finale, both bands came on

Willie McCallum

Liam O'Connor



All photos: John Slavin @ designfolk.com



Uilleann piper John McSherry with Dónal O'Connor

stage and played a Gordon Duncan tribute of *Zeta the Bubbleman* and *Ian Green of Greentrax*. This was an excellent afternoon's piping with both bands in good form. For my money though, Inveraray edged the head-to-head as Stuart has them playing in a beautifully fluid style that begs to be listened to. The Vale on the other hand were a sharp grade one outfit who had pyrotechnic fingers but were missing a little of that feeling for the music they used to have.

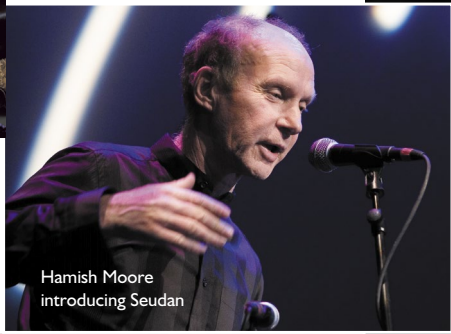
The influence of Gordon Duncan is still felt throughout this festival. Willie McCallum won the competition in his memory, held in The National Piping Centre and later that night a concert was held to celebrate his influence over the current generation of young musicians. Organised by the Gordon Duncan Trust this concert featured pipers Ross Ainslie and Jarlath Henderson and a rake of other extremely talented musicians: Adam Sutherland, Duncan Lyall, Innes Watson, Kevin O'Neill, Mairearad Green and John Somerville. Each player brought a piece of music composed by themselves to the party for the ensemble to play. The music produced was at turns



Fernanda Cabral

thoughtful, spirited and always melodic, and that, coupled with arrangements which were 'progressive' and almost 'big band', led to a terrific night's entertainment that underlines the spirit of Gordon Duncan's playing is very much alive.

A strong evocation of the classical music of the Great Highland Bagpipe was given by the group Seudan at the Tron Theatre. This group comprising pipers, Calum MacCrimmon (a very busy man over the festival), Angus MacKenzie, Fin Moore and Angus Nicolson who all play exact replicas of a 1785 set of bagpipes (known as the Black Set of Kintail). These pipes, made by Hamish Moore, are pitched much lower, at around concert A of 440hz, than the modern bagpipe. This gives them a wonderfully resonant sound that stirs the soul in a way that perhaps the modern pipe doesn't. Allan MacDonald is the fifth piping member of the group but he was unable to make the concert due to illness and Griogair Labhruidh stepped in at very short notice. Like Allan, Griogair is a singer as well as piper. His singing was to the fore on the songs associated with tunes such as *The Lament for William Lawrie of Ballachulish*, *The Battle of Inverlochry*, *The Lament for the Children*, and *The Piobaireachd of Donald Dhu*. Griogair's as-



Hamish Moore
introducing Seudan



Alexis Meunier



Ian Sinclair of Vale of Atholl Pipe Band



Ewan Duncan, left, and Alexander Levack, students from the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music at Plockton High School



Patsy Reid of Breabach



Griogair Labhruidh and Calum MacCrimmon

sured singing and the considered arrangements of the pipers (along with bouzouki player Will Lamb) brought out the poetry in the songs and indeed the music. Between piobaireachds we had quicksteps, jigs, marches and strathspeys and reels all played with spirit and élan and as Fin Moore step danced it was clear this group had succeeded in their aim of taking piping back to its roots where it lived alongside song and dance. This was a cracking night's entertainment and Seudan were aided and abetted by talented uilleann piper, Seán McKeon, and fiddler, Liam O'Connor, who were the support act and their stirring sets had the audience nicely warmed up for Seudan's appearance.

The Showcase Scotland event at the ABC had pipes again to the fore with Old Blind Dogs and Fred Morrison on along with The Shee, Ewan McLennan and Gaelic singer Alyth

McCormack. As well as the pipes, there needs to be a special mention for Ewan McLennan who is an excellent guitarist and a distinctive and fine singer and one to catch live if you can. The Old Blind Dogs have been on the go since Bonnie Prince Charlie marched on Derby and have been through a rake of personnel changes. However founder Jonny Hardie always ensures the current line up is as tight as a politician's wallet. With guests Nathan James on resonator guitar and Nigel Hitchcock on saxophone, the band rocked the ABC with Nigel's sax and Ali Hutton's pipes sparring across the sets.



Alyth McCormack



Carlos Núñez

It was obvious from the moment Fred stepped on the stage that many of the audience were there specifically to see him. Accompanied by bluegrass ace Tim O'Brien on mandolin, Matheu Watson on guitar and the ubiquitous



Ali Hutton with Old Blind Dogs

Piper Catriona Gibb from the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music at Plockton High School

Rhona Lightfoot

Dr Simon McKerrell

Ian Wilson, Raymond Kennedy and Craig Wilson

Iain Morrison

Lorne MacDougall

Ruairidh Macmillan

Glenn Ross of Vale of Atholl Pipe Band

Calum MacCrimmon

Finlay MacDonald

Martin O'Neill on bodhran, Fred was immediately into the *Train Journey North* set and with consummate ease the audience were in the palm of his hand. With Fred switching between Border pipes, uilleann pipes and whistle he and the gang enthralled the audience with tracks from his recent CD *Outlands*. Fred clearly has an affinity with bluegrass as does Tim with Celtic music and the two segued (not forgetting the important contribution of Martin and Mathew) into glorious sound that is so joyous I'm surprised it hasn't had a religion started around it. If a highlight can be picked from the sets then it is the *Kansas City Hornpipe* set. This is classic Fred, with steady easy rhythms

and great melodies, and with the supporting cast all pitching in it was a sheer delight. There are many good pipers, and a few great ones, but there is only one Fred Morrison. If you have a list of things to do before you die, then seeing him playing live needs to be on it.

The following night saw Finlay MacDonald and friends take over the Strathclyde suite. With friends such as fiddler Chris Stout, piper Simon McKerrell, percussionist Mark McKerrell and singer Maeve Mackinnon, who sang in Hungarian, it promised to be a good evening's entertainment. Shifting personnel to suit the sets and with Finlay switching between pipes and whistles the ensemble played a mix of music that was bursting with energy and spirit and the audience loved it. Then Finlay introduced Breton legends Jackie (fiddle) and Patrick Mollard (pipes) and they proceeded to play a set of

traditional Breton tunes — but for a bit too long, so when the cast reassembled it took a couple of sets before the audience were back in the groove. A rousing finale of Mark McKerrell's *A Time To Dance* followed by a rocking set of reels as an encore, closed the gig in style.

So all in all, some brilliant entertainment for fans of piping, in all its guises, across the 18 days of Celtic Connections. Yet bear in mind what has been reviewed above is only a fraction of the piping on show and didn't include Wolfstone, Breabach (Calum MacCrimmon again), Iain Morrison (both senior and junior), Skipinnish, John McSherry, The Chieftains, The Peatbog Faeries, Lorne MacDougall and Kyle Warren to name a few. If you want to get a heartbeat of where piping is in the twenty first century then Celtic Connections is the place to be. ●

Opening up the resource

The National Piping Centre's Highland Library

Since the day The National Piping Centre opened its doors it has collected reference material related to piping, and now the Centre's Highland Library has grown to include an extensive range of manuscripts, records, photographs, recordings and rare books.

Librarian James Beaton is helping to bring the collection into the 21st century by expanding the library service available to students, staff and piping enthusiasts with the ultimate aim of using technology to bring the library's resources to the widest possible audience.

James is himself a keen piper, playing with Glasgow Highland Club and the Royal Scottish Pipers' Society. He grew up in Inveraray and learned under Ronnie MacCallum, Robert Stewart and Dr Leslie Craig. He played with Dunoon Grammar School Pipe Band as a teenager and joined the Royal Scottish Pipers' Society while doing his degree in Celtic Studies at Edinburgh University in the early 1980s.

After graduating in 1984, he later went on to do a post-graduate diploma in Librarianship at Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology in Aberdeen in 1988.

His career as a librarian took him to London where he worked at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine



Librarian James Beaton

but he returned to Scotland working in libraries in the health sector. Latterly he worked at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons for 14 years but his post ended as a result of restructuring.

However he got the chance to combine his skills as a librarian with his interest in piping when one of The National Piping Centre's trustees approached him to help develop the library.

James explained: "Sandy Semeonoff, formerly a librarian with the BBC here in Glasgow, has done a lot of work in terms of cataloguing resources so there's a good basis here on which to get started. I think the next stage is to make the library a bit more available."

Sandy, who was also a presenter and producer with BBC Radio Scotland and is now a presenter on Celtic Music Radio, got involved in the project after responding to a request for volunteers to help in the library.

Since September 2007 he has been working through cataloguing the collection. The material is varied, with some rare items dating back 180 years, but together they form a fascinating record of the bagpipes' culture, music, history and players.

James said: "There are a number of different sections to the collection. There are rare books and archival, older materials including a collection of photographs



The title page of John McLachlan's Piper's Assistant

donated by the grandson of G.S. McLennan, which cover the period from about 1860 up to the early to mid 1920s. It's a record of pipers through photographs taken at various games.

"There are a number of the older piping books of music including first and second editions of *The Piper's Assistant* by John McLachlan. We've also got various handwritten manuscripts and collections of music which belong to individual pipers. To the best of my knowledge we've not been able to identify those pipers yet but that's something we would certainly hope to do.

"There are some of the other early piping books there and we have also got a collection of journals and magazines related to piping. We've got a collection of books about the bagpipe and bagpipes in general and that includes classics like Seamus McNeill's works and Roderick

the centre who have some interest in piping or who want to further their knowledge of piping and its culture."

But there are some sought-after items that the library would like to add to the collection, and one title in particular stands out.

James said: "An original version of Joseph McDonald's *Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe*. We've have a 1927 edition, which is great, but if we could get an original, that would be absolutely tremendous.

"We have a first edition of Angus Mackay's book which goes back to the 1830s so that is one of the oldest single books in the collection. We have various 19th century books on *Piobaireachd* like Ross's *Highland Music* and the works of G.F. Ross who published two collections of *Piobaireachd* in the 1920s, which

'We have quite an extensive sound collection of CDs, 78s and other records of current and past pipers. The whole plan for the library is to make them available and use them to support the work of staff and students and researchers within the centre itself but hopefully to be able to spread that to people outwith the Centre'

Cannon's bibliography of bagpipe music. We also have many of the recent books about the bagpipe and its culture.

"We've also got a fairly extensive run of *Piobaireachd* Society proceedings, which again are very useful to have. They have an annual conference and publish the papers and the subsequent discussion. We have the series going back to the 1970s so it's quite an extensive resource.

"Obviously we have a fairly substantial collection of music books and that is something that is a very valuable resource for students and staff here and anyone else who is looking to make use of the library.

"We have quite an extensive sound collection of CDs, 78s and other records of current and past pipers. The whole plan for the library is to make them available and to use them to support the work of staff and students and researchers within the centre itself, but hopefully to be able to spread that to people outwith

again is a very valuable thing to have. Also we have John McLachlan's *Piper's Assistant*, the first edition of which dates back to the 1850s. It is interesting to see what the professional piper's repertoire of light music was at that point, how they were expressing the music notationally and indeed whether the names of tunes have changed as time goes past."

Obviously there are conservation issues with the older and rarer items in the collection. So for users it wouldn't just be a case of getting your ticket stamped and traipsing home with a first edition of a precious piping tome.

"They're fairly fragile," acknowledges James. "They're mainly 19th century so the procedure for accessing these books would be for the person using it to sit here and be very closely supervised.

"There are conservation problems with some of them in terms of bindings or paper needing de-acidified or cleaned. With the photographs we would want to get these into

acetate sleeves to ensure people weren't actually touching them."

Another issue with the old photographs is identifying the pipers pictured. James is hoping to make progress on this, perhaps with help from Hamish MacLennan, G.S. McLennan's grandson who made the donation to the collection, or someone else who is knowledgeable about piping history.

Currently the library deals with a lot of requests tracking down where a tune is published and where the music is available.

"One of the library's functions is directing people to the right place to be able to get that information," James added. "Fortunately Dr Robert L. Pekaar has published an encyclopedia of tunes, so we make great use of that. There are various websites as well."

In the long term, the library is also looking to be able to provide copies of tunes.

James said, "Providing advice for members of the piping community on where tunes are to be found, as well as copies of tunes, where this is possible, are elements of the service which we would very much like to develop. We are working with publishers and other appropriate bodies on this, and we see it as an important future area of activity for us."

Developing the library for the future is quite a task — not only in ensuring the record of piping history is as complete as possible, but also reflecting current developments. And obviously the collection continues to grow with the addition of newly-published music books, CDs, books on piping culture and so on.

Another area being considered is recording pipers talking about their experiences.

"That is one of the aspects of piping that is being considered by the director and the board," said James. "Some work has been done towards that end, most notably with the late Ronnie Lawrie from Oban. An interview was carried out with him not long before he died, talking about his experiences. It is certainly something we would see as being very valuable going forward to have those records of people's experiences as pipers.

"I think the other thing is we are always looking for recordings of people playing because that really is the basis of a lot of the collection so that students can compare styles and compare sounds as piping has changed and developed."

But perhaps the most important task facing James is how best to utilise technology to make

the collection more accessible and searchable.

The first step of cataloguing of all the items in the collection on computer is already under way.

James explained: "What Sandy has been doing is putting details about all the holdings on to Excel spreadsheets so the first step will be to make those available on the web so people know what we have got.

"All the basic details are there – author, title, publication date and where they live in the library. The next stage of that will be to look at entering into some sort of arrangement with a cataloguing cooperative. The one that we have been looking at is Worldcat. It's provided by a company called OCLC and they gather together records from libraries and put holding details on them. If you are looking for a given book you can trace the libraries that hold it.

"I think that would be the next stage and that would allow us to access material in here but also to let people outwith the centre know what our holdings are.

"The second issue is looking at the creation of a piping portal with links to relevant web-sites on it but also access to unique material. That is the way we could draw people into the library. It would include sounds files, possibly PDF files of relevant publications and access to books on CD and also to the museum. It enables you to have a digital representation of museum-type artefacts and information about them. My understanding is that some work has been done on that by the National Museums of Scotland."

Sandy added: "I endorse what James has said about the library; it has the potential to grow into an extremely valuable resource. With my background I'm particularly excited about the possibility of developing the oral history collection of piping lore and of exploiting the unique collection of sound recordings already held in the library. I'm enjoying this experience and have learned a lot about piping!"

James's role at The National Piping Centre is a million miles away from the stereotypical role of librarians, putting books in alphabetical order on shelves and shushing noisy students.

It's essentially the chance to shape how piping's past is remembered for the future and giving people the opportunity to make the most of the assets held by the centre.

James added: "My work at the moment involves setting strategic direction for the library in terms of its development, opening



Peter Reid (1800-1880), whose manuscript collection of piobaireachd has been an important source for the Piobaireachd Society's publications. This photograph is one in a collection donated by Mr Hamish McLennan, grandson of G.S. McLennan, and held in the Centre Library.

up the library to provide a better service than it's providing at the moment and working to get the physical surroundings of the library where people can come in and make use of the resource.

"It's also important to ensure proper control over resources so that you know where everything is at any given time. Initially it's probably more likely to be for reference rather than lending until we get towards a system where we are able to control lending properly."

On a day-to-day basis, James is busy creating

the outline for how work on the library and the collection is going to progress and how it will be done.

"The basic focus is about getting a plan to move forward and starting to open up service levels in terms of access."

And he laughed: "Removing The National Youth Pipe Band's drums from the library would be a good start.

"It's about raising awareness among students and third parties that we are here, we're open for business and come and use us." ●

Adopt-A-Book Programme

The Library is planning to develop an Adopt-A-Book programme to help with the conservation and proper storage of some of its older and historically important holdings.

Items which will be included are manuscript collections of tunes which belonged to individual pipers, photographs, such as those donated by Mr Hamish McLennan, and older works, including the 1838 edition of Angus MacKay's *Ancient Piobaireachd* or *Highland Pipe Music*, the 5th edition of Donald MacDonald's "Collection of Quicksteps,

Strathspeys, Reels and Jigs for the Highland Bagpipe, as well as a large number of 19th and early 20th century collections of tunes.

Those who wish to help us with this important work will have the opportunity to make a donation of as little or as much as they wish towards conservation of a particular item, and further information will be available on the Centre website shortly.

If you have any queries about the library, tune searches or if you are looking for a book, please email our librarian on jbeaton@pipingcentre.co.uk

PIPER Connor Sinclair

Q. Where are you from and how old are you?

I'm from Crieff in Perthshire and I'm 13.

Q. How did you get into piping and when?

My papa played with a local pipe band and I just loved the sound of pipes and wanted to play. My dad got me my first chanter when I was five-and-a-half and pipes not long after that.

Q. How many hours a week do you spend on piping and how much practice is on your own, with a band or on the pipes/chanter?

I try to do an hour a day but if I have a big competition I try to do a bit more than that.

Q. What are your piping strong points and what do you most need to improve on?

My strong points just now is my light music and I think I need to work on my piobaireachd — but its swings and roundabouts.

Q. What do you want to achieve in piping?

To win the Glenfiddich Championship more times than Willie McCallum.

Q. What is your favourite tune and why?

I have lots of tunes I love, but I quite like Piper's Bonnet just because it's the strathspey I'm playing just now.

Q. Have you written any tunes?

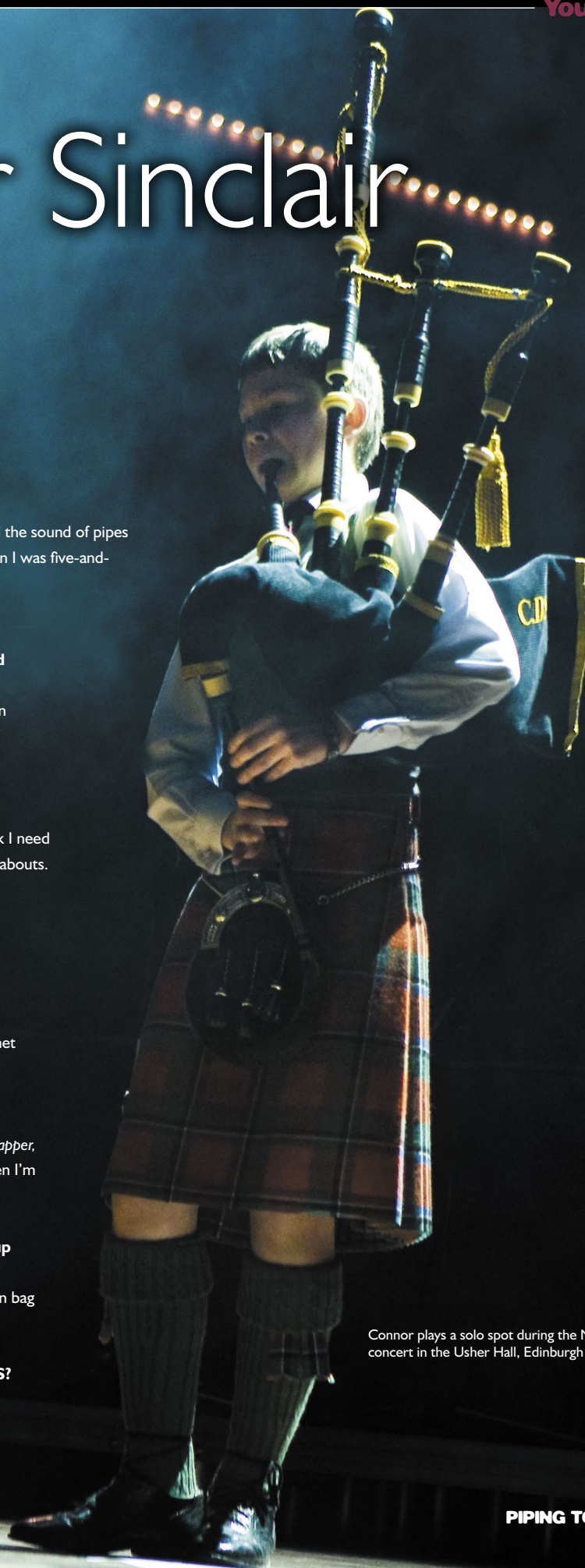
I've written a few. They are called *Notes From Ma' Napper*, *Finlay's Hair* and *PM Margaret Dunn*, and I play them when I'm tuning up at a solo competition.

Q. What make of pipes do you play, and are they set up with sheepskin and cane or synthetic?

I play an old set of Donald MacPhee's with a sheepskin bag and ezeedrone drone reeds.

Q. What is your favourite part of being in the NYPBoS?

Playing with the best pipers and drummers from around the country. ✂ *cont. on p.28*



Connor plays a solo spot during the NYPBoS concert in the Usher Hall, Edinburgh

Photo: John Slavin @ designfolk.com

All photos taken at the Usher Hall concert in November 2009, except where noted.

by ALISDAIR McLAREN
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL YOUTH PIPE BAND OF SCOTLAND

Scottish Arts Council
LOTTERY FUNDED



Youngstars



All photos: John Slavin @ designfolk.com except where noted



Coming of age on

THE NATIONAL Youth Pipe Band of Scotland wrapped up 2009 in fantastic style by performing their major concert titled *The Dragon's Lair* at one of Scotland's premier concert venues, Usher Hall in Edinburgh. Throughout the year the senior band had been working hard to produce a new concert that would showcase the talents within the band and also once again prove that they are at the forefront of the pipe band concert format.

It was a fantastic evening for everyone involved as the concert was performed to a very high standard,

entertaining more than 700 very enthusiastic and vocal members of the audience with over an hour-and-a-half's worth of new innovative music. A special mention must also go to the development band for putting on an excellent performance to open the show. It once again showed the great talent that we currently have within the project and that they are not too far behind the level of the senior band.

I would like to extend once again a special thank you to all the members and families of The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland for their dedication and enthusiasm. Without the tremendous efforts you



The NYPBoS pictured with Carlos Núñez at Celtic Connections 2010



Photo by Julie Broadfoot



All photos: John Slavin @ designfolk.com except where noted

the concert stage

guys put in, the success of events like these would not be possible.

2010 has also started with a blast as the band featured in two shows for the Celtic Connections festival. On Thursday, January 14 the band performed a composition by Fraser Fifeild at the Opening Concert held in the auditorium of the Royal Glasgow Concert Hall. It was a very challenging piece of music for each member as the band had never performed anything like this before, but from the crowd reaction on the night it seemed to go down really well. On Friday, January 15 the band was once again invited to

perform alongside Carlos Núñez who is one of the top performers of Galician music and exponent of the Gaita, or Galician bagpipes. It was a magical evening for the members who took part as Carlos put on a fantastic show that had the whole auditorium grooving to his catchy rhythms.

February sees the band take part in a few workshops which are designed to help improve the members' skills. There will be piping workshops from both Hervé Le Floc'h and Richard Parkes and a drumming workshop from American DCI drummer Jeff Queen which should see some fantastic days of learning. ●



Q. What are the other band members likely to say about you, or what are you most known for in the band?

Probably for wearing a green balmoral or being very annoying.

Q. What is the secret of your success?

Practice and very good teachers.

Q. What would be your ideal uniform if you were allowed to choose it for your band?

Sinclair kilts, balmoral hats, long-sleeved shirts with cufflinks and tweed jackets.

Q. What would you do or say to encourage other youngsters to learn the pipes?

It's brilliant. I've got to meet some famous people and made some great friends and I would encourage any boys or girls to annoy their parents into getting them a chanter. It will change their lives.

Q. Do you have any superstitions or any pre-performance rituals?

I always wear a bracelet with all the saints on it and I always wear my balmoral.



Q. Who is your pipe idol?

Roddy MacLeod and Margaret Dunn, but I have lots as there's so many great players.

Q. What are your interests outside of piping?

Playing football, playing computer, eating pizza and annoying my dad.

Q. What do you want to do for a career?

I want to be a piping teacher.

Q. What other music do you like? What's on your MP3 player?

Johnny Cash, Newton Faulkner and of course piping CDs — Chris Armstrong and Gordon Duncan.

Q. Who are your heroes?

Henrik Larsson and my big brother Alister.

Q. Are you sporty, and do you follow any teams?

Yes I am sporty and I support the one and only Glasgow Celtic

Q. Do you prefer sweet or savoury?

Both. I think chocolate on a pizza sounds nice.

Ross Reedmakers

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Tel: 562-981-6082 Email: andy@rossreeds.com

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Growing their own in West Lothian

Gordon Bruce — West Lothian Schools

There are lots of council regions in Scotland which now employ full-time piping instructors to teach within the school curriculum. As these piping instructors become accepted as part of the educational infrastructure, they will reach more potential players by giving an opportunity to youngsters who would not even have considered learning an instrument, never mind knocking on the door of a pipe band and asking to be taught.

The main roles for these piping instructors are to encourage new talent within the schools and provide teaching and support for pupils taking exams in music at Standard Grade, Higher and Advanced Higher levels. These exams provide the perfect platform for students who want to take their study of the instrument to a higher level, such as the BA (Scottish Music – Piping) degree. This is a full-time, four-year honours course offered by The National Piping Centre and validated by the The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

Gordon Bruce was the first piper to graduate from the course with first-class honours in 2007, as covered in issue 30 of *Piping Today*. Now he is helping to bring on the next generation of piping talent by taking his skills into classrooms in West Lothian.

When Gordon graduated he had a variety of part-time jobs teaching pipes, including The National Piping Centre evening classes and summer schools, and supply teaching in Edinburgh covering for Stuart Cassells as he enjoyed the success of the Red Hot Chilli Pipers' national TV exposure.

Eventually Gordon got his foot in the door with his current employer, when West Lothian Council were looking for an instructor for their schools' pipe band and he started the job in 2008. His remit at that time was to take the band practice once a week for two hours after school on a Friday.

However, a post of piping instructor soon became available in North Ayrshire offering three days employment per week, and Gordon also secured this position. This allowed him to keep on the West Lothian position and fit in his 11 private students in his own time, but before long the North Ayrshire job grew to four-and-a-half days.

"I built up to about 90 pupils in North Ayrshire, ranging from beginners to students preparing for their



Gordon Bruce

Photo: John Slavin @ designfolk.com

Advanced Highers,” said Gordon. “I covered all the secondary and a couple of primary schools, and had hopes that the North Ayrshire schools’ band would have competed in 2010. I was just waiting on the paperwork from North Ayrshire to confirm the job as a full time post, but I believe the funding fell through, and they could only continue to offer the temporary post. Thankfully, right at the same time, I was offered the full time post as Bagpipe Instructor and pipe major of West Lothian Schools Pipe Band and I started the job in January 2009.”

Gordon’s daily routine involves going into the secondary schools in the morning to give bagpipe support to pupils preparing to sit exams and in the afternoons he goes around five primary schools teaching beginners. He also takes the West Lothian Schools Pipe Band practice every Friday for two hours, alongside Fraser Bruce, who plays with Torphichen and Bathgate and The National Youth Pipe Band, and who teaches the drum corps.

“At the moment the West Lothian Schools Pipe Band consists of secondary school kids who are also members of other pipe bands, and they are amongst some of the best young players in the region. West Lothian is a strong area for junior pipe bands with the likes of Boghall and Bathgate, and Seafield and District pipe bands and they all teach their own kids, so I just provide bagpipe support to make sure they are getting their full educational needs met for sitting the exams.

“The current West Lothian Schools Pipe Band does take engagements so we keep in contact with the other local bands to try to avoid a clash. The pupils in the band know that if this happens, their first priority is to their own band and not the schools, and as a result we have had to turn down a few engagements.”

It is in the very nature of a school pipe band that there is an annual turnover of players as the oldest players leave school and are replaced by the younger players ready to join the band. It was with this in mind that West Lothian and Gordon decided he had to go into the local primary schools to teach his own future players and ensure a steady flow of talent coming up to join the ranks.

“When I started the job last year I went into five primary schools to do workshops with primary fives with the view to generate as much interest as possible.

“Of course, when you do a workshop for kids who are eight or nine-years-old everyone

sticks their hand up when you ask them who would like to learn the pipes. We were hoping to meet a target of 45 pupils from five schools but we were way over subscribed, and even now, a year later, I still have over 50 kids on the chanter.

“I started by giving very basic music theory for a few weeks before I got the chanters and gave them small music theory tests to help find the most suitable pupils. However, I didn’t think it would be fair just to accept the pupils who showed an aptitude for theory, and I wanted to give them all a chance on the chanter. So as I only had 45 chanters, with a few extras drafted in from various places, I set up a weekly rotation scheme with the chanters being sterilised before they were passed on. Eventually some kids decided for themselves that the chanter wasn’t for them, or I would get letters from parents returning the chanter, so I slowly managed to cut the numbers down to just over 50.

“With the new term just started I have taken on my second batch of primary five kids for selection, and I will continue to teach last year’s

GORDON provides bagpipe support for pupils in all but two secondary schools in West Lothian, working in towns such as Whitburn, Bathgate, Livingston, Linlithgow, Broxburn, Blackburn and West Calder. As he said already this is a very strong area for pipe bands and he does not want to intrude on any teaching that is going on within the bands. The bagpipe support he provides to pupils preparing for music exams is not compulsory, and is only given where it is wanted, but he is not aware of any pipers who are preparing for music exams without his support.

There are six different exams that a pupil could be preparing for: Access Three, Intermediate One, Standard Grade or Intermediate Two, Higher and Advanced Higher. The requirements for Standard Grade are to play a march, strathspey and reel, and a jig, though the MSR does not really need to be played right through meaning the tunes can be played separately. However, sampling has been introduced for the Higher Still examinations Intermediate One, Intermediate Two, Higher and Advanced Higher where the examiner will

‘West Lothian is a strong area for junior pipe bands with the likes of Boghall and Bathgate, and Seafield and District pipe bands and they all teach their own kids, so I just provide bagpipe support to make sure they are getting their full educational needs met for sitting the exams’

youngsters in the groups I have formed, with the new primary fives joining these groups as they progress. It took a bit of juggling to get the better players spread throughout the groups, so that all the groups were about the same level and they are progressing well together.

“We have seven sets of pipes ordered for delivery at Easter and I have a few players almost ready to move on to them, and we have a few who have already bought their own pipes.

“As well as giving chanter tuition to the young people in the individual schools, I am setting up an after-school West Lothian schools chanter group for all who are almost ready to move on to the pipes. My plan is that these pupils will feed into a development band, who will eventually move on to the West Lothian Schools Pipe Band.”

ask to hear a sample of some of the tunes the pupil has prepared.

“The pupils will get their programme together, whether it is four, five or 15 minutes, and when sampling is involved they don’t need to play the full piece, but do need to show that they do have the technique to play it. They may be asked to play one piece the full way through; the examiner may ask for two parts of their march, all their strathspey, and the first two parts of their reel.

“Higher and Advanced Higher involves piobaireachd, and the exam involves the pupil playing for a 10 or 15-minute time slot, and the pupils who are very good at piobaireachd tend to play it the full way through. The examiner will know in advance what tunes a pupil has prepared; an MSR, hornpipe and jig, or the



Gordon with ScottishPower at the Worlds in 2009

ground of a piobaireachd, and he will tell the pupils what he wants to hear,” said Gordon.

“The pupils also need a second instrument for all the exams, and you will find that keyboards are the most popular as this can be taught in a classroom situation by the music teacher. If a pupil is receiving support for a specialist instrument such as the pipes, they are not allowed support for a second specialist instrument, and can only study another instrument which can be taught by the music staff in the school or one they get taught outwith school.”

WEST Lothian Council and the Scottish Arts Council have funded the uniform needs of the pipe band: kilts in the Spirit of West Lothian tartan, sporrans with West Lothian

logos, band chanters and reeds, including a set of B-flat chanters and two sets of Fred Morrison’s Reelpipes.

“We play along side the schools’ brass band and the wind ensemble from time to time so need to be in concert pitch,” said Gordon. These opportunities to play with other types of band are giving the youngsters a chance to experience different forms of music and learn a little more about their pipes, and is something that we can offer which they would not usually get with their own pipe bands. There is also a West Lothian Traditional music group within the schools and now that we have the Fred Morrison Reel Pipes it will allow some of our pipers to play along with fiddles and other traditional instruments.”

It was the chance to widen his pupils’ experience of piping in all its forms that led Gordon to organise a week-long piping summer school in West Lothian last July with funding from the Scottish Arts Council Youth Music Initiative.

“I wrote a proposal, gave it to my boss, and it was taken up whole-heartedly. We ran it during a week which did not clash with pipe band events, and it was open to young people in West Lothian who were interested. Kyle Warren and myself were the piping tutors and we got David Ross and David Henderson from D2 drumming to teach the drums. We got a range of kids from complete beginners right up to players who were in the schools’ band, and the week culminated in a piping concert which was open to the whole community to see what the youngsters had been learning during the week. The highlight of this concert, and an important part of the week for me, was to have top-class pipers give a recital for the children who attended the week, which was free of charge for those who attended the summer school. I was delighted to get Gordon Walker and Stuart Liddell, two of the best in the world, and the week was such a success that I would like to make it an annual event.”

GORDON has obviously been very busy over the last couple of years. There can’t be many 24-year-olds with such a large workload in a new job, and who would choose to take on a week of extra summer school tuition when they could be on holiday. Add to that the fact that he was a grade one piper with ScottishPower Pipe Band, a competing solo piper, he has his own private piping students and plays in a ceilidh band, *Broomielaw*, you can imagine why something had to give.

“Piping is my hobby, as well as my job, so it has really been my whole existence for the past couple of years, and I had to find something else outside of piping,” he explained. “I had my day job teaching Monday to Friday, and on a Monday night I would teach in Uddingston after work and then go the ScottishPower band practice. On a Tuesday I would go to Anne Johnston in Glasgow for my own solo piping practice, as I feel it is important that I am always improving myself. On a Wednesday after work I would drive to Strathaven to teach privately before going on to band practice again. On a Thursday night I would fit in all of my other private students, which involved me driving to their homes all over North Ayrshire and not

getting home until midnight. On a Friday the West Lothian schools have a half-day which allows me to take their band practice from two till four, meaning that I would drive home through Glasgow's rush hour, get home about six, and occasionally need to do a quick turnaround, get back in the car, and maybe drive to Perth or the Borders to do a gig with my ceilidh band — I drove 43,000 miles in my car last year!

"I had to try and fit in my own practice time where ever I could, and I would try to do an hour every day. During the summer in the lead-up to the games I would try and get an hour after school, and I couldn't really get any done at the weekends, as I would maybe have a gig with the ceilidh band on a Saturday, and on a Sunday I just had to rest before starting it all again.

"People do have the impression that teaching bagpipes in the school all day would allow me to fit in my own practice time, but that is not the case. I spend a lot of time teaching the



Gordon with his solo tutor Anne Johnston

very basic techniques: the scale; doublings; grace notes and simple tunes and it is for the benefit of the kids, not myself. When I found I was struggling to find the time for my own practice, I decided to be more aware of what I was doing when teaching the kids and make

sure that my technique is spot-on every time. It is hard though, as I could find myself teaching kids to get a clean low G all day, and the last thing I would want to do at night is pick up a set of pipes.

"So I had to change something and decided to leave ScottishPower and take a break from the competing pipe band scene for a while. I have been in pipe bands since I was seven – it feels like my whole life, and I'm only 24 and have got plenty time to go back to pipe bands in later life.

"I would like to put in a bit more practice time to my solo piping now, and compete as much as I did last year. In 2008 I got in the prize list for the Strathspey and Reel at the Northern Meeting, last year I picked up a few prizes in light music with a second in the Strathspey and Reel at Inveraray. I also played in the Silver Medal at Oban last year for the first time and it was a achievement I would like to repeat again this year." ●

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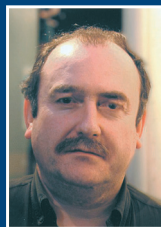
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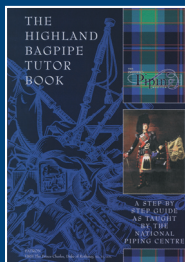
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Alastair Dunn with his Peter Henderson pipes and chanter which he played when winning the Gold Medal at the Argyllshire Gathering this year



Nine Notes and more... by Stuart Robertson



After a short break, we return with our look at composers and their thoughts on modern bagpipe composition. This time ScottishPower pipe major Chris Armstrong share his methods and views on composing.

Chris Armstrong

CHRIS is one of today's most influential composers of modern bagpipe music. With three solo recordings and two bagpipe music collections to his name, as well as many major solo and pipe band prizes, Chris has carved out a piping career that many could only dream of. A tutor at The National Piping Centre and sought-after recitalist, Chris has found time to answer our questions.

When did you start composing?

I wrote my first tune at the age of nine. I remember the day I wrote it. I went with my dad to work on a Saturday and was sitting bored out of my head in the office when I thought to myself... I'll try to write a tune. So I had to draw out the stave on a blank sheet of A4 and away I went. It was a two-parted 2/4 march. I don't remember how it went now but I do know it was terrible.

What inspired you to write?

Boredom in the very first place, but after that I decided to keep trying to see if I could get any better at it."

What are your influences?

Pretty much anything. It can range from some of the modern-day composers to any other types of mainstream music.

What's your opinion on modern composers, and who impresses you?

I like a lot of the material that's being written nowadays, I particularly like what a lot of the bands are doing arrangement wise with the older more traditional tunes. I have to say the material Fred Morrison and Finlay MacDonald produce impresses me a great deal.

How do you mould a tune from concept to completion?

I find that if I have to sit down and write a tune it doesn't work well for me. Most of the tunes I have written have come to me out of the blue when I've been doing something unrelated



Chris Armstrong at the Glenfiddich in 2008

to piping. I don't really apply any kind of rules or logic to my composing, I just let the tune go where it needs to go and try to do things that I like. When I was younger and had a lot more free time I used to write a lot more tunes, I guess because there was a lot more space in my head for ideas to develop and then jump out at me when I was least expecting it. I remember on more than one occasion waking up from a deep sleep in the middle of the night with an idea for a tune and having to get out of bed to write it down. Sometimes I'd wake up in the morning and check it out and there would be a decent tune and other times it would be wheelie bin material. There was another thing that I noticed and used to test myself to see if it worked. If I had an idea for a tune, say before I went to bed or was busy during the day and couldn't get to write it down, I'd wait until the morning or until I had time to do it and if I was still able

to recall the idea I used to figure it must be a decent enough tune.

How did you come to write the tune published in the magazine?

I was teaching at Glasgow Academy during the time that the album *X-treme* was being recorded. Up until this tune was written the album didn't have a title or a good track to finish on. One of the students didn't turn up for their lesson so I was messing about on the chanter playing a few exercises and phrases, just the usual kind of nonsense. I ended up playing the opening phrase of the tune and remember thinking 'that's not bad'. So from there the tune took shape and was finished by the time the next student came in half an hour later. I think it was recorded the following day at the studio and used as the finishing track and title for the album. ●

X-treme

Reel

Chris Armstrong

Musical score for 'X-treme' by Chris Armstrong, a reel in G major. The score consists of 12 staves of music. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The music is written in a single melodic line. The first staff starts with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. The second staff continues the melody. The third staff has a repeat sign. The fourth staff has a first ending bracket labeled '1'. The fifth staff has a second ending bracket labeled '2'. The sixth staff has a repeat sign. The seventh staff has a repeat sign. The eighth staff has a repeat sign. The ninth staff has a repeat sign. The tenth staff has a repeat sign. The eleventh staff has a repeat sign. The twelfth staff has a repeat sign. The music is characterized by a fast, rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, typical of a reel.



This musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef, featuring a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 2/4 time signature. The piece consists of 14 staves of music. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and rests. There are several first and second endings marked with '1' and '2' above the staff lines. The first ending appears at the beginning of the third staff and at the end of the eighth staff. The second ending appears at the end of the tenth staff and at the end of the thirteenth staff. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of the final staff.

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Bluffer's Guide to the Art of Pipe Band Snare Drumming

FOR PIPERS

IT'S probably safe to say that there are few drummers that have a strong knowledge of the intricacies of the Great Highland Bagpipe, piobaireachd and airtight seasoning and perhaps the same can be said for some pipers.

While most pipers will have some knowledge of the art of snare drumming, there may be a few terms that may need explaining to fully understand exactly what drummers are talking about. After all, radamacues, paradiddles and mummy daddies can be confusing things. Of course, there are exceptions in that there are pipers who can play the snare drum, but for those not quite in the know, drummer Libby O'Brien gives her bluffer's guide to the art of snare drumming.

Originally from New Zealand, but now living in Glasgow, Libby has played with The Pipeband Club – Australia and Auckland & District Pipe Band and is now a snare drummer with the Robert Wiseman Dairies Vale of Atholl Pipe Band. Here she shares a few terms to help you to impress your friends with your knowledge of all things drumming.

The Drag

While some pipers may mistake a drag for what we drummers refer to when pipers spend hours tuning their pipes at band practice, it is a simple rudiment that is regularly found in drumming music.

Whilst reasonably simple, this rudiment is often the bane of many drummers' lives, especially when attempting to play one on the left hand.

The drag is the art of playing a dead stick on one hand closely followed by a tap on the other and is often used to slow down a drumming movement so that the drum corps doesn't rush ahead of the beat. Which we never, ever do. Ever.



'Tell a drummer to open up the double in their Swiss Roughs and they'll no doubt be impressed, but could also be offended, so take care when offering advice. Especially to those who have meaty flans'

“Well that’s another one popped.”

This expression, which is usually prefaced by an expletive of sorts, is used often throughout the season, but is usually found muttered in abundance on contest days when the corps’ allocated drum tuner has gotten a little energetic with the tuning key.

Through the constant search for the perfect drum pitch (something akin to finding the Holy Grail) it is not uncommon for top skins to burst due to heads being ‘brought up’ too quickly before getting to the line when half of the drums have mysteriously all popped at the same time. (See below.)

“Well that’s four popped.”

As above, this expression is usually exclaimed on contest days by the drum sergeant after pulling the drums out of the bus upon arriving at the park to find half the drums have ‘popped’. This is usually down to band funds getting a bit low and the need to go with the cheaper bus company that puts the luggage compartment annoyingly close to engine parts. The drums then heat up during the journey from the band hall to the park and can’t handle the difference in temperature from the bus to the outside air temperature, subsequently bursting the top skin. Not surprisingly, this happens a lot in Scotland where the weather is usually nothing short of atrocious on contest days.

The Paradiddle: *The onomatopoeic movement*

As one of the building blocks of the pipe band snare drum score as well as being an integral part of many forms of drumming, the paradiddle wins the ‘best named’ rudiment award and is made up of four notes – right tap, then a left, followed by two right taps. This can be reversed (left, right, left, left) and inverted (right, left, left, right) and so on.

It can also be easily rushed and leading drummers can often be overheard telling corps drummers to open up their paradiddles so to make them even.

The paradiddle gets its name from the sound the rudiment makes when played, just like how mummy daddies got their name. (Of course there are many other words that could have been made up to explain the movement, but it’s quirky and memorable and seems to work.)

The Flam

As well as being one of the most popular domestic pet names of the Noughties behind

Sporran and Tachum, the flam is also a heavily used drumming movement in which both the left and right sticks hit the drum, but one hits the drum slightly before the other, producing a ‘pla’ sound.

The flam is usually the movement that has confident drummers lifting both sticks quite far off the drum and has even more confident drummers lifting their sticks close to the boundaries of outer space in order to get a ‘meaty’ flam. This can sometimes backfire when both sticks hit the drum at the same time, thwarting the movement and making a sound worse than 100 pipers’ crossing noises.

drummers often refer to a practice as having a ‘hit’ or a ‘hit out’. This term obviously comes from the literal action required to produce the beautiful music that snare drummers make. It can, however, often confuse your friends outside of the pipe band fraternity who are left wondering exactly what your extra-curricular activities/hobby really involves.

Drumsticks.

While some pipers and other non-drummers believe that drumsticks are simply two pieces of moulded wood, there is slightly more to the humble drumstick than meets the eye. Before



The “Not So Rough” Swiss — The Top Secret Drum Corps at Piping Live! 2009

Photo: John Savin @ designfolk.com

The Swiss Rough

Sometimes mistaken for one who resides on the street in Zurich or Basel, the Swiss Rough is probably the most difficult movements to core perfectly with a corps of drummers. A rather technical movement, the Swiss Rough or ‘Swissy’ as it is often affectionately referred to, has a lot of notes packed into the movement and, like the beer tent after a contest, can get messy very easily. Tell a drummer to open up the double in their Swiss Roughs and they’ll no doubt be impressed, but could also be offended, so take care when offering advice. Especially to those who have meaty flams. (See above.)

“That was a good hit.”

Never ever to be exclaimed in certain parts of Glasgow, in the presence of a member of the local police constabulary or in front of fans of Danny Boyle’s hit film ‘Trainspotting’,

choosing a set of sticks at the start of the season, (that you hope will get you successfully though five majors and countless band practices), drummers take the time to match their sticks so that they have two sticks of equal density and weight. This process requires said drummer to tap each stick on their head in order to hear the sound each stick makes with the aim to find two sticks with a similar pitch.

It’s extremely technical stuff.

HOPEFULLY this rough guide has helped you to learn at least one fact about drummers and the skills we employ to be the best percussionists possible. Use your newly-acquired knowledge to impress the musicians up the back of the band and try to slip a few terms into your next discussion about which part of the band really was pushing the tempo in the strathspeys. Good luck! ●

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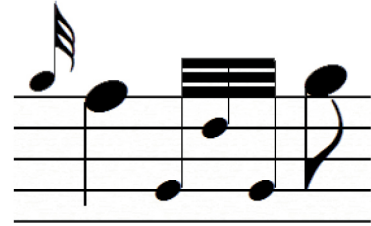
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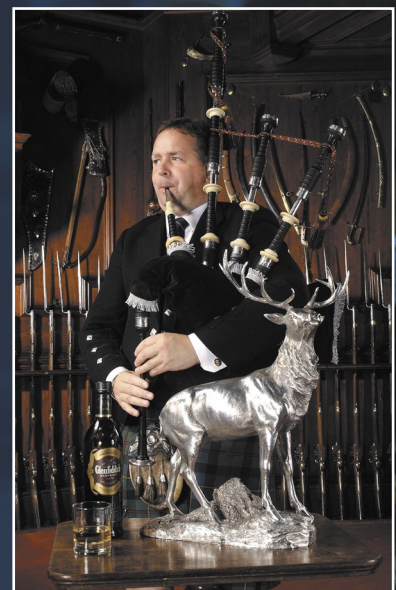


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Roddy MacLeod MBE is the Principal of the National Piping Centre in Glasgow, Scotland and is considered to be one of the most accomplished pipers of his generation and a highly regarded teacher, recitalist and adjudicator.

His website, at www.rodymacleodpiobaireachd.com, provides a growing archive of Piobaireachd music performed on the Highland Bagpipe by Roddy MacLeod and it is hoped that this archive will provide a source of enjoyment to piping enthusiasts as well as a valuable learning and teaching resource.

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Sound Technique

by Jori Chisholm

BagpipeLessons.com

Getting the most out of your practice

What is practice? How is practice different from simply playing your instrument? Practice is focused on making changes and producing results. Good practice leads to learning new skills, achieving mastery, or building consistency.

What are some of the specific things you might work on when you practise?

- Learning a new tune
- Memorising a tune
- Troubleshooting the tricky bits
- Getting a tune up to speed
- Making the tune reliable
- Building stamina
- Improving your tone
- Getting better and faster at tuning
- Preparing for performance or competition and the list goes on...

WITH SO many different things to practise, how do you choose what to practise on a given day? Well, it depends on what you are trying to achieve. What you practise today will determine where you will be in the months and years to come. The most effective practice sessions are focused on specific objectives, with long term and short term goals in mind.

Set your goals. Take some time to think about where you are today and where you want to go with your playing. Set aside 20-30 minutes of uninterrupted time to answer these questions:

What do you want to accomplish with your playing in the next five years? There is no right or wrong response, every person will have a different answer. Examples might include winning a specific competition, playing with a band, performing at a particular venue, or learning a certain set of tunes. Don't hold back. Dream big. Get inspired. Be as detailed and specific as possible.

Work backwards from your big goal. What do you need to accomplish in the next six to 12 months in order to be on track? Once again, be specific. Every big accomplishment can be broken down into more manageable goals.

Again, work backwards towards the present day. Based on your goals for the next several

months to a year, what do you need to get accomplished in the next month? Your one-month goals should be more specific, referring to specific skill areas (blowing, rhythm, execution) and specific tunes.

Based on this month's objectives, what you need to practise this week and today?

Design clear practice objectives. "At my next lesson, I should be able to play the first two parts of my competition 2/4 March on the pipes, three times in a row, with no crossing noises, missed doublings or gracenotes, chokes, or false fingerings; with the metronome set at 60 BPM."

This challenge very clearly directs your practice. It requires you to work on several different areas of your playing. Specific objectives help you practise more effectively than generalities like "work on this tune" or "practise more."

Get a teacher. In addition to regular goal-focused practising, get frequent lessons from the best teacher you can find. A great teacher will be more than an expert player. A great teacher keeps you inspired, challenged, and focused on reaching your goals. Your teacher should be able to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses and help you create specific and clearly defined practice objectives.

When and how much to practise. What are you trying to accomplish? The more time you can practice the better, but goal-focused practising is best. Practise as often as you can. Your practice is a time to focus on your goals, not simply a daily chore you complete while watching the clock.

Practise frequently. Multiple short sessions are always better than one marathon session. Try to practise for at least 10 or 15 minutes per day, rather than saving up your time for a big session. Keep track of the days you practised, and try to reduce the number of days you skip entirely.

Take notes. Find a way to keep track of what needs practice and what you've accomplished. Try keeping a practice journal, and write down what you've worked on, what still needs to be fixed, and what solutions you discovered. Or, try to keep a simple list of all the tasks you need to practise. Cross them off when you achieve them.

Stay organised. Keep a list of all of your tunes. Keep your solo tunes, band tunes, and other music organised in a binder or folder. Your goal is to spend less of your time looking for your music and notes and more time actually getting things accomplished.

Create deadlines. Competitions and performances can be great ways of keeping you on schedule with your practice. You should know exactly how many days, band practices, or individual lessons you have until your next performance. An organised calendar with clear deadlines keeps you from falling behind and helps ensure you are fully prepared on the big day. If you don't compete or perform, consider setting an arbitrary deadline. Pick a day that you will perform a specific tune or complete a particular task. We humans are goal-seeking organisms. Set a goal with a specific deadline and make a step-by-step plan for success.

Record yourself. Make a recording of yourself playing and again two weeks later. Listen to the two recordings and compare. How did you do? Give yourself credit for what you've achieved. Make adjustments to your practice routine to overcome any persistent challenges. For more ideas, ask your teacher, discuss with friends, or consult players who you admire.

Play your pipes. Many pipers spend too much time on the practice chanter. Get your pipes out and work on your timing, tempo, execution, and phrasing on the pipes. Play your pipes long enough to get exhausted, then put them down and keep working on the practice chanter. Regular practice on your instrument is the only way to build up the strength, stamina, and coordination required to be able to play comfortably and well. Your goal is to be excellent on your pipes, not the practice chanter!

Break it down. Playing your instrument requires you to do many things well at the same time. To make improvements, it often helps to focus on just one thing at a time. Tunes can be long, complicated, and challenging. Simplify by playing the tune slower or by breaking it down into phrases, bars, or individual note combinations. Repeat these smaller sections until you have achieved the desired rhythm and execution, then gradually build up to longer sections. Keep good notes of all of the tricky

bits in your tunes and practise those sections first, then try the tune as a whole.

Focus. Focus on one or two tunes in a practice session, and really get into the details of those tunes. Don't just play several tunes once through from start to finish.

Use a metronome. Often a band or solo performance requires a tune to be played at a specific tempo. Use your metronome to establish a baseline tempo where you can play with control and consistency. Then gradually increase your tempo, one or two beats per minute per day until you reach your goal performance tempo. As you speed up, beware of tension in your hands. Your goal is to keep the same level of control and consistency at the new faster tempo.

Make a secret hit list. We all have specific skill areas that need more work than others. Make a list of your challenges and systematically practise to overcome them. Your list may include skills like blowing, tuning, or marching and may also include specific fingering

techniques like crossing noises, tachums, or crunluaths. Successful players know their weaknesses and tackle them head on. You will never improve at something by avoiding it.

Play your band tunes at home. The essence of good pipe band playing is unison of fingering and tone. However, it can be difficult to hear the details of your own playing in the pipe band circle. Play your band tunes at home to verify that you are on target with your rhythms, execution, and tone. Regardless of the level of your pipe band, you'll always be able to hear you own playing better when you are playing on your own.

Review and re-evaluate. If you are putting in the time and not getting the results you want, make changes to your practice routine. As you progress, your skills will improve and your goals will change, and you will need to adjust your practice strategies.

In summary, focus your practice sessions on specific goals and make a plan for your success. Get lessons from the best instruc-

tor you can find. Get honest feedback with clearly defined expectations. Keep yourself organised with good notes and a calendar to keep track of deadlines. Practise frequently, play your pipes regularly, and record yourself often to self-evaluate. Break your tunes down to identify and focus on the hardest parts. Focus your practice sessions on a short list of tunes or skill areas. Use your metronome to gradually build up speed while maintaining control. Make a list of your weaknesses and turn them into strengths. Play your band tunes at home. Continually review and adjust your practice methods to get the results you want.

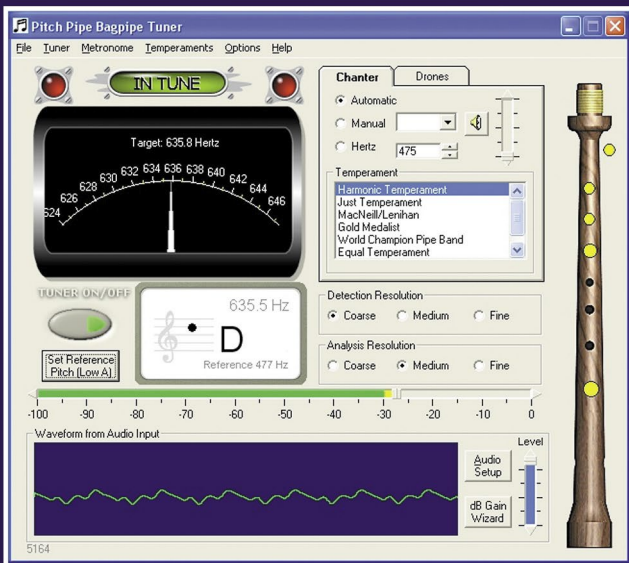
Practise smart, often, and hard, and anything is possible. ●

Jori Chisholm is a successful solo competitor, a member of the current World Champion Simon Fraser University Pipe Band, and one of the world's leading bagpipe instructors.

If you have specific questions about practising, or any other bagpipe-related topics, contact Jori through his website BagpipeLessons.com.

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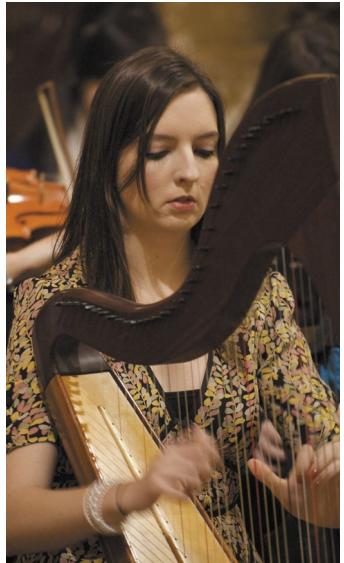
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Magical global gathering

The William Kennedy Piping Festival — Armagh, 2009

IT certainly was a sweet 16th for the William Kennedy Piping Festival in Armagh, Northern Ireland. The event – hosted by Armagh Pipers Club and now in its 16th year, continues to go from strength to strength and brought together pipers and musical genres from all over the world.

However it still maintains a real community feel, with scores of schoolchildren attending workshops and concerts, a special service in the cathedral and a host of venues welcoming pipers and visitors for performances and sessions.

There were many chances to brush up on

musical skills over the weekend at classes and workshops. These included five uilleann pipe groups as well as highland pipes with three-times All Ireland solo Champion Andy Carlisle, fiddle, flute and guitar master classes and also reed making with master pipe maker Eamonn Curran. There was also an exploration of Irish Gaelige/Scottish Gaidhlig links.

However the main attractions were some captivating shows which gave the audience the chance to sit back and watch some of the cream of world piping in action.

The spectacular Micheál Ó Súilleabháin con-

cert in the packed Market Place Theatre on the Saturday night brought a new musical experience to Armagh through the performance of his 35-minute composition Francesco Walks.

The new work was based on the music of 18th century Italian composer Francesco Geminiani, who spent a lot of time in Ireland.

The composition for piano/harpsichord, uilleann pipes, classical orchestra and traditional musicians playing fiddle and accordions, describes Francesco walking through Ireland meeting and playing with various local musicians until he comes to Armagh and meets



Playing the Basque Alboka (Traditional pipes)



Liz Knowles & Kieran O'Hare playing at the Duets Concert

All photos: Paul Ellsberg



Fraser Fifield at World Piping 2 Concert



Loic & Ronan Blejean in foreground and Kevin Crawford and Elliott Grasso in background

the musicians of the Armagh Pipers Club. It was a truly magical experience that deeply moved everyone lucky enough to attend.

The duets concert, introduced for the first time last year, again featured the uilleann pipes paired with various other instruments.

This time round it kicked off with American duo Kieran O'Hare on pipes and Liz Knowles playing fiddle. Kevin Crawford and Cillian Vallely, of traditional Irish band Lúnasa, brought together flute and pipes.

One of the themes of the festival was the uilleann pipes diaspora with pipers from the USA, France and Brittany and so it was fitting the second half of the concert opened with a Breton duo Loic and Ronan Blejean on pipes and accordion. The night rounded off with Tiarnan O'Duinnchinn playing uilleann pipes and Paul O'Shaughnessy on fiddle.

Another example of the global influence was

the World Piping Two Concert, featuring the Breton duo of Ronan Le Bars on uilleann pipes and Nicolas Quemener on guitar. Scots Fraser Fifield and Ali Hutton also gave a virtuoso performance and they were followed by the fantastic Basque group Alboka, named after the pipes made out of animal horn.

The Rotunda Theatre at St Patrick's Trián was the perfect venue for the Pipes and Songs concert, which celebrated the Gaelic song and language links between Ireland and Scotland.

Anna Murray from Lewis in the Outer Hebrides is a renowned Gáidhlig singer and piper and she was joined by Griogair Labhruidh from Argyll, who is also a piper and singer. The Irish Gaels were represented by Lorcan MacMathúna, Sile Denvir and Maitiu Ó Casaide.

The uilleann pipes concert rounded off the festival in fine style. This year had a difference in

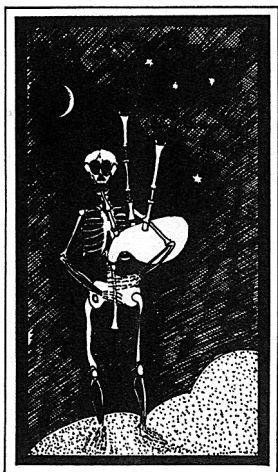
that no Irish pipers were featured. Loic Bléjean and Ronan Le Bars represented the Bretons, Marc Pollier flew the flag for France and the USA had three pipers – Jerry O'Sullivan, Eliot Grasso and Kieran O'Hare.

All elected to present very different programmes on a variety of pipes ranging from chanters tuned to concert pitch right down to B. They all showed both great chanter work and imaginative use of regulators often absent even in the playing of top pipers.

It was a fitting conclusion to a very successful and memorable festival.

Armagh Pipers Club is deeply indebted to all those volunteers and funding bodies who ensured the success of the festival. The global gathering has certainly put Armagh on the map and everyone is now preparing for the 17th festival which takes place on November 11 to 14, 2010. ●

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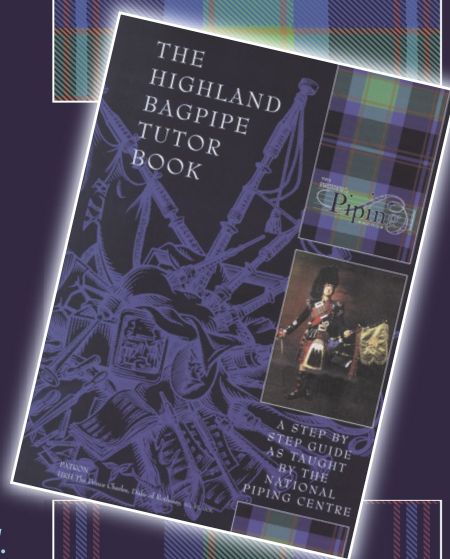
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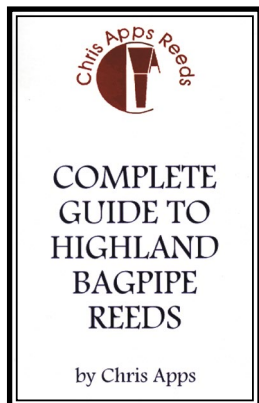
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Book

Complete Guide to Highland Bagpipe Reeds

Chris Apps Reeds



TO MY knowledge this product is the first of its kind ever made by a reedmaker. This

55-page book is an encyclopaedia of reed knowledge and deals with both molded and ridge cut chanter reeds, cane drone reeds and practice chanter reeds.

The book attempts to explain everything about pipe chanter reeds, from reed anatomy to selecting good cane, testing for pitch and vibration, positioning the reed in the chanter reed seat, hemping and mouth testing.

It goes on to explain what to look for in the shape of the reed mouth and how you can go about slightly adjusting the size of the mouth, particularly if you feel the reed is collapsing or getting too easy to blow.

Then it gets to the nitty-gritty, how to scrape/shave the reed in places to give different effects on blowing strength and tuning balance. How to reduce the effects of a crowing High A, how to achieve a Roddy MacLeod trademark "vibrato" style High A and how to minimise the risk of squealing and chirping are all covered here too.

Most of the subject matter of this book isn't groundbreaking for seasoned players, but that isn't the point. This will be an excellent learning tool for the novice and intermediate as well as a great quick reference guide for the more experienced player.

There isn't a huge amount in this publication factually that I would disagree with – Apps knows his stuff! My only quibble, however, would have been that I would have liked to see some more in-depth analysis on a few niche topics.

How saliva/water reacts with reeds, for example. Before setting up their instrument, you often see top players give their reed the "heavy breath" treatment to get some moisture on the reed. Also a little information on how the reeds react with playing pressure and blowing time, ie the low notes will sharpen faster than other notes thus proving that the chanter does not rise in pitch in a linear fashion across the full spectrum of notes. A little table explaining this could be quite a helpful addition to make this volume more comprehensive. An explanation of the difference between seamed and seamless staples and the materials used (brass/brass copper mix) could be another topic, along with the shape of the staple. Nevertheless, this is an excellent product for those taking first steps into tuning and maintaining bagpipes and comes thoroughly recommended. GREIG CANNING

CD Reviews

**SFU Pipe Band • Affirmation
In Concert at the Glasgow
Royal Concert Hall • SFU01 CD**

FROM THE moment the now obligatory solo piper, pipe major Terry Lee, plays the slow air section of Mark Saul's suite *The Beaches of Harris* and is joined by the rest of the pipe corps, it is clear this CD is going to be a bit special. As regular SFU compere Neil Dickie puts it, they are 'five-time and reigning World Champions' and they are out to entertain.

Into the suite and the reassuring thud of rope tension drums adds depth to the set as it reaches its crescendo. Most bands would have been happy to have this as a finale. SFU set themselves up with a hard act to follow. Undaunted they launch into their winning medley set from 2008 and 2009. This is a master class in how to construct a pipe band medley (and of course play it). With tunes such as the *Snuff Wife*, *The Atholl Highlanders* and *Mrs MacLeod of Raasay*, this should have sounded passé and clichéd yet with fresh arrangements and sparkling playing this becomes one of the most enjoyable medley sets in years. Not content with redefining the medley tunes the band then enlist Wolfstone's help to play a set of big reels in a round style including that old favourite *Mrs Macpherson of Inveran*. It takes chutzpah and no small amount of skill to carry this off and SFU have both by the barrel load.

Another Mark Saul suite, *Tir nan Og*, has some of the younger members of the band harnessing a tub-thumping electronic bass beat in a set that has echoes of that other Mark Saul classic suite, *The Hellbound Train*. As we get a 4/4 version of *Cha Till MacCruimen* it is now clear there are no rules and Terry Lee and his band will take us where ever they want to and we will

follow. The set finishes with the Gordon Duncan classic, *The High Drive*, with both pipe band and Wolfstone in full flight. Alan Bevan gets to do the necessary solo spot and sparkles as usual.

Noted solo piper, Jori Chisholm, (his recent CD *Bagpipe Revolution* is well worth a few pounds of anybody's money) kicks off *Pasucais de Coaña* on the Scottish small pipes before the rest of the band join in for one of R.S. MacDonald's tunes, *North American Pipe Band* and the fabulous Peter MacLeod tune *Inspector Campbell of Ness*. Reprising *Pasucais de Coaña* with the whole band rounds out a clever and musical set. The necessary MSR is *The Highland Wedding*, *Blair Drummond* and *John Morrison of Assynt House* — classic tunes played with style and class.

Piobaireachd playing in pipe band concerts is a well established tradition. Here the SFU tackle one of Pipe Major Donald MacLeod's best tunes, *The Field of Gold*. Pipe sergeant Jack Lee starts with the ground and is joined for the variations by the rest of the core. At the end the core sing the ground in Canntaireachd. The whole tune is beautifully done and a delight to listen to. A drum fanfare, a set including revisiting their *Do Mo Chara Maith: Blair Murphy* from the 1993 album of the same name, and a finale of the fabulous Adam Quinn tune *Blue Cloud* (that's the confidence the band has) close out the CD in spectacular fashion.

This is a band that knows how to do concerts and is clearly the number one concert pipe band in the world, as well as being the World Champions, two things that don't always go hand in hand. This concert was a kaleidoscope of musical colour with the band keeping the audience engaged with clever switches of pace and arrangements. Great tune selection, including reworking some old favourites and careful selection from the modern canon allied with a flawless technique make this arguably the best live pipe band CD ever. CHRIS MACKENZIE



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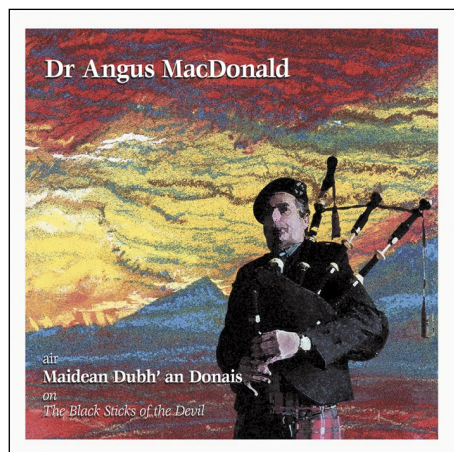
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CD Reviews

Dr Angus MacDonald

air Maidean Dubh' an Donais

MACMEANMNA SKYECD 50



IT MAY come as a shock to some, but *A' Sireachd Spòrs*, Dr Angus's last CD, was released 20 (yes 20) years ago. Despite the time difference this CD is very much a continuation of the theme Dr Angus explored in that 1990 release.

His focus on returning piping to its pre 'aristocratic patronage' that has 'sanitised and made more genteel' the music is further explored through this CD. This contention that the gentrification of piping has robbed it of much of its power and expression is of course also a theme explored by Dr Angus's brother Allan, especially with regard to piobaireachd and Gaelic song. Dr Angus spent a period of time in Cape Breton and soaked up the musical style, which he contends had not changed in essence from that brought over from Scotland by the early settlers. Gaelic mouth music, *puirt à beul*, is he argues another fairly unadulterated source of pre-gentrification style. So far, all so theoretical and to most, probably fairly academic. All music changes through time as people rearrange, reuse and reshape. What is important is whether in interpreting an earlier style you can produce music that is relevant, and worth listening to in today's world.

In Dr Angus's case the answer is a resounding yes. As he plays strathspeys, reels, marches and jigs there is rawness and a drive that conjures pictures of wanton ceilidhs in crowded Black Houses as the revellers dance the night away. Dr Angus has carefully selected a varied cross section of tunes, some old, such as *Luinneag Mhic Leòid* composed in the 17th century, and *Òran Mòr Mhic Leòid* composed by Roderick Morrison (The Blind Harper) along with some more recent tunes such as *Kantara to El Arish* and *Buntata's Sgadain* by his brother Allan, and some of his own compositions such as the title track *Maidean Dubh' an Donais* (The Black Sticks of The Devil) and *Chloe's Passion*. Yet irrespective of the century the tune was composed, Dr Angus expresses the sentiment directly and without fuss. This is music shorn of its affectations and pretences and presented simply and directly to your ears.

On a few of the tracks Dr Angus enlists some heavyweight accomplices such as Alasdair Fraser, Natalie Haas, Martin O'Neill and Allan Henderson, and as you would expect they enter into the spirit of things and contribute effectively without ever getting in the way of Dr Angus's piping. But to be clear, even with the stellar support cast this is still first and foremost a solo piping CD.

Some jig junkies may struggle to 'get into' the rhythms presented by Dr Angus but they should persevere as this is an album that reveals its secrets slowly over several listens and will continue to reveal them for many more. Despite the paucity of his CD output, when the history of piping over the turn of the century is written Dr Angus MacDonald will feature prominently in the list of those that influenced what path piping took into the 21st century.

CHRIS MACKENZIE

Iain MacInnes

Sealbh

MACMEANMNA SKYECD 51



A WELL-KNOWN figure throughout the piping world from his radio broadcasts to his time with *Ossian and the Tannahill Weavers*, Iain MacInnes has focused for over a decade on the music of Scottish bellows-blown pipes.

Sealbh is Iain's second solo CD, and on it he plays mainly smallpipes in D, with that high mellow sound reminiscent of Northumbrian instruments. The repertoire is chosen to match: *Go to Berwick Johnny*, *Up wi' Eli*, *Pawky Adam Glen*, a version of the Northumberland classic *All Night I Lay with Jockey*, and a brave attempt to fit *The Rusty Gully* onto the nine-note scale. Iain is joined by some great musicians from his adopted Edinburgh home, including Simon Thoumire on concertina and John Martin on fiddle. I was particularly pleased to see mandolinist Iain MacLeod's name here, a man I'd lost track of since his Heughmagandy days. Special mention should go to fiddler Mairi Campbell, who provides two excellent tunes for Iain's whistle: *The Treadmill*, a driving reel, and the lovely air *Karuna*.

Sealbh is full of fine and unusual tunes. *Spark's Rant* is another outstanding reel, from an 1854 publication, which Iain plays on the border pipes. *Major Nicker'son's Fancy* is a composition of Scots Guards Pipe Major Robert Crabb, a charming melodic jig which suits the plain Lowland style. A powerful version of Paddy O'Rafferty leads into *William Nicholson's Jig* and *Nighean na Cailleach* on the one highland piping track here. *The Low Country Dance* is a definite highlight, recorded by Smalltalk as I remember, and *The Countess of Loudon's Reel* is another fine jig. This recording finishes with a delightful medley: *The Sands of Loch Bea*, a gorgeous melody from my end of the Hebrides which puts me in mind of Ceolbeg's version, is followed by a pair of *puirt à beul* strathspeys before Iain's own catchy tune *Angus MacInnes of Glenside* pays tribute to his Lewis roots. The set finishes with William Ross's great reel *Struy Lodge*, a tasteful end to a tasty CD.

Plenty of variety, very neat piping, and some exceptional tunes arranged for interesting combinations of instruments, *Sealbh* is well worth a listen.

ALEX MONAGHAN

The World Pipe Band Championships 2009

Qualifying Heat, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2

MONARCH RECORDINGS

THIS YEAR'S World Pipe Band Championship CDs from Monarch Recordings come in the form of three different albums.

Volume one delivers the MSR and medley performances from the top seven bands which made it through to the grade one final. The CD contains 14 tracks in the order in which the bands were placed on the day, starting with the World Champions, Simon Fraser University Pipe Band and their MSR, *Highland Wedding*, *Blair Drummond* and *John Morrison of Assynt House* and finishing with ScottishPower's Medley which concludes with Chris Armstrong's arrangement of the classic reel *The Little Cascade*. The tune *Highland Wedding* is played three times in the space of six tracks, with the top three bands, SFU, Field Marshal Montgomery and St Laurence O'Toole all performing it as their march in the MSR, so if you don't already know the tune you will by the end of this CD!

Volume two follows the same structure as volume one but continues with the following seven bands in the grade one final, opening with the Vale of Atholl and finishing with the Australia Highlanders. The third CD of the qualifying heat has all the MSRs performed by the qualifying bands in the morning.

These CDs are well-produced every year and this year is no different. It gives everyone who was not able to be at the event, or who were at the event but were too busy in the beer tent, a chance to listen to every grade one band's performance on the day. It also gives those that were playing in these bands a chance to listen to the competition, along with a good record of their own performances. GORDON BRUCE

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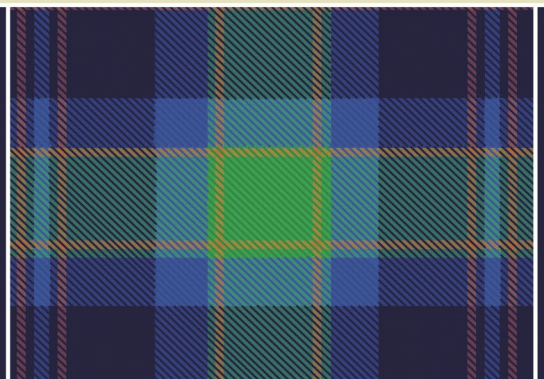
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