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PIPING TODAY

ROSS AINSLIE
& JARLATH
HENDERSON

The Big Music Society

Prepare to be converted

The real life of

MICHAEL GREY

Highland Harmonics

Scale and sensory dissonance

The Battle of Park — Part 2

The tragic pathos of The Park Pibroch (PS 21)

Grey's Notes

by Michael Grey

Bagpipe 999

Theory top-up

by Tim Cummings

Tunes in B-minor

Youngstars

NYPBoS newsletter No.72

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Piping
CENTRE

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June/July 2015



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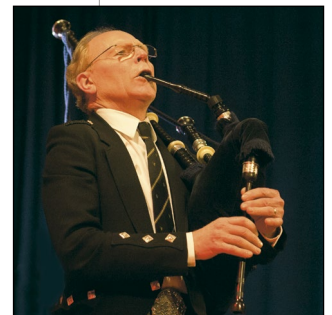
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Planning for the future



PIPING Live! is very much to the fore at the moment within The National Piping Centre. At this time of year we are pulling out the stops to ensure everything is in place for the production of the printed programme which will be distributed from the middle of July.

We are optimistic that this year will be a great success, building on the growing popularity which the festival has developed over the past 12 years. One major factor which will make a big difference is that we are finally back in George Square after a two-year absence due to renovation work followed by the Commonwealth Games. This will give us prominence in the heart of the city and we should be easily found by festival goers and tourists alike.

Without revealing the programme in this editorial, I can say that we have an exciting line up planned which will bring a number of new faces into the festival along with some regular favourites. Staple events such as the *Piping Live! Masters*, *Pipe Idol*, the Quartets, pipe bands in George Square continue and, of course, we have a very interesting and varied line-up of international and home talent to perform in our marquees in George Square and at The National Piping Centre. So, keep an eye out for the completed programme coming in mid-July and you can also find more detail at that time on the *Piping Live!* website, www.pipinglive.co.uk

On another topic, we have some very important news to share. After several years of work, The National Piping Centre has been granted approval by The Scottish Qualifications Authority to offer an HNC in Music with the first study instrument as the bagpipe.

I believe this is a seminal moment in the history of The National Piping Centre, as for the first time, the Centre is in a position to offer its own Higher education qualification.

We believe this qualification fills a gap for pipers who aren't quite ready for a degree programme. It gives a year to build on skills and knowledge while gaining a qualification which may provide entry into some universities' music courses at the second year level.

The HNC course at The National Piping Centre will consist of nine units of study. The course will run over two semesters and some of the units will be single semester courses while others, such as the first study instrument and theory, for example, will run over two semesters.

The units of study are as follows: Music 1st Study, Music Theory, Music History, Music Live Performance Skills, Professional Practice for Musicians, Organising a Community Project, Working in the Creative Industries, Creative Industries Infrastructure and Music Graded Unit.

The Music History course is also centred around the history of piping. The other units of study aim to provide students with knowledge and practical skills to enable them to work as performing musicians or work within other areas of the music and creative industries.

The approval process was a major hurdle but having overcome that, we are now focusing our attention on ensuring that we are prepared administratively. We still have work to do to ensure the information is made easily available to prospective students and so setting a firm launch date and starting date for the course is a bold step at this stage. Having said that, we try not to shirk from a challenge and so, suffice to say, it is our aim to have this course in place and ready to enrol students for the first semester in September of this year.

In the meantime, if you are interested in communicating with us regarding this new HNC in Music, please get in touch and we will be happy to update you with our progress and keep you advised of developments and the enrolment start date.

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

Piping Live! is the main attraction

THE world's biggest week of piping — *Piping Live! Glasgow International Piping Festival and The World Pipe Band Championships* — were officially launched on April 28.

The hugely popular event — which runs from August 10 to 16 — expects to welcome 50,000 music fans, families and tourists and 8000 performers to enjoy and take part in 200 events.

The launch of the festival's 12th year was held on a Glasgow City Sightseeing Tour bus in George Square, and the landmark will once again be at the heart of the piping action.

The festival returns to the square after a two-year absence and musicians will perform there daily.

Piping Live! boasts a diverse programme and is famed for its evening concerts, which not only showcase the best pipers and pipe bands from across the globe but also celebrate multi-instrument traditional musicians and bands.

Acts in the line-up this year include the Scott Wood Band, Finlay MacDonald and Chris Stout, Fred Morrison and Borja Baragano.

As well as the annual Pipe Idol competition and International Quartets competition there will also be special concerts on the Thursday and Friday night of the festival, featuring unique and never seen-before collaborations between musicians from *Piping Live!* and abroad.

The festival will also celebrate Scotland's *Year of Food and Drink* with a new Pipers Market in George



Square, showcasing the very best of fresh local Scottish produce.

Roddy MacLeod, Festival Director of *Piping Live!*, said: "It's year 12 and the festival continues to grow. We annually attract tens of thousands of people to the city and last year *Piping Live!* had an economic impact of almost £2 million, so you could say we're the summer's main attraction.

"The festival programme for 2015 is hugely diverse — whether you are looking for a family day out, are a seasoned piping or traditional music fan — *Piping Live!* has something for you."

The World Pipe Band Championships take place at Glasgow Green on August 14 and 15, with 220 bands expected to compete. Grade 1 World Champions

Field Marshal Montgomery Pipe Band from Belfast will have their sights set on claiming their fifth title in a row. The Grade 1 qualifiers take place on August 14 with the full competition will being held on August 15.

Ian Embelton, Chief Executive of the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association, said: "The World Pipe Band Championships have always been a terrific mix of passionate competition and family fun and this year looks to be better than ever.

"It's a unique event and a terrific platform to celebrate the vast pipe band talent from across the world."

Tickets for *Piping Live!* and The Worlds are on sale now. To book, call 0141 353 8000 or visit the website www.peoplemakeglasgow.com/piping.

Armagh pipers in tune for book launch

PLAYERS from Armagh Pipers Club will perform at the launch of a new tune book.

Various groups from the club will showcase compositions by acclaimed Irish musician Niall Vallely, from his book *Malfunction Junction — 101 Tunes in Áras na bPíobairí*, Armagh, on May 15.

Niall, son of Armagh Pipers Club founders Brian and Eithne, will also perform at the launch.

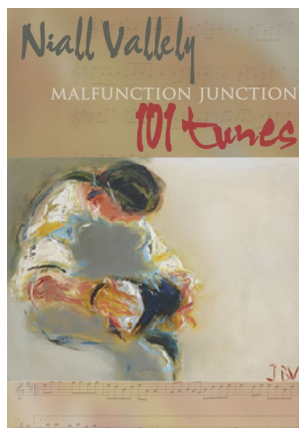
He is a renowned concertina player, who has performed solo, as well as with the well-known group Nomos and with piping

great Paddy Keenan, bluegrass mandolinist Tim O'Brien and singer Karan Casey.

Tunes featured in the new book have been performed by artists including Lunasa, Michael McGoldrick, Kan, Dàimh and the Poozies.

There are 116 pages including an introduction by Irish composer, musician and academic Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin.

He said: "The contents are tunes essentially in a traditional mould — but a mould that he is not slow to extend and reshape as he sees fit."



Buskers beware

NEW rules for buskers in London have been criticised for effectively banning pipers from performing in the streets.

The code of conduct classes the bagpipes as a "repetitive loud sound" and says "noisy" buskers cannot play near flats, offices, shops or hotels, putting many tourist spots popular with pipers out of bounds.

Pat Sands, who pipes in London's West End, is calling for a change of heart from mayor Boris Johnston.

He said: "Many pipers feel that we'll be refused once licensing comes in. Most pipers can physically only play for up to an hour before moving on anyway."

The mayor's spokeswoman said pipers were welcome. But she added: "The bagpipes can have more of a noise impact than other instruments and musicians should consider this when deciding where to play."

News in brief...

THE Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association's approved grading changes for the 2015 season when they met on April 11.

The grades given were as follows:

Northwest Junior Pipe Band (Canada) — Novice Juvenile;
Augharohan Pipe Band — request to downgrade from 3B to 4B granted;
Kamloops Pipe Band (Canada) — 4B;
St Mary's Derrytrasna — 4B;

Milngavie — new band granted Novice Juvenile;
1st Scots — new band granted 4B;
University of Bedfordshire Pipe Band — request to downgrade from Grade 2 to 3A granted;
St Columcille United Gaelic (USA) — new band granted 4A;
West Lothian Schools Pipe Band — new band granted Novice Juvenile;
Finvoy Pipe Band — upgraded to Grade 3B.

The changes were subject to approval from the RSPBA Board of Directors.

● **TOM Peterkin built on his success in the**

Archie Kenneth Quach competition by winning for a third time.

The 23rd annual contest for amateur piobaireachd players was held in the Royal Scottish Pipers' Society rooms in Edinburgh on March 7.

Winner Tom impressed judges Colin MacLellan and Jenny Hazzard with his performance *Lament for Captain MacDougall*.

● **THE Piobaireachd Society's set tunes for next year's competitions have been confirmed.**

The full list has been published on the Society's website, www.piobaireachd.co.uk.



by Stuart Curnow

A SHAR MUSICAL B



ross ainslie & jarl

ED BRAIN

Jarlath henderson



ROSS Ainslie and Jarlath Henderson spend a ridiculous amount of their life playing music together. A friendship built on a simple yet uncommon understanding of another human being's capacity for music; when they first met, at the William Kennedy Festival in Armagh in 2003, they almost immediately "got each other". It is reflected in almost everything they do on stage and in the recording studio.

It is as if they share the same brain — a musical brain.

Both have an uncanny knack of anticipating the other's next improvisation and seamlessly melding it to their next musical move. The fact they are often playing 'cauld wind' instruments that have a different range should only reinforce how brilliant their musicianship is. That both are involved in countless other projects and musical groups, when they come together their music truly becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

Jarlath was born in Dungannon, County Tyrone, and although he boasts both one of the finest lineage of tutors possible, coming from the Armagh Pipers Club, it's hardly surprising. He learned from Brian Vallely, Tiarnán Ó Duinnchinn, Mark Donnelly and Eamonn Curran — quite a pedigree. His musicality, though comes as easily from his home and his family as it does from these doyens of Irish piping.

He said: "I'd say my music comes from my parents being involved and us all being influenced by the folk movement in Ireland in the 1970s. My mother is a lover of song and the old heroes of the folk scene were always being played at our home. Everyone from Planxty and Paul Brady to local traditional singers like Paddy Tunney, Sarah Makem and Geordie Hannah. Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Nancy Griffith and Alison Krauss were all in there, so maybe it all just merged into one. There's a really strong singing tradition in and around the area I'm from at home, too."

Jarlath tells how he encountered Ross at a Gordon Duncan gig in Armagh: "When we first met in 2003, I think I was a bit bored. I'd met Gordon a few times before and it was always amazing hearing him play.

‘When you find that place where the music just takes you over, that’s where it becomes brilliant. If you think about it, you kill it. We’re really searching for the autopilot.’

I was in my last year of school, and Ross was already playing with Emily Smith, and after listening to Gordon play, we were introduced and ended sitting up all night for a few days playing tunes. I think, musically it saved the day for me.”

Ross was 11 when he began to take music seriously. Until he heard Gordon Duncan, he was only really interested in football and cooking and, like meeting Gordon Duncan, finding the musical connection with Jarlath was life-changing.

He said: “If I didn’t find someone like Gordon, someone that excited me musically, I would’ve risked just end up sitting in my room, playing in a pipe band and doing what I was told. When your imagination gets triggered, when you get the opportunity to treat your *mind* like an instrument (and also like a bagpipe should be treated), instead of just something to use for pipe band music... I’m very lucky Gordon was there. It’s a lucky thing we all met at the time we did.”

From those early days, whether it was Ross and Ali Hutton sitting in a bedroom messing around with guitars, whistles and pipes, or the building musical friendship Ross and Jarlath developed, the way they played seems to be as much about the luck of finding a musical partnership as lots of practice.

Ross admitted there was no big plan. He said: “We never really sat down and said, ‘Let’s make a great album, let’s start a band’, it was more just music coming out and we’d just put a set together for a gig, and we’d both go to variations and play the same thing, in the same style. It was very organic.”

But now, Jarlath laughs at their lack of practice on the road. He said: “We can go on a tour and be almost all the way through it, and sit down and say, ‘We should be really practising our new stuff...’ but there’s so much music to play and such great craic, that we don’t get to go there. As any tour progresses, though, the way we play changes throughout, so I guess it’s the way we do things and the changes that we make that keeps it going.”



Photo: Stuart Currow

Ross added: “It feels like we could record an album every second month if we sat down and practised the music we keep writing and putting together but it’s great just to play and to appreciate the moment, so we just play...”

Jarlath agreed: “Often we just pick up tunes that work on both pipes or pipes and whistles, and it just happens. If it doesn’t, we rewrite tunes and put together sets that work.”

This understanding leads well into the breadth of experience these two formidable young musicians have. They come from different countries, different teaching styles and different cultures; and while they have a strong sense of working together for a common musical goal, they are careful not to try and control it too much.

Ross said: “We spend a lot of our time just playing and bouncing off each other, not be-

ing too controlled. If you try to control the creativity, you can kill it. When you find that place where the music just takes you over, that’s where it becomes brilliant. It’s almost harder to make a mistake when it’s like that, because it’s two of you playing as one. Gordon used to say the same thing, he’d lock in the drones and then just let the music come out. That’s when it just happens. If you think about it, you kill it. We’re really searching for the autopilot.”

Both of them have guested on or been part of some of the greatest modern folk ensembles of the last 10 years, and they show no sign of slowing down. They have played with Salsa Celtica, one of the great bands to come from the Scottish/world music crossover and Ross has had a leading role in Treacherous Orchestra, who can seem like a deranged musical anarcho-collective on stage.



Photo: Stuart Currow

Ross said “Treacherous Orchestra look like this crazy group, totally out of control, but it’s not. Everyone sits around when we’re writing and it comes together as a collective but it’s completely controlled. The exact opposite of what Jar and I do on stage. You can’t have that many musicians doing their own thing at a gig. It’d sound like rubbish.”

Maybe that’s the magic. Treacherous look out of control and yet brilliantly achieve this through collective precision. Ross and Jarlath are laid back and loose and achieve the same thing.

Playing with Ali Hutton further explains the notion of this shared musical brain.

Ross said: “I’ve been playing with Ali for years. He’s a great piper in his own right and that makes it so easy when we gig together. He knows the music, he knows piping backwards. He knows us.”

Ali played pipes with Ross, Calum MacCrimmon and 80 of the finest musicians in Scotland under Greg Lawson. The opening night of Celtic Connections 2015 featured *Nae Regrets*, which commemorated both the 10th anniversary of Martyn Bennett’s earthshaking album *GRIT* and his passing. The concert was hailed by everyone who saw it as one of the finest musical ensemble pieces attempted.

But it’s the musical pioneer who brought Ross and Jarlath together who continues to inspire and drive them to ensure Gordon Duncan’s legacy endures.

Jarlath said: “His influence on us was immeasurable. It feels that if you received something from Gordon, you’re duty bound to pay it forward. *The Gordon Duncan Trust* has that as its main goal. To foster youth and music, to give a hand to those who need one, whether it’s instruments or lessons or mentoring.”

Ross sometimes talks about music other than from a purist perspective of ‘a perfectly controlled sound’, and although he and Jarlath have an undisputed mastery of their instruments, he tells a story about Gordon and Allan MacDonald recording using the *Degerpipe* that brings the frustrations of the Highland bagpipe into sharp relief.

He said: “Gordon actually wanted to record *Thunderstruck* on the Deger. He would have been happier, I think, with the ease of electronic pipes across a whole album. The whole tuning and control thing can really fry your brain. Getting the sound right, getting the thing to stay stable for a whole recording, or even just a whole gig can really mess with you. It can drain your soul when the pipes aren’t going...

Jarlath uses electronic uilleann Vpipes for the

same reason lots of Highland pipers use electronic pipes: just to concentrate on the music, to get as much solid time playing as possible.”

Allan MacDonald has said a similar thing to Ross. In Edinburgh a few years ago Allan lamented ‘the lack of the perfect reed’ as to why he hadn’t been playing much on the big pipes. He instead provided me with a masterclass at 3am on the Deger and the squeeze box, but that’s another story for another time.

When I spoke to Ross and Jarlath after their gig at the 2015 Brunswick Music Festival in Melbourne, both felt their pipes were uncomfortable with the temperature in the room. Gigs in Australia can be like that. The weather is changeable and the dryness of the climate and air conditioning in venues can make it hard for a consistent sound.

As consummate professionals do, they worried about the sound and there were a few moments when you could feel their frustration on stage. Such was the strength of their performance, though, especially with the skill of Ali to back them up with guitar, that the very few that did notice a moment or two of tuning, didn’t care. The quality of music was the key and sheer musicality won the day.

The crowd wanted to enjoy themselves and wanted the guys to be brilliant. They were.

Ross asked: “The question is, when we find that extra 5%, do the audience get that? Do the audience feel you having more fun?”

Jarlath answered: “I think they do. We probably talk more rubbish and have more fun on stage when it’s all going along like a train.

“It’s like that with some musicians; when it’s on the edge of falling apart, you can get moments of genius. It’s a great rush. I sometimes think I’d rather play 10 rubbish performances for the chance to play that one brilliant gig.”

Ross added: “I love the not knowing. There’s great pipers out there, they may make a hash of it sometimes, but then follow it with some inspired genius... Wow.”

Jarlath speaks of performance the same way he does about his day job as a locum doctor in Accident and Emergency and general medicine.

Life in A&E is a mix of routine and sleep deprivation crossed with periods of intense activity and high stress — much like live performance around the globe.

He said: “The adrenaline rush of being in the emergency department can be addictive. The feeling of being right on the edge of controlling an uncontrolled situation; it is a lot like live gigs where you push right to that edge. It’s strange but you really feel alive, but also, like living on a perpetual high doesn’t work, nor does being completely safe with your music. You need the highs and lows, whether it’s performance or life.”

He has a point. Together, Ross and Jarlath feed off each other and the crowd sees and experiences the interplay, feels part of it and gets on board the musical train.

Both musicians spread their time across many bands and collectives. Some they do together, some on their own. Another thing they share is a love of experimenting with pipes across a range of styles. Ross plays with India Alba, Jarlath has played with Capercaillie and has just come back from a UK tour with Duncan Chisholm, one of Scotland’s most respected fiddle players and composers.

It throws into relief somewhat that competition piping seems to dominate many peoples thinking. Ross came through The Vale of Atholl and enjoyed his time there but both he and Jarlath look at the obsession with competing and winning and come away a little perplexed.

Jarlath thinks it isn’t just a pipe band thing, however. He said: “It’s funny, some guys look at competition as the *only* thing. It’s the same as the guys who only play on their own. When you’ve competed, in a band or even solo, wouldn’t you want to see what it’s like to play with another instrument? Wouldn’t you get bored with doing the same thing over and over? Aren’t you curious? Competition can be a total subculture.

“There’s guys out there that can tell me what tunes I competed with and in what year. I haven’t competed for over 10 years. I haven’t a clue what I played, when or where.”

It might be flattering for some to have that level of interest in their music, however, there is a dark side. Jarlath finds that coming up to competition time, guys who had been playing tunes in the pub together suddenly stop talking to each other.

He’s pretty blunt about it: “I couldn’t wait to finish with that world.”

The influence they have garnered from musi-

‘I couldn’t see myself as just a musician all the time. It’d kill the creativity. The Emergency Department is mad, and in that madness, music often comes to you’

cal luminaries such as Gordon Duncan, Mike McGoldrick, Martyn Bennett and Duncan Chisholm; they also count among their bands: Salsa Celtica, India Alba, Capercaillie, Dougie MacLean and Treacherous Orchestra.

Both Jarlath and Ross have a healthy social justice leaning and both barrack for the underdog. Both share a love for an almost epicurean lifestyle and a desire to explore the culture of the places they play. Both have come from different cultures, different arenas of piping; yet both have gravitated towards the folk end of the spectrum, not from nostalgia, but innovation... and risk taking.

At the gig in Melbourne, Jarlath surprised a few people by singing several songs throughout the set. He has a beautiful voice and an ability with lyrics that matches his piping.

He said: “My family was always singing, it was always around the house. My sister plays cello, and sings too. Currently she’s touring with Hozier (the Irish singer who released *Take me to Church* to worldwide acclaim).

Jarlath and Ross have a new album in production. The desire to expand their music is obvious; both with the voice as the extension of their art.

“We’ve just started to work on an album that turned into half piping and half songs. In uilleann piping, the pipe is supposed to replicate the voice. It’s the same with canntaireachd. The voice came before the pipe, so why don’t we utilise it more? We play tunes and sing songs that are modern, generally because we’re modern musicians.

“Why shouldn’t we have songs on piping albums?”

Both Ross and Jarlath describe themselves as hyperactive, and draw on that feature of their personality when they compose, and how they compose. Jarlath often ‘finds his muse’ at work, and through that work in the Emergency Department, it allows the music to come out.

He said: “I couldn’t see myself as just a musician all the time. It’d kill the creativity. The Emergency Department is mad, and in that madness, music often comes to you. It’s like the adrenaline rush you get on stage. I cycle too, and that gives me space to create. We both

experiment with instruments, neither of us really knowing what we’re doing, but we’re discovering and creating new sounds, new ideas.”

Ross agreed: “When I sit on the couch and do nothing I sometimes feel guilty. I don’t drink or anything like that any more; but before when I did, I just *sat* and it was OK, cause I was drinking, and that’s what you did when you were hungover. When you stop drinking, you find you have a lot more free time on your hands, because you’re *not* hungover.

“Drink is a terrible waster of time. Now, I cook — I love to cook. It clears my head, and gives me the same space that Jar talks about. It lets me be precise, to create and be clear. I’ve started to write songs, too, but I don’t sing them. It’s great to work through issues and get rid of *stuff*.”

“I’ve been working on the album from the *New Voices* commission at Celtic Connections; it’s a great concept. The idea is that you do something outside your comfort zone and really try to push your boundaries.”

(The review from Chris MacKenzie in *Piping Today* 74 was nothing short of glowing. When the album does come out, buy it on the strength of that review!)

Creativity is an elusive beast, and Jarlath tells a story about Neil Young. He said: “Neil insisted that everything be recorded, because you never know when the genius part is going to emerge and you don’t want to miss it. Toward the end of the session, Neil turns to the sound engineer and asks THE question... ‘You got that, right...?’ Anyway, the sound guy forgot to hit record on that one part of the rehearsal. Neil apparently went crazy...”

Ross went up to Lewis to write for a week with Dougie MacLean and got one tune off. One. He said: “It was a waste. I find it better if you just go and switch off, and when you get back you can really get into it. Inspiration comes in the most random places. Write it down or record it, move on and then come back later.”

I asked Ross and Jarlath whether the process is organic or scientific. They surprised me by saying, almost simultaneously: who cares?

Jarlath said: “You could write 20,000 words on it being organic and then write 20,000 about

it being scientific. It doesn't matter. Just write."

Ross had the same experience with his girlfriend Laura. He said: "Laura was writing a piece for a string quartet. We were talking for ages about a whole bunch of stuff about patterns and music and theory, and in the end, I just said, 'Go and play for a bit...'. I think we *think* about music way too much. Just play!"

Their combined CV is beyond impressive: India Alba, The Vale of Atholl, BBC Young Musician of the Year, Dougie MacLean, Treacherous Orchestra, Salsa Celtica, Phil Cunningham, Duncan Chisholm, Capercaillie and movie soundtracks... The freedom to do what these two guys from a very folky tradition get to do is down to adaptability and respect.

Ross explained: "Salsa Celtica gave both of us a chance to improvise. We didn't really understand how to do that at the start, and on my rehearsal notes there'd be a written note, 'Improvise HERE'..."


"India Alba was an eye opener. Lots of room for a melody instrument, then the drummer would come through, another instrument would improvise and then everyone would come back together. That's where it's great, you have so much room to move.

"Gigging with Dougie MacLean is completely different, same with Duncan Chisholm. It's privilege to play with them, you just play to fit in and respect the voice, whether it is Dougie when he's singing, or Duncan when he's playing. You get to sit back and make the audience feel as comfortable as you can. We need both types of gig, otherwise we'd get bored."

You could write more on these two young men, the albums they have produced and the experiences they have had all over the world. You could write of the respect that is given to them by everyone who has worked with them and how their ability to play together was forged when Gordon pointed them along the one true path. It's enough to say that Jarlath Henderson and Ross Ainslie play wonderful music brilliantly and maybe they really do share one very large musical brain.

However, that would be too much to write and it might be easier to say: they play from the heart, for the soul — together. ●

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Rolf Jost

by John Slavin

The Real Life of

MICHAEL GREY

MICHAEL Grey lives a real life full of music. It is a good life, a great life even, amply sprinkled with moments of genius. It seems that anything Mike sets his mind to is top quality. Whether he is playing pipes, writing tunes, recording CDs, writing for *Piping Today*, holding a senior management position at Bank of Montreal, being a friend — or putting you down with a funny one-liner — he is bloody great at it!

Every piper will have heard of him, or at least read his name at the top of a sheet of music. He has published nine CDs and six tunebooks. The latest book, *Damned Suites and Other Music*, includes his groundbreaking pipe band competition music which received critical acclaim and scorn in equal measure when played by Toronto Police Pipe Band from 2008 to 2013. He probably enjoyed the furore but a few of the barbed comments may have pierced his sensitive side at times.

A full feature (which will happen eventually) would be needed to cover his achievements in piping, so in brief: he was a founding and influential member of the now legendary World Champion 78th Fraser Highlanders Pipe Band, and then was pipe major of Grade 1 Peel Police Pipe Band from 1996 to 1999.



Mike at Saltcoats harbour with the Isle of Arran in the background

His titles for solo piping are too many to list but include the Piobaireachd Society Gold Medal (Canada) and the March, Strathspey & Reel and Former Winners' MSR on the same day.

Since last year, he has been playing with the Greater Glasgow Police Scotland Pipe Band, and he has another CD in the making which will likely be released this year.

I first met him in 2010 through *Piping Today*. He was coming to Glasgow for Celtic Connections and suggested we meet for a pint in *Blackfriars*, a well-loved pub in the Merchant City — but it did surprise me that he knew of it. He was with his long-time friend Malkie Bow, and I remember laughing all night. I found out that Mike and Malkie had been coming to Celtic Connections for years, and if you add their visits for the Worlds, they both know Glasgow better than I do.

But the big coincidence was Saltcoats, my home town. It so happened that Mike and Malkie had visited Saltcoats earlier on in the day we first met in 2010 — just so Malkie could relive a childhood memory and eat his favourite cake from the Kandy Bar bakery.

They also visited Saltcoats harbour and Mike seemed impressed (maybe that's the wrong word) with its aromatic "fishy", hole-in-the-wall doorway — so we had to go back there recently for the photoshoot.

And in the spirit of these "Real Life of..." features I asked him a bunch of questions totally unrelated to piping whatsoever.

PT: Name three great songs.

MG: *La Vie En Rose*, as sung by Edith Piaf, and I know it's been done to death but Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*, as interpreted by k. d. lang, and *An Ataireachd Àrd* sung by the late Gaelic soul woman, Ishbel MacAskill.

PT: Best advice you ever received?

MG: I don't know if it's the best advice but it is good advice and advice I remember: pick your battles. An old boss at work told me that. I remember it often. It comes in handy when I get riled up about one damned thing or another. None of us can be on the offensive all the time or indignant and shouting about every imagined personal

affront. All of that takes a lot of physical and mental energy and makes you a pretty unlikable person. Better, maybe, to be careful and pick the challenges you can do something about.

PT: When you're feeling down, what cheers you up?

MG: Exercise. You might be surprised to hear that: A long walk in the woods or a long ride on my bike do the trick. Failing that, dance band music. Bring on The Shand. The accordion can make a lot of inspiring music.

PT: Is there anything we should know?

MG: There is. Where do I begin? Are you talking about me?

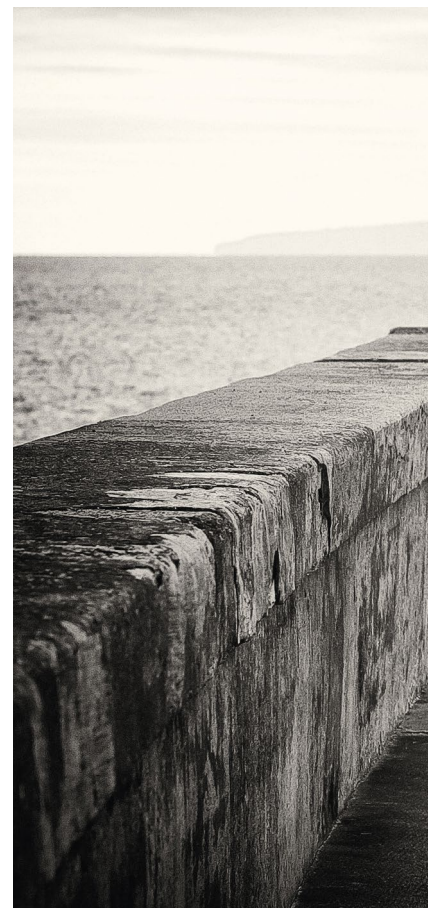
PT: Yes.

MG: I absolutely hate eggs. Have never eaten them. Can't. I know that's a bit weird. Were you looking for something deeper than that?

PT: There's no wrong answers today.



Mike with Reid Maxwell at the bus after the 78th's Worlds win 1987. Mike is wearing an SFU tie as the bands had swapped after the contest — SFU were second that day. In the background posing for a photo is Bruce Gandy, the late Inverness Silver Medallist and SFU piper Darleen Miharija and 78th piper, Tom Bowen



MG: Good. Well, on the eggs thing, I remember a supper I went to a good while ago hosted by a piper friend and his piper wife. We sat down to eat and there in front of me was a big plate of quiche — the eggiest of pies. So, being what I think is a person who tries to be a good house guest, I did my best to choke down a few pieces of egg pie, rolled up in salad with me the whole time working the mind over matter thing and imagining the food was pizza or anything but eggs. I messed up the plate so it would sort of look like I'd eaten and in the end I think I made a good appearance of eating my supper. Dessert came and went and I was none the worse for wear. The funny thing was I had travelled throughout Scotland with this piper and at all B&B stops I would slide my greasy sulphuric morning egggy mess onto this guy's plate for him to enjoy bonus eggs [makes "ugh" sound]. Anyway, the next morning the phone rang and there was the host saying he woke up in the middle of the night bolt upright thinking, "Chrissakes, Mike doesn't eat eggs!" Jim McGillivray never served me eggs again.

PT: Pick one person from history; you can ask them one question to which they must answer truthfully. Who is the person and what is the question?

MG: Glad you gave me this one in advance. Hitler. Why?

PT: Name someone you know and describe them in five words.

MG: Duncan Nicholson. Sensitive. Intense. Loyal. Careful. Passionate.

'She carried the shell with her as a memento of her home in Benbecula and kept it for a long stretch of her long life... so yeah, the pipes can go up in flames and I'll be running with the conch'

PT: And how would people you know describe you in five words?

MG: You mean people I know or people who know me?

PT: People who know you. We can guess one of the words coming.

MG: It would definitely depend on the person but maybe: Independent. Creative. Cynical. Perceptive. Intense.

PT: What is your best childhood memory?

MG: I don't think I can nail down one. My dad and his oldest brother owned a large piece of property, about 50 acres or so, on Lake Massawippi in the Canadian province of Quebec. He built a rustic cottage on the land and that is where the family would spend much of our summers. No running water, no electricity, no indoor plumbing to speak of but it was usually pretty great: swimming, fishing, bonfires, running wild in the woods. All these are among my happiest childhood memories.

PT: Your house is burning and you have to get out fast with only one possession, what would it be?

MG: There was a time I might've said photo albums or something like that but most of my pics are now all stored on the cloud. I think I have to face up to the fact that I am pretty sentimental. I have a very large sea shell that belonged to my Grandmother. She carried the shell with her as a memento of her home in Benbecula and kept it for a long stretch of her long life including taking it to Canada on emigrating from Scotland. She gave it to my Father and I ended up with it about 20 years ago and it has pride of place in my house. It's a modest sort of thing with no intrinsic value but irreplaceable no matter how great any insurance policy. I like to think of her holding it, and thinking of home and all of that. She left Scotland for Canada in 1929 never to return. Sad. So yeah, the pipes can go up in flames and I'll be running with the conch.



Photo: John Shavin@desi.moby.com

PT: What is a skill you'd like to learn and why?

MG: Sing. I can sorta kinda carry a tune in that bagpipe way, which means, really I can't sing. It would be great to be able to belt out a tune without tuning or carrying a big case or having the police called.

PT: What makes you laugh?

MG: Oh, I'm pretty easy to please and so simple on that front. Everything from vids of people slipping on the ice (I mean, seriously, why is that funny? It just is) to YouTube of overdubbed Dolmio adverts. The American TV show *Modern Family* is brilliant. *Still Game* never gets old. This self-absorbed interview I think is pretty funny.

PT: On that, do you believe in ghosts?

MG: Yes.

PT: Really! Have you ever seen a ghost?

MG: "Really" (laughs)? Yes.

PT: Tell us about it.

MG: It was in Scotland that I spotted the ghost or whatever it was. I was staying with friends — mooching more like it — in the village of Auldhouse, part of East Kilbride now, I guess, in their fully converted 1920s schoolhouse home. I was just finishing up a long stay in Scotland following university and was about to head home in a few days. Anyway, that late September night, I was tucked away in the back of the house on the second floor. A clear, beautiful, early fall evening saw me leave the windows open to the moon and the fields. I remember this clearly, I guess that's why

I mention it. So I fall asleep only to wake up a few hours later — the moon had moved but you could still see it through the window. On waking the moon was the first thing I saw. The second was what I saw when I looked to the end of my bed. There standing staring at me, with next to no expression on his face, was an old man. Dressed in a tweed jacket, kinda worn-looking, he just stared. I didn't say a word — but pretty near filled the bed. I stared at him, he me, and it felt like this went on for five minutes. But that wasn't likely. I finally turned away and looked back to where he was and the ghost was gone.

I told Jim and Marion about it the next morning. I don't think Jim was too pleased with me for doing that as Marion was not loving the ghost story. Weeks and months after odd things started happening in the house like the kitchen taps blasting water on their own.

They sold the house not long after.

PT: For £5000 would you march down Buchanan Street [one of Scotland's main shopping areas] on a Saturday afternoon wearing a high street south Asian-made one-yard mini kilt (and nothing else) while playing Cockney Jocks on the pipes the whole way?

MG: You mean from the Concert Hall to Argyle Street?

PT: Yes.

MG: What's the tartan?

PT: Modern MacLeod of Lewis.

MG: No.

PT: You've come to Scotland a lot in your life. What do you like most about the country?

MG: The landscape, the people, too. Scots are a self-deprecating people: humble, proud, funny, smart.

PT: What's the best decision you ever made?

MG: Not sure if was the best but I think it was a good one and that was to join the General Motors Pipe Band in September 1981. Bill Livingstone was the pipe major and he was teaching me at the time. GM dropped their long-time sponsorship of the band a month or two after I joined and before year's end the band were renamed the 78th Fraser Highlanders Pipe Band. That changed the course of my life. Everything from how hard I worked at university (not very) to meeting lifelong friends happened as a result of that decision.

PT: Are you an introvert or an extrovert?

MG: I think I am down the middle on that question. There's time I love to be out front but I always need to find my own time to regroup. An introverted extrovert?

PT: If all jobs paid the same what would you be doing?

MG: I'd be a barista in some semi-rural trad music sort of café where every afternoon I'd be expected to play an hour's worth of tunes for the music-loving customers.

PT: Good luck with that. Thanks for the chat, Mike. ●

The Great Highland Bagpipe

THIS article aims to illustrate some of the features of the tuning of the Highland bagpipe scale in terms of the consonance and dissonance of the chanter against the drones. It presents a theoretical plot which estimates how the sensory dissonance varies for every possible tuning of the chanter. This is achieved by charting a steady glissando from low G to high A, using different colours for the different numbers of harmonics present in chanter, tenor drone and bass drone spectra. Such a visual representation may be of practical assistance to players, reed makers and bagpipe makers who are seeking to achieve a better sound. It also offers a new understanding and clearer explanation of why the bagpipe scale is non-standardised.

Harmonics on the bagpipe and dissonance

THE bagpipe produces sound through the air in the bag acting as a high-pressure reservoir, with the reeds partially opening and closing to allow periodic puffs of air into the drones and chanter. Each pipe produces a pitched musical sound consisting of a harmonic series (pure tone components within the sound that blend together, producing a unique tone colour). The lowest component in a harmonic series is not always the loudest, but is labelled the fundamental frequency and this depends principally on the length of the air column enclosed. When multiple frequencies are sounding simultaneously (as in chanter and drones), the degree of pleasantness or consonance in the sound depends on the extent to which harmonics coincide.

When pure tone harmonics from two different sounds are very close to each other but not matching then beating may be perceived in the sound (as observed during tuning). If the difference is slightly too large for beats to be observed then a very rough, dissonant sound is perceived. Listening tests have concluded that the sensory dissonance has a maximum which typically occurs when the difference in frequency between two pure tone components in the sound is around a semitone (but this

depends on the frequency) as illustrated in Figure 3.8 of Sethares' *Tuning, Timbre, Spectrum, Scale* [1].

Graphs of sensory dissonance

IN 1995, MacKenzie [2] demonstrated the range of tone colours produced by drones and chanters and considered the implications for intonation. He also reproduced a graph by Kameoka and Kuriyagawa [3] covering the dissonance for harmonic tones in a range of less than an octave. As MacKenzie states, such a plot represents the dissonance of a chanter glissando against another chanter sounding low A, rather than against drones sounding in lower octaves. The graph in this article is more relevant to Highland pipers because it plots sensory dissonance of the chanter against pitches corresponding to the tenor and bass drones.

Using MATLAB programs customised from those of Sethares [1], the proximity of all the harmonics of the drones were checked in relation to all the harmonics of the (variable) chanter pitch. The total amount of sensory dissonance was then tallied up and the results are graphed in Figure 1. It should be noted that no sound synthesis or listening tests on actual bagpipe tones were performed, but rather a standard method was applied to predict relative dissonance levels.

Different coloured lines on the figure show how the sensory dissonance depends on the number of harmonics (or tone colour) of each sound source: bass drone, tenor drones and chanter. The horizontal axis shows chanter fundamental frequencies, as measured relative to a low A that is perfectly in tune with the bass drone two octaves below and tenor drones one octave below. Dips on each line show frequencies that my theoretical modelling predicts would give a less dissonant (and therefore more consonant) sound against the drones.

The blue line assumes that each sound source contributes six equal amplitude harmonics. A good reason for only including six harmonics is that the higher harmonics are closer together in pitch and thus are not so well resolved by the ear [4]. Lines for including up to ten equal amplitude harmonics in the analysis show extra

minima in sensory dissonance being introduced with each additional harmonic.

The shape of the graph for a real bagpipe would depend on the relative amplitude of all the harmonics, which would in turn depend on the instrument, the reeds, the player (including moisture build-up effects and fingerings) and the acoustic of the performance space and listening position. While these factors will affect the relative depth of the minima of sensory dissonance, they will not alter their frequency. This is determined by the simple ratios for coincidence of harmonics of drones against the chanter.

Since each octave corresponds to a frequency ratio of 2, the lowest or fundamental component of the bass drone is a factor of 4 below that of the chanter low A. Labelling the fundamental frequency of low A as f , the harmonics of the bass drone (when tuned accurately) will thus sound at integer multiples of $f/4$, therefore at 0.25, 0.5, 0.75, 1.0, 1.25, 1.5, 1.75 and 2.0 and so on relative to low A.

The horizontal axis on the figure is spaced logarithmically so that equal distance is given to scale steps rather than to harmonics. All five plots show minima indicating clear acoustical reasons for tuning the notes low A, C#, E and high A to achieve coinciding harmonics between chanter and drones if it is desired that dissonance should be minimised. Dissonance is not something that should be minimised at all costs — historically musical taste has dictated preferences for different tunings. A particularly striking example is that the high A has been deliberately tuned flat of the true octave ratio of 2 by some players in order “not to lose the note in the drones” [2].

The line including six harmonics in the analysis also has broad, shallow dissonance minima close to the low G and B pitches, and a single broad minima covering the region including F# and high G. Interestingly, the pitch D is shown to be relatively dissonant due to the fifth harmonic of the bass drone (sounding around C#) lying close enough (around 40 Hz away for typical playing frequencies) to clash with the fundamental frequency of the chanter. A sharper pitch for D would reduce the extent

scale and sensory dissonance

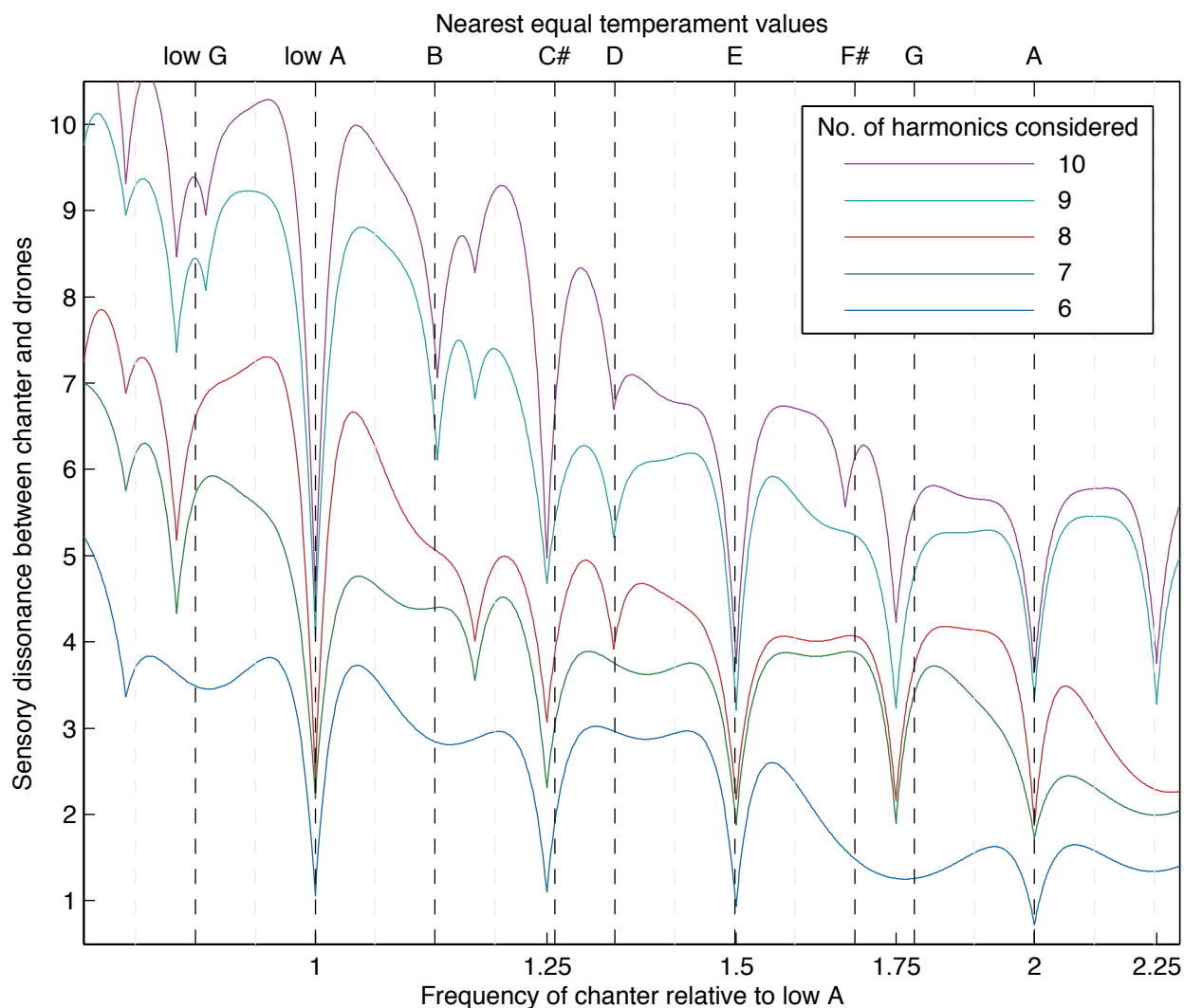


Figure 1. Theoretical plots of sensory dissonance across the range of the chanter, taking into consideration equal amplitude harmonics for bass drone, tenor drone and chanter spectra.

of this clash. Analysis by Brown of the late 17th century chanter of Iain Dall MacKay shows that the D was “colourful”, or sharp of the interval that would be expected from modern instruments by approximately 20 cents[5]. Interestingly this tuning was common until around the 1950s[6].

Notes of the Pipe Scale

IT is helpful to set out the implications of sensory dissonance for each note in the bagpipe scale in turn, from lowest pitch to highest. In doing so, I will refer to the cent scale in which an equally tempered semitone is divided into 100 cents. The headings for the different notes

in the pipe scale are labelled low G, low A, B, C, D, E, F, high G and high A as is standard in material written by and for pipers, but it should be noted that those labelled C and F are tuned closer to the equally tempered pitches C# and F# respectively (allowing the A Mixolydian mode to sound rather than the A Aeolian mode). In addition to this, the pitch standard for the definition of A has changed over the years to be increasingly sharp of concert pitch.

Low G Note

WHEN seven harmonics are included in the analysis, a dissonance minimum appears corresponding to a low G tuned 31 cents flat of

the equally tempered value. This is relatively consonant because the second harmonic of the chanter matches the seventh harmonic of the bass drone. When nine harmonics are included, the ninth harmonic of the tenor drones matches the fifth harmonic of the chanter to give a small dip in dissonance at a value 18 cents sharp of an equally tempered low G. These two options for a more consonant low G correspond to the frequency ratios 7/8 and 9/10 (i.e. the frequency of low G over the frequency of low A). It is possible that the preference for one or other tuning may depend on the relative amplitude of the seventh and ninth harmonics in the drone spectra.

Low A Note

THE first harmonic of the chanter (its fundamental frequency) matches the fourth harmonic of the bass drone and the second harmonic of the tenor drones at the position marked 1.0 on the graph.

B Note

IF nine harmonics are included in the analysis, then a minimum of sensory dissonance appears where the fourth harmonic of the chanter agrees with the ninth harmonic of the tenor drones. This corresponds to a ratio of $9/8 = 1.125$ (known as the just intonation ratio for a major second), giving a note 4 cents sharp of an equally tempered B.

C Note

WHEN the fifth harmonic of the bass drone matches the fundamental of the chanter, a dissonance minimum is obtained at the ratio $5/4 = 1.25$ or an interval of a pure major 3rd above low A. This corresponds to a pitch 14 cents flat of an equally tempered major 3rd (C sharp). When seven harmonics are included, a weaker minimum occurs at a pitch 33 cents flat of a minor third (C natural). This is due to the third harmonic of the chanter agreeing with the seventh harmonic of the tenor drones, giving a ratio $7/6$. The consonance is weaker because of a clash between the fundamental of the chanter and the fifth harmonic of the bass drone (sounding around C#) for this pitch.

D Note

WHEN including eight harmonics, the third harmonic of the chanter matches the eighth harmonic of the tenor drones to give a dissonance minimum at a ratio of $4/3 = 1.333$, or 2 cents flat of an equally tempered D. As with a pure minor third, the consonance of a pure fourth may suffer from it clashing with the fifth harmonic of the bass drone which sounds only a semitone away, at a pure major third.

E Note

WHEN the chanter sounds a pure fifth above low A, the sixth harmonic of the bass drone and third harmonic of the tenor drones both match the fundamental of the chanter. This occurs at a frequency ratio of $3/2 = 1.5$, or 2 cents sharp of an equally tempered E.

F Note

A minimum appears at $5/3 = 1.667$ only in the line that includes ten harmonics. This cor-

responds to a pure major 6th, 16 cents flat of an equally tempered F#. This minimum is weak compared to others because the chanter fundamental clashes with the seventh harmonic of the bass drone. Figure 1 shows that the consonance or “sweetness” of F depends on the presence of the tenth harmonic of the tenor drones. If strong, this would ring with the third harmonic of the chanter.

High G Note

AGREEMENT between the seventh harmonic of the bass drone and the fundamental of the chanter leads to a dissonance minimum for the frequency ratio $7/4 = 1.75$. This represents a pitch 31 cents flat of the equally tempered value for high G.

High A Note

A minimum is located where the fundamental of the chanter matches the fourth harmonic of the tenor drones, which occurs at the ratio 2.0 or a pure octave above low A. This minimum is reinforced if the eighth harmonic of the bass drone, corresponding to the same frequency, is considered.

Conclusions

THE theoretical plots of sensory dissonance are best viewed as a way of demonstrating why the bagpipe scale is not standardised. Dissonance is a matter of taste but this work sets out the theoretical level of dissonance against drones sounding in the two lower octaves on a solo instrument. Another possible factor (not discussed here) relates to the tuning of the bagpipe scale for achieving satisfactory relative pitches between different chanter notes.

If (and this is a big if) minimum dissonance against the drones is desirable there are clear reasons for optimum harmonic relationships for the notes low A, C#, E, and high A as they rely on only the first six harmonics of the bass and tenor drones against the chanter. For other intervals, the extent to which dissonance against the drones may be avoided is reduced since the harmonics of the drones that are involved lie closer to the limit for separate resolution by the human ear (although under certain acoustical circumstances particular harmonics may be louder than neighbouring harmonics, allowing for improved consonance). That said, the most secure of the intervals for minimising dissonance (requiring the ear to hear the interaction of the seventh harmonics of the bass and tenor drones against the chanter) are those at high G

and low G. The harmonic interval for B requires the ninth harmonic to be perceived.

The pitch F# has a contribution to dissonance associated with its proximity to the seventh harmonic of the bass drone while the harmonic ratio for D, which would be consonant against the chanter low A, may be argued to be the most dissonant of the harmonic intervals discussed when considered against the drones. This is because the fundamental of the chanter D is dissonant against the fifth harmonic of the bass drone roughly a semitone below it (and the second harmonic of the chanter is similarly dissonant against the fifth harmonic of the tenor drones). It is intriguing to speculate that the colourful sharpened D common in Highland bagpipe recordings prior to the 1950s (and present to a decreasing extent thereafter) may have been caused by an attempt to reduce the severity of this clash.

Taste for particular intervals depends on musical acclimatisation in any case and the strength of perception for particular harmonics will depend greatly on individual players and their instruments. Ultimately, this article exposes the complexities involved in basing the tuning of the scale on the dissonance or consonance of the chanter against the drones and is intended to help inform choices related to this issue. Much hinges on the relative loudness of the harmonics that make up the sound colour of the drones and on the player's (and audience's) perception of those harmonic spectra.

Acknowledgements

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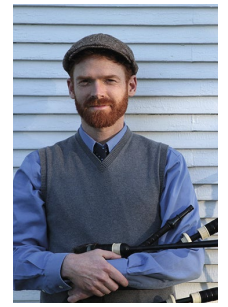
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by Timothy Cummings



Theory Top-Up: *Tunes in B-minor*

I have a hunch that you might be familiar with something called fish and chips. I'm also willing to bet that each time you've partaken of that meal, there was a fair bit of salt added, which no doubt enhanced the flavours of both the fish and the chips. It's a simple, successful, and very popular combination. But how many of you have also tried a little sprinkling of coarse salt on a bar of rich, dark chocolate? Far fewer, probably, as it's a less obvious, less ubiquitous recipe. But among those who've tried it, many claim it's about as close to heaven as you get on this side of eternity.

How does this apply to music theory? It is my best guess that close to 90% of the tunes making up our standard ceòl beag repertoire are based in the general keys of A and D [fish and chips]. Tunes that fall under either of these two broad umbrellas harmonize [taste] very well with A-tuned drones [salt]. That's probably not news to anyone. But every so often it can be refreshing and novel to play a darker tune in the key of B-minor [dark chocolate] with the same A-tuned drones [salt], despite that combination being a lot less obvious, certainly from the standpoint of many theorists of Western music.

Does that analogy make sense to you? If not, fear not. The point is that B-minor tunes go unexpectedly well with drones tuned to A. What would normally be considered dissonance, or clashing, or tension — that is the A against the B — can actually be a compelling uncertainty or restlessness. Not everyone will want to base an entire medley on B-minor tunes, but throwing a B-minor tune or two into a set of tunes is an excellent way to build tension. (Similarly, you would not want to eat an entire meal of dark chocolate and sea salt.) The pairing of tunes in B with drones in A is not the most obvious combination, which may explain why these tunes make up only five or six percent¹ of our ceòl beag.

1. Approximately 4.5% of these are standard B-minor tunes; another 1% or so are pentatonic tunes in B-minor.

Any standard Scottish pipe tune that claims B as its foundational, home-base note, and which features a significant number of Bs and F#s on strong pulses, is almost certainly going to be in a minor key. As mentioned in previous articles, minor keys are generally thought to invoke darker, sadder moods and emotions (e.g. *The Mist-Covered Mountains*). Faster tunes in B-minor may sometimes come across as more obstinate, ranting angrily perhaps (*Paddy's Leather Breeches*). But paired with drones tuned to the chanter's A, practically any B-minor tune will have a captivating, unresolved nature to it.

B minor scale



This scale forms the basis of tunes considered to be in the key of B-minor, as sampled below.³ As always, trying playing through as many of these as you can, to get a better feel for this stirring, moody key:

- *The Ale is Dear* (reel)
- *The Burning of the Piper's Hut* (2/4 march)
- *Dark Lowers the Night* (3/4 retreat)
- *Farewell to Nigg* (6/4 march)
- *The Haunting* (slow air)
- *I Hae a Wife o' My Ain* (slip jig)
- *The Lion's Den* (reel, by Ward MacDonald)
- *Mairi Bhàn Og* [a.k.a. Fair Young Mary] (slow march)
- *Malts on the Optics* (reel, by Hamish Moore)
- *The Sleeping Tune* (slow air, by Gordon Duncan)
- *The Star of County Down* [a.k.a. Kingsfold] (song, air, hymn)
- *Struan Robertson* (strathspey)
- *The Wee Highland Laddie* (4/4 march)
- Also the Breton *an dro* frequently played by both Carlos Nuñez and The Chieftans when they invite Highland pipers on stage.

I should also mention that there are pipers, particularly those in Brittany, who daringly play B-minor tunes with drones also tuned to B. It is an amazing, powerful, dive-headfirst-into-the-dark-deep-end-of-B-minor effect.² It makes my skin crawl like the very first time I heard bagpipes as a young child. Pairing B-minor tunes with drones also in B might be analogous to mixing chocolate with coffee or espresso for an especially, outlandishly dark, rich experience.

Getting back to the melodic nature of B-minor, here is the B-minor scale as we would play it on the pipes:

A few closing tips and reminders: Small-pipers and Border pipers, if you find yourself playing a tune that is in B-minor on a standard A chanter, you can keep your drones tuned to A, and alert any accompanists that you are playing that tune in B-minor. If you have the option, you might also try tuning your drones to B and/or F#, for that extra-rich, ultra-dark Breton effect. But if you plan on changing keys at any point in a set of tunes, particularly any based in A or D, you're better off using drones tuned to A. Highland pipers, remember you are playing transposing instruments, and that a tune *written* in the key of B-minor, will *sound* in the key of C-minor — or a bit sharper — when played on a standard set of Highland pipes. ●

2. Breton players are also prone to playing A-minor tunes (using C- and F-naturals) with A drones, creating a similarly dark effect.

3. It's worth noting that many of these tunes are technically 'gapped' or 'hexatonic' in that they may skip Gs. But this does not change the minor flavouring of the tune, as other gapped scales might (e.g. gapped tunes in A).

Robbie MacIsaac
playing with the NYPBoS
in Musselburgh, 2014

ROBBIE MACISAAC

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

I am from Falkirk and I am 14.

Q. How did you get into piping and when?

My auntie Julie originally introduced me to the chanter when I was nine.

Q. Who is your tutor and what pipe band do you play with?

I am tutored by Chris Armstrong and have been for five years, and I play for Stirling and District Schools Pipe Band.

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?

My band has a two-hour practice, once a week. In the house I play my pipes on average 45 minutes to 1 hour per day. Although often I can go a wee bit mental and play a lot longer...

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

I believe I have a good sound, good technique and a good understanding and enjoyment of the tunes I play and compete with. I need to work on the theory of music itself.

Q. What do you want to achieve in piping?

One day, I would like to win the Gold Medal.

Q. What is your favourite tune and why?

It has to be *The Picnic In The Sky*. There are many things in the tune you can improvise to make your own. It's an absolute belter.

Q. Have you written any tunes?

I've written a few tunes I really enjoy playing. I seem to make them rather different, technically demanding and very interesting and fun to play.

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

I have three sets of pipes. A set of Jim Tweedies for my solos and a set of Nails for my band. They are both set up on the same sheepskin with X-treme standard drone reeds. I also have a set of McCallums I use as a B-flat set up and I use these for travelling at the moment.

Q. What is the best trip or playing experience you have had with the NYPBoS?

Playing in Switzerland for the Basel Christmas Tattoo last December. It was an absolutely amazing experience, spending a whole week performing for a large audience, and being filmed for television, with cameras flying over your head while playing.

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

My favourite part would have to be the people and the music combined. When you bring all these players from across Scotland to play together, it's some buzz and great craic.

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

I am known as "wee Rab" I am probably most known for "whit-eying" (being sick) on a public tram in Switzerland on our way to perform in the first show! Unfortunately I didn't play that night but soon recovered and played in the other shows. I'm also known for saying "great for the weans" in a Sunday Mail interview with the band.



A brief insight into 2015

WITH a quieter start to the year, members of The National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland have been taking some time out to recharge the batteries for the new 2015 season. Here's a brief preview of a few of our major events in the year ahead.

Major Concerts

As a part of this year's aim to reach out further into the community, the band will be performing two community concerts scheduled towards the end of this year. Both shows will feature a brand new concert repertoire developed over the summer which will include a mix of traditional and contemporary music, as well as some bigger suites created throughout workshops conducted in 2014. The first concert will take place at the Gardyne Theatre in Dundee on November 14 with the second being held at Eden Court Theatre in Inverness on November 28. Each show will not only feature the very talented members of the NYPBoS but will also include a performance from a local pipe band. If you are free on those dates, please come and support the band.

Inverness Summer Camp, July 27-29

Following on from the success of previous camps held in Perthshire, this year the band travel to Inverness

to conduct a Piping and Drumming Summer Camp. This event will take place from July 27-29 and will be held at Millburn Academy, Inverness. This will be the very first time the NYPBoS has held such an event in the Highlands region. The programme will run for three days and will see NYPBoS Senior Band members teach and collaborate with other young pipers and drummers. During the camp, students will learn new music, attend workshops on tuning, bandsmanship, theory of music and most importantly, meet other young pipers and drummers from around the region.

The camp caters for all levels of ability from beginners through to advanced and is open to pipers and drummers aged between 12 and 25.

Aside from learning new music in a fun environment, each day will also include a full group workshop covering topics such as bagpipe and drum maintenance, tuning, practice techniques, performance and composition. On the final day there will be a small recital and performance for students by members of the NYPBoS.

In addition, we will be inviting students from the Inverness Summer Camp to join us on stage in Eden Court for a very special musical performance. This is a fantastic opportunity for young pipers and drummers from the Highlands to experience the thrill of performing live to a full audience.

Royal Highland Show

The band will once again be performing at this year's Royal Highland Show at the Ingliston Show Grounds, Edinburgh, on June 19. The RHS is renowned for being one of the largest agricultural shows in the UK and attracts thousands of people from all over the country and internationally each year. At this year's event the band will be combining both Senior and Development Band members into one band where they will be taking part in street parades and performances throughout the day.

For more information, or to register for any of our events, please check out our website at www.thepipingcentre.co.uk.

The start of the new project has also seen many new players join the ranks of both Development and Senior Bands. I would like to officially welcome each of you on board and hope that you all enjoy the experience of being a part of this fantastic project. ●



Members of the NYPBoS Senior Band performing at the Musselburgh concert in 2014.

Robbie performing a solo at the NYPBoS concert in the Armadillo, Glasgow in 2013 — only four years after he started learning the chanter!

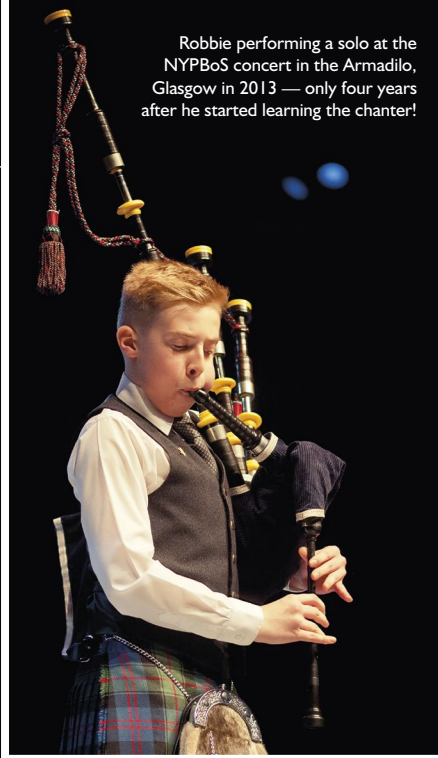


Photo: John Slavin @ designfolk.com

Q. What is the secret of your success?

Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect means practice.

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

I love the uniform my band currently have. We helped to design the tartan a couple of years ago.

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

Give it a bash and do not give up! I remember I got my second tune *Teribus*, couldn't play the throw on Ds and wanted to stop learning. But I never gave up. If you want something so much, you're always going to find a way to accomplish and enjoy it.

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

If anything, I always wear a pair of socks under my kilt socks.

Q. Who is your pipe idol?

Chris Armstrong.

Q. What are your interests outside of piping?

I am extremely interested in engineering. Particularly behind the pipes. How things work and different aspects you can change to create and get a result out of something.

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

I would like to go down some sort of engineering route but not sure what type. Perhaps civil or chemical.

Q. What other music do you like?

Love a good old bit of club classics. Mostly pipe and folk music on my phone though.

Q. Who are your heroes?

Has to be my auntie Julie. She's the one who started this whole wild adventure off.

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

Yes I enjoy playing multiple sports. I follow my home town football team — Falkirk.

Q. Do you prefer sweet or savoury?

Has to be sweet. Can't beat a cake of chocolate. ●





How to warm up your pipes before performing

(and what to do if you can't warm up)

SOMETIMES it seems that we pipers are constantly warming up. Warming up the fingers, warming up the drones, going over tunes in our head, etc. Other musicians seem to be able to pick up their instrument and just play, so why do we pipers need so long to get our fingers and instrument ready to perform? This article focuses on what is really going on during that warm-up session, provides some tips for speeding up the process, and gives some suggestions for what you can do if you need to perform with little or no warm-up.

If you hang around a piping competition or some other gathering of pipers, you'll usually see pipers involved in a wide range of activities as they get ready to play. Some of those activities can be avoided or streamlined so you can warm up just enough to get your instrument and fingers ready but not too much so your pipes get wet or you get tired.

Here are a few things to consider when planning your successful warm-up:

Maintain your instrument. I strive to keep my pipes in top condition all year round. When it comes to performance day, you'll want them to be 100%. In the days leading up to your performance, make sure your reeds are in good condition, your bag is airtight, your tape is fresh and your joints are all tight. On performance day, you want to get warmed up and play — and not be scrambling to make repairs.

Warm up your fingers. Get your fingers and hands ready with some stretches or finger exercises. Resist the temptation to get the pipes out and just start playing cold. Take five minutes to get your hands loose and get the blood flowing with some simple hand exercises. YouTube has many great hand warm-up exercises.

Warmth = Higher Pitch. Before you start play, your instrument and reeds are cold. As you play, the warmth from your breath and from your body will warm up the instrument and the pitch will start to rise. This is normal and to be expected. With good reeds, good pipes and steady blowing, eventually the rising pitch will start to level off and the pitch will stabilise. The key is to know how long your pipes typically take to warm up to this stable pitch.

Lick appropriately. Licking gives the reed some moisture. Licking can help speed up the warm-up process, particularly if your reed is quite dry. You might not want to lick your reed if it has been well played (very recently), or if you live in a damp climate, or if you use a reed humidifier (like the Pipers Pal Reed Protector).

Pinch appropriately. Pinching your chanter reed — gently 4-10 times — can raise the pitch of reed, make it easier to blow, and speed up the warm-up process. Overpinching can make the reed too easy and can permanently damage the reed. Pinch gently.

Control your moisture. After your pipes have warmed up and stabilised, and as you continue to play, the moisture from your breath will start to build up inside your pipes. Moisture will tend to make your chanter reed flatten off. Moisture on the drone reeds will lead to instability. An effective system, such as a tube and/or canister, will extend the warm and dry playing phase of your instrument — which means a longer period to enjoy stable tone.

Tune quickly. Often pipers take too long to tune their pipes. Practice at home to get your drones as close as you can in 60 seconds or less. Taking too long can lead to frustration and fatigue. Remember: great tone is never created on the day of the performance. Great tone is built over the months, weeks and days leading up to a performance. Don't make the mistake of avoiding your tone issues until performance day.

Don't over-practice. Performance day isn't the time to practice. If you feel you need many reps of your performance tunes, or if you feel you need an extended warm-up routine, you might not be fully prepared. Leading up to a competition or performance, test your level of readiness by playing through your performance tunes with little or no warm-up. You might discover what many recording studio musicians have learned through experience: often the best performances are in the first few takes. After that the performances can start to fade in sharpness and energy.

Use a tuner. Even if you are comfortable tuning your drones and chanter by ear, you might learn some interesting information if you simply measure the pitch of your Low A when you first start to play and again when your pipes are fully warmed up. The length of time it takes your pipes to achieve that stable playing pitch depends on lots of factors, but you might be surprised at either how long or how quickly your pipes warm up and stabilise.

I measured the pitch of my pipes using an electronic tuner app and plotted the pitch vs. time. I was actually surprised to learn that my chanter pitch was basically fully warmed up by about 20 minutes of playing. Before looking at this data, I thought it was closer to 30 or more minutes.

Tuning up when cold

What about those situations when you must play with little or no warm-up or if you may warm up but then wait to perform?

As pipers, we often get the chance to perform at ceremonial occasions such as weddings, funerals or other formal events. Due to the loudness of our instrument, it's often impossible to tune up anywhere near the performance venue. Other times, you can tune up but then you must wait for a long time to actually perform. What to do? Here's what I do:

I try to predict how long I will have to wait in

between warming up and performing. If it is longer than 15 minutes of waiting, it means I'll be performing cold. So, as I result I need to try to set up my pipes so that they are in tune when cold. So, I'll blow up and with no warm-up, tune the drones so they are in tune with each other and with Low A. I try to do this in under 60 seconds. Then I put my pipes down. That's it. If I play any longer before tuning, I'll be tuning the pipes up in a warm condition, and then after waiting to play they'll be cold and way out of tune. If I'm going to be playing outside or in a place colder than where I'm tuning up, I might even tune the drones a little bit higher on the pin (i.e. flatter) to compensate for the fact that colder conditions mean the chanter pitch will be flatter in pitch too.

When it comes time to play, I'll give my chanter reed a few small pinches to quickly warm it up and ease it up. I'll leave the drones as they are. Hopefully, things will be close and the tuning will hold for the length of the performance. Of course, the pipes will be warming up and changing as you play, but usually these performances are just a few minutes in length and there isn't much time for things to move very far out of tune.

If you have a longer performance, such as piping outside a venue as guests arrive or piping intermittently over an extended period (e.g. distant background music) you might even be able to tune your pipes during the performance. The trick is do it quickly with a minimum of starting and stopping, keep your poise and look like you know what you are doing. When you blow up to play, if the drones are close, don't bother tuning, but if they need adjustment do it fast — in 10 seconds or less — and then get on with playing. ●

Jori Chisholm is a successful solo competitor, a member of Simon Fraser University Pipe Band and one of the world's leading bagpipe instructors. If you have specific questions on any bagpipe-related topics, contact Jori through his website BagpipeLessons.com. He started the world's first-ever online piping competition and launched the **BagpipeLessons.com Studio** — online collaborative community with exclusive educational content featuring lessons from some of the world's top pipers. For more info, please visit: studio.bagpipelessons.com

rest from what they could recall with greater clarity. In addition to memory failure, we should consider the possibility that these recompositions were conscious efforts to make the tune better. As military organisation and industrial thinking lay behind the success of the British Empire, admiration for strict regularity in the early 1800s is unsurprising.

Archibald Campbell of Kilberry wrote of Campbell's cycles II–IV, "They are perhaps defective, but there are no data upon which to edit them".¹ This is no longer the case. I presented data in the article "What do 1s and Os mean?" last year (see Issue 71 of this magazine) which lead me to propose an emendation, marked in square brackets in the score below. These extra bars make every cycle fit the same measure—the piper's equivalent of a bardic metre, or a generative pattern that was once conventional but became obscure and archaic as it was superseded by more fashionable musical procedures.

"Sing, damn you, sing!"

THE score below is not for bagpipe, but for voice. The "vocables" are those Iain Dubh MacCrimmon might have used when he was learning to play in the 1730s and 40s. In 1815, Alexander Campbell called them "those sort of syllables by which pipers fix in their memory the themes and variations of the various compositions performed on the bagpipe".² In a recent interview, Ann Spalding recalled a lesson with Bob Brown in about 1966: "We had the book but there was no chanter involved at that point.

Illustration 2. Fundamental correspondence between the settings of Donald MacDonald (1826) and Colin Campbell (c. 1797) begins in the Taoludh. National Library of Scotland. Facsimiles of both settings are available at altpibroch.com/tunes/ps21.

You had to sing it. Now, I was 14 or 15 and I didn't want to sing of course, but he said to me, "Sing, damn you, sing!" So I had to sing with him. You had to sing through the tunes."³

Using your vocal chords makes it easier to develop a strong connection with pibroch. Singing also removes barriers of technique and instrument: if you can sing Auld Lang Syne, then you can sing this tune. I provide a vocal score for two reasons: to increase confidence levels singing Hebridean canntaireachd, and to encourage music educators to give non-pipers an energising introduction to pibroch.

Although it can be exhilarating to accompany a choir with a great highland bagpipe, the key of B flat is rather low, particularly for children. To deliver feel-good factor in schools, I would sing Scottish bagpipe music at a higher pitch, using a C or D drone. Without a drone, the music loses its magic. Uilleann pipe drones are perfect, or an eraser and small weight balanced on the key of an organ or electric keyboard. For anyone who wishes to transpose or tailor this score, a Sibelius file is available at barnabybrown.info/publications.

What happened at Park?

IN Part 1, I presented two accounts of *Blàr na Pàirce* from the perspective of the victors. To put the music in context, I continue here with a 17th-century account from the losing side, Clan Donald, and a 19th-century account by Donald Gregory. Gregory went to considerable lengths to reconcile the work of earlier historians with documents of the period,

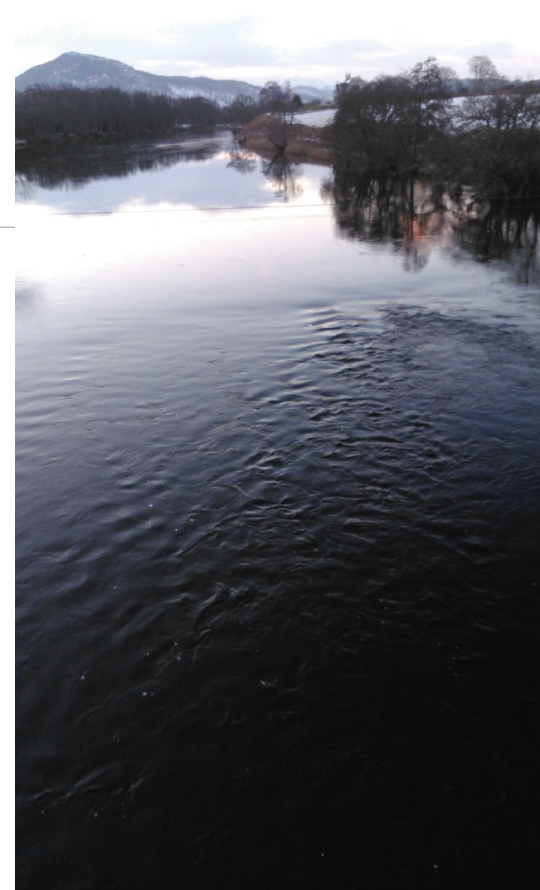


Illustration 3. The river Conon, looking west from Moy Bridge.

such as the 1492 charter reproduced opposite (Illustration 4). The original texts are available at archive.org.

ACCOUNT 3

Said to have been written between 1649 and 1685 by a Skye seannachie, HUGH MACDONALD. 'History of the Macdonalds', ed. J. R. N. McPhail (1914) *Highland Papers*, Vol. 1, pp. 52–56.

AFTER the death of Angus [Og of the Isles], the Islanders, and the rest of the Highlanders, were let loose, and began to shed one another's blood. Although Angus kept them in obedience while he was sole lord over them, yet upon his resignation of his rights to the king, all families, his own as well as others, gave themselves up to all sorts of cruelties, which continued for a long time thereafter. ...

John of the Isles aforesaid had a base son called Gillespig⁴ ... He had a son called Alexander [of Lochalsh] ... by his father's brother's daughter, and finding no clergyman to marry them, he cohabited with her all his lifetime against the consent of all his friends. This Alexander ... after the death of his uncle Angus Ogg, was infetted in [i.e. had legal possession of] his father's lands in Ross, because his father was infetted there before the resignation of his grandfather: and not content with this, he be-thought himself of possessing all Macdonald's lands, or, as he pretended, to hold them in tutelage for Donald Du, the son of Angus Ogg, who was detained prisoner in Inchconnil ...

Alexander, of whom we spoke above, went to Ross with a small body of the Ross people, having Alexander of Glengarry his son-in-law in company. ... many men gathered to him from the Isles and adjacent country. Alexander of Keppoch was going to his aid with 240 men, but young Mackenzie gathered together a number of Ross people, and that of the north, particularly such as held Macdonald's lands, at that time of the king; he had commission to oppose Alexander, in case he aimed to regain Macdonald's lands, and fearing for himself to have those whom he formerly offended as his neighbours, he got all those who then held of the king to join him.

Alexander thought that Mackenzie would by no means venture to attack him, but Mackenzie knowing that if Alexander obtained any kind of superiority or advantage over him, that he would be reduced to a very low condition, became desperate in the attempt, and surprised Alexander and his people while in their beds resting in security and safety as they thought in Park. Their confusion became so great, that more were drowned in the river Connil [i.e. Conon — see Illustration 3] than killed; 43

perished in all, but when Keppoch arrived with his men, he plundered Mackenzie's lands, who at that time kept the fort of the Island Donnen [Eilean Donan]. Alexander MacGillespig [of Lochalsh] joining afterwards, came south to Collonsay to raise more men to recover his lands in Ross, but was, contrary to humanity or justice, killed by John Brayoch MacEan of Ardnamurchan and Alexander Macdonald of Isla and Kintyre, at Oronsay, being then well stricken in years.

ACCOUNT 4

DONALD GREGORY (1836) *History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland*, pp. 55–58.

THE aged Lord of the Isles now resumed possession of his estates, from which he had been for some time excluded by the unnatural violence of his eldest son, Angus [Og]; and, as John, his remaining son, had died without issue, the rank of heir to the lordship was now held by his nephew, Alexander of Lochalsh, son of his brother, Celestine [= Gillespig; see note 4]. Some accounts say, that Lochalsh merely acted

as guardian for the child Donald Dubh, who still remained a captive in Inchconnell; but this is hardly reconcilable with known facts.⁵ He, apparently with the consent and approbation of his uncle, who seems now to have retired from active life, placed himself at the head of the vassals of the Isles, and, with their assistance, endeavoured, as it is said, to recover possession of the Earldom of Ross.

As the districts of Lochalsh, Lochcarron, and Lochbroom, which Alexander inherited from his father, and which he now held as a Crown fief [i.e. on condition of feudal allegiance and service], lay in the Earldom of Ross, his influence there was greater than that of Angus [Og] of the Isles had been. Yet, the only Crown vassal of the Earldom who joined him, was Hugh Rose, younger of Kilravock, whose father, at this time, was Keeper, under the Earl of Huntly, of the Castle of Ardmach, in Ross.⁶

In the year 1491, a large body of Western Highlanders, composed of the Clanranald of Garmoran, the Clanranald of Lochaber, and the Clanchameron, under Alexander of Lochalsh, advanced from Lochaber into Badenoch, where they were joined by the Clanchattan. The latter

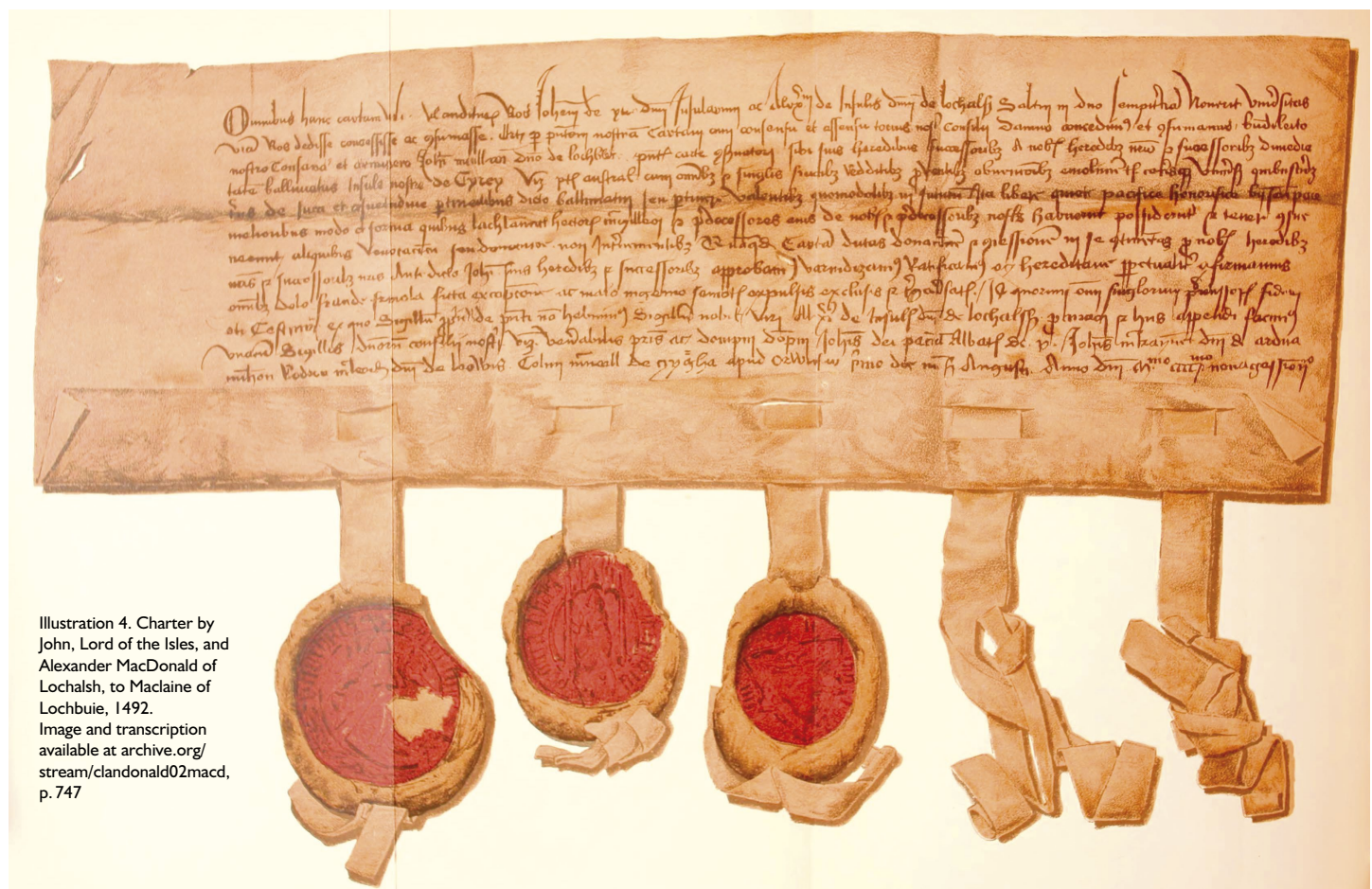


Illustration 4. Charter by John, Lord of the Isles, and Alexander MacDonald of Lochalsh, to Maclaine of Lochbuie, 1492. Image and transcription available at archive.org/stream/clandonald02macd, p. 747

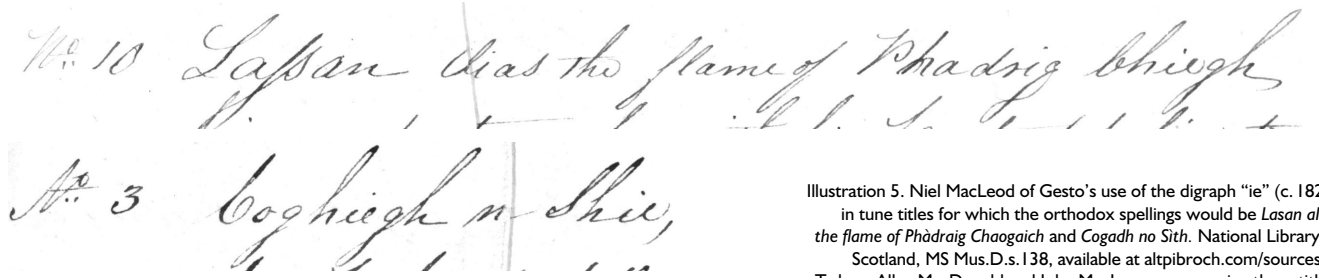


Illustration 5. Niel MacLeod of Gesto's use of the digraph "ie" (c. 1828) in tune titles for which the orthodox spellings would be *Lissan alias the flame of Phàdraig Chaogaich* and *Cogadh na Sith*. National Library of Scotland, MS Mus.D.s.138, available at altpiroch.com/sources/g. To hear Allan MacDonald and John MacInnes pronouncing these titles, visit altpiroch.com/learning/gestos-digraph-ie.

Played by Patrick M. Crimmon, commonly called
LASSAN PHADRIG CHIEGCH.

I hintoradin hiento, hodrova hieinto,

hintoradin ha botrie, oddin drao bodrie, ochin to,
 ha bodrie oddin hintoradin, hodrova ochin to,
 hintoradin, ha bodrie oddin, drao bodrie, ochin to,
 hodrova ochin to, **hievi, hieo, hiento,**

ha bodrie oddin, hintoradin, hodrova ochin to,
 hintoradin, habodrie oddin, drao bodrie, ochin to,
biedrieo drao hodra, biedrieo hoichin dro, ochin to.



Illustration 6. Gesto's use of the digraph "ie" in vocables such as "hieinto," "hievi, hieo," and "biedrieo" (1828). The corresponding excerpts of staff notation are by Angus MacKay (c. 1840). Although Gesto's vocables fit MacKay's fingerings remarkably well, the vocables could represent other fingerings and timings. This tune is now called "MacDonald's Salute, or Duntroon's Salute" (PS 244). Facsimiles of both settings are available at altpiroch.com/tunes/ps244.

tribe, which possessed lands both under the Lord of the Isles and the Earl of Huntly, was led by Farquhar Macintosh, the son and heir of the captain of the Clanchattan. From Badenoch, the confederates marched to Inverness, where Farquhar Macintosh stormed and took the Royal Castle, in which he established a garrison; and where the forces of the Highlanders were probably increased by the arrival of the young Baron of Kilravock and his followers. Proceeding to the north-east, the fertile lands belonging to Sir Alexander Urquhart, the sheriff of Cromarty, were plundered, and a vast booty carried off by the Islanders and their associates.⁷

It is probable that, at this time, Lochalsh had divided his force into two parts, one being sent home with the booty already acquired, whilst with the other he proceeded to Strathconnan, for the purpose of ravaging the lands of the Mackenzies. The latter clan, under their chief Kenneth, having assembled their forces, surprised and routed the invaders, who had encamped near the river Connan, at a place called Park, whence the conflict has received the name of Blairneparck. Alexander of Lochalsh was wounded, and, as some say, taken prisoner in this battle, and his followers were expelled from Ross.⁸

The victors then proceeded to ravage the lands of Ardmanach, and those belonging to William Munro of Foulis — the former, because the young Baron of Kilravock, whose father was governor of that district, had assisted the other party; the latter, probably because Munro, who joined neither party, was suspected of secretly favouring Lochalsh. So many excesses were

committed at this time by the Mackenzies, that the Earl of Huntly, Lieutenant of the North, was compelled (notwithstanding their services in repelling the invasion of the Macdonalds) to act against them as rebels and oppressors of the lieges [i.e. king's subjects].⁹ Meanwhile, the origin of these commotions did not escape the investigation of the government; and the result was, the final forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles, and its annexation to the Crown.

Gesto's unconventional "ie"

IN 2001, when I quizzed Frans Buisman on the historical pronunciation of canntaireachd, he pointed out that Niel MacLeod of Gesto used the digraph "ie" in surprising places in his spelling of two tune titles, "Lassan Phadrig Chiegh" and "Coghiegh nha Shie" (Illustration 5). I then heard Rona Lightfoot using the corresponding Gaelic vowel in her canntaireachd, which she learned orally in South Uist in the 1940s. The fact that both Lightfoot and Gesto used it consistently for E, the fifth above the drone, seemed unlikely to be a coincidence (see Illustration 6). In 2012, I began introducing this vowel into my own canntaireachd and have since come to appreciate the merits of using a neutral vowel for the pitches that blend most smoothly with the drones: low A and E.

Rather than use a digraph for this vowel in the following score — either Gesto's "ie" or the Scottish Gaelic "ao" — I have adopted the letter "u". This is entirely absent from the Campbell Canntaireachd and only rarely used by Gesto. It represents a similar vowel in the English words "burn" and "turn" and is easier to read than the

IPA characters [u] or [ə].

The staff notation is quite loose from the point of view of rhythm and cadences because I prefer a score that does not force one particular interpretation on the reader. The trend since the 1820s has been to fix personal expression in writing, but this has progressively degraded the performer's craft with power being transferred to the editor and the page. A cadence E that is *not* fixed in ink has far more emotion. Perhaps the best way to escape the tyranny of detailed notation is to do as the MacCrimmons did: learn pibroch by singing. ●

NOTES

- 1 The Piobaireachd Society (1932) *Book 4*, p. 116.
- 2 Alexander Campbell, "A Slight Sketch of a Journey made Through Parts of the Highlands and Hebrides," Edinburgh University Library, MS La III.577, p. 47.
- 3 Audio interview recorded 2 December 2012, www.thepipingcentre.co.uk/museum-heritage/noting-the-tradition/interviews/anne-spalding, 19:50–20:14.
- 4 J. R. N. McPhail, provided this note in 1914: "Gillespig is generally known as Celestine of Lochalsh. He was brother and not son of John, Lord of the Isles. For some mysterious reason the names Gillesbuig, Archibald, and Celestine are regarded as synonyms."

Notes 5–9 are reproduced from Gregory's account (1836):

- 5 I allude particularly to a charter dated in 1492, and granted by John, Lord of the Isles, and Alexander de Insulis, Lord of Lochalsh, to John Maclean of Lochbuy, of the office of Bailiary of the south half of the Isle of Tiree; an office which formed no part of the patrimony of the house of Lochalsh. Lochbuy Ch. Chest.
- 6 Writs in Ch. Chest of Kilravock, ad tempus.
- 7 Kilravock Writs and Acts of Lords of Council, ad tempus.
- 8 M.S. Histories of Mackenzies. Sir Robert Gordon's History of the family of Matherland, p. 77. Hugh Macdonald's and Maccurich's M.S.
- 9 Kilravock Writs and Acts of Lords of Council, ad tempus.

Pìobaireachd na Pàirce PS 21

A reconstruction by Barnaby Brown of how this pibroch might have been vocalised in the mid-1700s. For recordings, facsimiles and other resources, see altpibroch.com/tunes/ps21.

In these vocables, “u” is pronounced as in Scottish Gaelic *caogach* — [u:] or [ə], or as in English *fur / fir / the*.

COLIN CAMPBELL'S setting (1797) is here interpreted in the light of other early settings of PS 21, other pibrochs on the same measure, and transcriptions of the canntaireachd of Iain Dubh MacCrimmon (1730/31–1822).

In the third Quarter (Q₃) of cycles II–IV, I have suggested six bars in square brackets. This emendation maintains the measure, which in several respects is analogous to a bardic metre (see “What do 1s and Os mean?” in Issue 71).

Pipers sometimes varied the measure to good musical effect, however, and when they did so, it typically involved a reduction after the Urlar. Campbell's abbreviation of the measure may, therefore, reflect a conscious artistic choice.

I, V & VIII. Urlar Q₁, Q₂

Hiu - ru - rin bedre - u ha - ve hu - ru - ru hu - ru - ru hio - tra bedre - a ho - vu hia - vur - la hia - vur - la

5 hu - bedre ha - ro - din - da hio - ro - ro hio - ro - ro ha - budru ve - a ho - din - da - o hiu - ru - rin hiu - ru - rin

9 ha - budru ve - u ha - vu ho - ve hia - vur - la hia - vur - la ho - tra vu - a hio - ro - ro

12 ha - budru ve - u hia - vur - la hu - bedre vi - u ha - budru ve - a ho - tra vu - a hio - ro - ro

15 ha - budru ve - a hu - bedre vi - u he - u vi - u hia - vur - la hu - bedre vi - u ha - budru ve - a

18 ho - tra vu - a hio - ro - ro ha - o ha - vu hia - vur - la hu - a hu - ve hiu - ru - ru

21 he - u he - vi hu - a hu - ve ha - o ha - vu hia - vur - la hu - a hu - ve ha - o ha - vu

24 ho - din ho - tra hio - ro - ro ha - vu ha - ve ho - va ho - vu hin - du ho - va hiu - ru - rin. **Fine**

27 II. Urlar Dùbailte Q₁, Q₂



Hiu - ru-rin he - u-tra hu - ru-ru hu-chio ha-budru he-udru hia - vur-la ha - chin



hu-bedre ha - ro-din hio-ro-ro ho-chin ha-budru he-odro hiu - ru-rin hin-dun he-udru ha-chin



[ho - tra hio - din ha-budru ha - chin hu-bedre ha - ro-din ho - tra hio - din



ho - tra mbudri - e hu-vedre hu - chin] he-udru hu-odro ha - ro-din hio - din



ha-budru ha - chin hu-vedre hu - chin he - udru vi - udru he - udru ha - chin



hu-vedre ha - ro-din ho - tra hio - dim bi-udru hu-odro ha-odro hin - dun

52 III. Taoludh Singilte Q₁, Q₂



Hin - dir-it he - dir-it ha - dir-it ha - chin ho - dir-it he - dir-it hu - dir-it hu - chin



he - dir-it he - dir-it ha - dir-it ha-chin ho - dir-it ha - dir-it he - dir-it hin-dun he - dir-it hu-chin



[ha - dru - n ha - chin hu-dre - n hu - chin he - dir-it hu - dir-it ha - dru - n ha - chin



ho - dir-it ha - dir-it he - dri - n hu - chin] he - dir-it hu - dir-it ha - dru - n ha - chin

69 Q_4

hu-dre - n hu - chin ha-dru - n ha - chin ho-dri - n he-dri - n hu-dre - n hu - chin

73

he-dri - n hu-dre - n ha-dru - n ha - chin hu-dre - n ha-dru - n ho - dir-it hin - dun

77 IV. Taoludh Dùbailte Q_1, Q_2

Hin-dir-it he-dir-it ha-dir-it ha-dir-it ho-dir-it he-dir-it hu-dir-it hu-dir-it he-dir-it he-dir-it

82

ha - dir-it ha - dir-it ho - dir-it ha - dir-it he - dir-it hin - dir-it he - dir-it hu - dir-it

86 Q_3

[ha-dru - n ha - dir-it hu-dre - n hu - dir-it he - dir-it hu - dir-it ha-dru - n ha - dir-it

90

ho - dir-it ha - dir-it he-dri - n hu - dir-it] he - dir-it hu - dir-it ha-dru - n ha - dir-it

94 Q_4

hu-dre - n hu - dir-it ha-dru - n ha - dir-it ho-dri - n he-dri - n hu-dre - n hu - dir-it

98 D.C.

he-dri - n hu-dre - n ha-dru - n ha - dir-it hu-dre - n ha-dru - n ho - dir-it hin-dro - un

VI. Crunludh Singilte Q_1, Q_2

[Hin - da-tri he - da-tri ha - da-tri ha - chin ho - da-tri he - da-tri hu - da-tri hu - chin

he - da-tri he - da-tri ha - da-tri ha - chin ho - da-tri ha - da-tri he - da-tri hin - dun] *Etc.**

* Continue reading from bar 60, but replace dirit with datri.

by Stuart Curnow

THE BIG MUSIC SOCIETY

Prepare to be converted

THE ancient music of the Great Highland Bagpipe: The Big Music, Ceol Mor or Pibroch, this music engenders much debate. From the culture of competition and allegations of strictures placed upon it by an overly controlling Society, to its nuance of weight and touch and complexity of movements; nothing about piobaireachd is easy. Complexity and nuance, folklore and history, these all permeate the body and soul of piobaireachd. Competition careers have been made with one performance and broken with another. Odes to it have been penned and the odd poisonous review for good measure.

It will move some to tears and drive others to distraction.

Piobaireachd has been eulogised, praised, mocked and fought over; but despite these, one thing remains: The big music has both power and beauty.





Much of what has been said about this marvellous music over the past 100 years seems to have come from an entrenched position. Military history often shows that while an entrenched position may be more easily defended, it is also harder to advance from. Over the last decade, however, there has been a perceptible shift, a feeling of more openness. People are listening to the ideas espoused by Allan MacDonald with fresh ears and open hearts. Pipe bands are playing *Ceòl Mòr*, some are even competing with it. Breabach have been weaving the big music into the popular folk music realm all over the world. Albums of piobaireachd featuring other instruments, while not common place, are now released with equanimity... and now, the Big Music Society has seemingly breached the battlements of tradition again; and live on stage, to a worldwide audience.

An excellent proponent of piobaireachd with a solid record in competition, John Mulhearn's 2010 Celtic Connections departure from the accepted presentation of the music was warmly received by critics and audiences alike.

From that start point, John and Calum MacCrimmon have worked this idea together. First meeting as teenagers at a summer school run by John D. Burgess and Norman Gillies at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, they have built their music upon an openness to new ideas which add to the integrity of the old. They have contributed



Photos: John Savin@designfolk.com

to the other's projects and acted as a sounding board across several other projects. Calum contributed whistle to John's track *No More* in 2013, and John was involved in Calum's commission for the BBC, *When the Birds Migrate*.

The Big Music Society (Version 1.0) was an experiment, as well as an expression of love for the music. Would the boldness of John's vision lead some to a fresh take on piobaireachd; to see it as a vehicle for performance, not just competition? The *Big Music Society* in 2009 presented a 'freeform' version of the music to an enthusiastic

and open-minded audience. The nature of this first presentation was jazz-like: unstructured and emotive. A success, albeit a short lived one, it gave notice of things to come. As with his debut CD *The Extraordinary Little Cough*, John Mulhearn was looking at the old music in a new way. He and Calum MacCrimmon would soon re-boot the experiment of 2009.

And the new incarnation of *The Big Music Society* performed at The National Piping Centre in Glasgow on March 7 with the concert live-streamed for fans around the world.



John explained: “The original idea to arrange piobaireachd for an ensemble — in order to broaden its appeal and to celebrate the pieces in a way you can’t on the competition platform — was conceived in 2009, culminating in a performance at Celtic Connections in January 2010.

“I had wanted to create a sort of collective with the view of exchanging ideas and building arrangements as an ensemble but ultimately with me as creative director. With the pressure of the upcoming gig, and the logistic difficulties in working collaboratively on something so ambitious (along with my own inexperience), the approach didn’t work and I ended doing the vast majority of the writing and arrangement, which was a great learning experience.”

Five years passed, and with their passion for *The Big Music Society* undimmed, John and Calum looked to take the second iteration of it to a very successful place. With Calum fast becoming one of the leaders in the production of cutting edge Scottish folk music and the skill and vision of John with piobaireachd, their musical relationship is blossoming.

This project, one of their boldest, also secured funding from Enterprise Music Scotland, one of the hurdles they found difficult to overcome in the first generation of BMS, and it received support from The Piobaireachd Society. Yes, The Piobaireachd Society.

‘It was great to rehearse with Murray. He expressed the way he felt the music to us through his body language and singing — it made a lot more sense than just listening to a recording’

The age-old conflict between the modern and the establishment is the elephant in the room when it comes to piobaireachd. You may suspect that The Piobaireachd Society might not be supportive of a change to the treatment of an almost sacred canon of music and that the two sides of the musical coin might never meet.

You might be wrong.

Society president Dr Jack Taylor spoke of how they deliberated over what could be seen as a departure from the norm and how the involvement of one of the world’s most successful solo pipers — Murray Henderson — was a crucial consideration.

Jack said: “The decision to support the concert was made by the General Committee of the Piobaireachd Society. I think there were eight at the meeting and there was a fair bit of discussion, both for and against. Our anxiety was that the integrity of the music was not compromised, and Murray’s participation was very reassuring to us in that respect. And what he did added to that reassurance.”

John is adamant that the aims of *The Big Music Society* are not about opposing philosophies at all.

He said: “We’re looking at it as part of a progression, albeit long overdue. The performance happened as a result of funding from Enterprise Music Scotland. The proposal we put forward was to invite master piobaireachd players to collaborate with an ensemble.

“Murray Henderson was the first person we approached, around late August 2014. Having seen his performance of *Catherine’s Lament* at the Inveraray concert a couple of years ago I was confident that he’d be interested. I emailed him late in August last year, and he was in. Murray’s involvement really feels like an ‘official endorsement’ of our vision. His performance was really exciting in the way in which the strings almost acted as extra arms that he doesn’t have.

“James Lindsay’s string arrangements were based on Murray’s thoughts and the intention was to make the strings an extension of Murray himself and his pipe.”

As bold as the idea may seem, in the talented hands of Murray and James (bass player

extraordinaire from Breabach and 2014 winner of The Martyn Bennett Prize for new composition), you could hardly have chosen better. The talent in the string ensemble was as good as they come. Megan Henderson (fiddle), Mhairi Mackinnon (fiddle), Susan Appelbe (cello) and James (double bass) are excellent musicians and they would need to be. There was time for only a few practices to interpret not one, but two dramatic and different musical interpretations of piobaireachd.

James was a little apprehensive at first. He said: “I had worked on the piobaireachd arrangement in Breabach (particularly on *Proud to Play a Pipe* from our album *Ùrlar*) but I had never done anything on this scale. It was especially intimidating to be arranging for such highly esteemed pipers as Murray and Duncan Grant. I do not come from a piping background, so this was going to be a massive learning curve for me.

“In the early stages, I felt fortunate John and Calum were on hand to guide me, especially on ornamentation and where the strong and weak beats fell. Murray described the emotions he felt in the music and expressed how he wished the strings could be utilised to draw out these feelings. *Who or what had it been written for? What was the background to the piece?* Gaining a deeper understanding of the music provided me the inspiration I needed.

“*Lament for Hugh* has a particularly dark and sombre tone and allows the strings a wide range of dynamics to really tug at the heart. I worked on fairly dramatic, tense string sounds and brought this to Murray.

“Throwing ideas back and forward, it was great to rehearse with Murray. He expressed the way he felt the music to us through his body language and singing — it made a lot more sense than just listening to a recording. It was during the rehearsal that we felt the *Ùrlar* doubling could be handled a lighter touch, and through this, it became sadder — a ‘crying variation’ as Murray calls it.

“This allowed me to open up some interesting new harmonic ideas while still retaining the sadness from the previous movements. It’s



strange, but I actually found a bit of a Beatles influence floating into this section, too.”

Lament for Hugh, one of Murray’s favourite piobaireachds, was a powerful performance across all levels. Brilliant piping combined with a wonderful sympathy from the strings — no one voice, but a conversation between the two. The opening chords of *Lord Lovat’s Lament*, with some intriguing counterpoints from James Lindsay’s bass wove an intriguing spell. When John joined Murray on the pipes half way through the performance, through to the Taorluath variation, it gave voice to a lovely tension and release.

The build up to the return to the ground, almost a salute to the ideas that brought forth *The Big Music Society*, three pipers — John, Murray and Calum — brought the piece home with the strings giving a true rounding out of the beauty of piobaireachd structure. If there was ever any doubt this idea would work it was dispelled here.

At the end of the piece, the look of accomplishment on the face of Murray Henderson said it all. Even before the echo of the last note faded from the stage, he saluted his fellow performers. If Murray knew it was a brilliant success, nobody else was left in any doubt either.

The power of the start of *Cabar Feidh gu Brath* was matched by the perfect balance of the string arrangement. Simply breathtaking. Where piobaireachd is derided as sounding ‘all the same’, this performance should be a clarion call. Texture and shade through brilliant vision and technical mastery.

Duncan Grant was asked to take the direction of the second half of the performance.

John explained “His approach was completely different. He wrote the arrangements

himself with some tweaks by James, also giving leeway to the strings to express the music in a way that felt natural to them. I was doing the piping for his performance.

“His arrangements were more challenging as they developed counter melodies and didn’t always treat the pipes as the ‘lead’ instrument, more as a rhythmic element of the ensemble which I felt was really fresh and exciting.”

Megan Henderson’s beautiful touch on the opening strains of *Too long in this Condition* set the scene for a striking rendition with John on the pipes. The echo that came through at several periods, especially when Duncan brought in a superbly balanced electronic counterpoint, cast a mournful but beautiful veil over the performance, to be repeated by cello and double bass in the variation. It was a nine-minute story of wonder.

Jack agreed: “I’d hoped that it would showcase the melodic attraction of piobaireachd and it certainly did that. In addition it brought out implied emotions and dynamics very well. It adds and it subtracts, I think. It adds colour, harmony, dynamics, mood and wider appeal. It subtracts the beauty of the lone pipe sound, the sound of chanter against drone, the musical and technical subtleties, what I would call the stillness of the music. I’m personally not a great fan of electronic music, or even amplification, and while I can’t rave about it, it certainly was a very good concert.

“Yet, curiously, I found that Duncan Grant’s treatment, where he used synthesiser and counter-melodies as well as the strings, was maybe more exciting than Murray’s with his beautifully arranged harmonies, drone effects and dynamics using strings only.”

The *Earl of Ross* began in a quite traditional

way and the experienced piobaireachd player or listener would have appreciated that approach... until the ‘finale’. There, the strings almost took over and drove the piece home, a beautiful counterpoint to a wonderful tune.

Canntaireachd should never be far from the minds of the piper, the best players will always re-inforce that. *The Earl of Seaforth* started in Canntaireachd, then extended with strings and the finesse of Duncan on the keyboard, reminiscent of a button keyed melodeon around a peat fire. This set the mind to a rhythm that brought language to the music, something espoused by Allan MacDonald consistently and reaffirmed in the music of *Breabach* and several of John’s own side projects. Finishing with John on the pipes and the coup de grace of the strings, this piece showed just how versatile *The Big Music Society* are now, and will be in the future.

John was keen to stress that *The Big Music Society* are not a band.

He said: “It’s a vehicle through which we hope to take the Big Music, piobaireachd, to wider audiences through commissioning work, programming, promoting innovative shows, teaching and generating related online content.”

We are all the sum of our parts, and gather inspiration from many quarters and it’s the same with John.

He said: “It would be fair to say that a number of people and things have influenced what we’re trying to do — we share some of these, as well as having our own — so pinpointing one particular influence isn’t really possible.

“Obviously, musically I’ve been influenced by a wide range of things, but it’s quite easy to point to Allan MacDonald and Martyn Bennett as forebears in arranging piobaireachd for non-piping audiences. More importantly though,



Photo: John Slavin@designfolk.com

solo piping competitions have influenced this approach. As an active competing piper I'm constantly reminded of how little we do to make our amazing heritage accessible. Not that I believe in diluting music in order to make it palatable but I think the format in which we perform in competition often actively discourages engagement."

Could a Lorient Festival crowd of thousands going from hushed awe to rapturous applause for a Patrick Molard performance be replicated in Scotland? John and Jack agree there is change happening and there is room for piobaireachd across a range of performance genres.

John said: "Is there a change that we're able to do something like this show with the people we had involved? I would suggest that there is. I think people are ready. Pipers today have far broader tastes than in the past. Look at the developments in popular music in the last 50 years. Your average piper today will listen to a much wider range of music than the average piper in 1965. That's got to affect how they see the development of the Big Music.

Jack added: "I find it very acceptable that The Piobaireachd Society is involved with

this 'cross-over' music platform. The reaction of audiences to it in this environment always seems positive. I read that in the *Piping Today* review of Celtic Connections, and I have seen it with pipe bands in concert. The four pipers playing *Caber Feidh Gu Brath* at the big concert in Winter Storm this year was the only item given a standing ovation.

"The support given by the Society was because we saw the concert as being in line with our broad aim of promoting piobaireachd. I would say that I think the Society is viewed pretty positively by most people in piping nowadays. But then I would say that, wouldn't I? As for there still being a sense of elitism, of control? I think that is much less now... and competition? Yes it is still the backbone of piobaireachd, and that, I think, is a pity."

The Bonnie Rideout fiddle piobaireachd album and performance at Allan Macdonald and Margaret Stewart's concert *Battle Lines to Bar Lines* at *Piping Live!* 2009 was, according to John "edge of the seat stuff" and this performance was in the same mould whether you were in the audience or, like me, watching from 12,000 miles away. The reach of the music is

no longer hampered by distance; nor should it be hampered by antiquated attitudes and fear of change.

John and Calum's love for this music is open and honest, as is their respect for what *The Big Music Society* musicians were able to achieve.

John said: "The reach and development of this ancient music is significant. A milestone is needed for the development of modern piobaireachd performance, and what has been achieved could not have gone much better from our perspective."

In embracing both of avenues of piobaireachd, John and Calum may have helped achieve a form of cultural détente. The French word meaning '*the easing of hostility or strained relations*' applies as easily to piobaireachd as to international politics. What was achieved by bringing Murray Henderson and Duncan Grant together with a brilliant string ensemble comes close to miraculous — a respectful deviation from the beautiful ubiquity of the solo bagpipe, giving greater breadth to the music and bringing understanding and shared purpose to different sides of the same coin. *Détente* indeed. ●

Reviews

Bagpiper Backpack

IF the Bagpiper Flight Case was the Rolls Royce of piping cases, (and I think it was), then the Bagpiper Backpack is the Porsche.

Initially, I was a little taken aback by the reduction in size and wondered how the difference would affect the stowage and access. It doesn't. The case is light, easy to use, robust and practical. The drones are still dismantled in the same way — the bag, blow pipe, stocks and bottom joints still fit in the case with ease.

I stored a set up with synthetic bag and drying system, 2 chanters in protective tubes and a Low F whistle with ease in the large section, a practice chanter, tuner, iPad, and phone in the top section).

The initial feel is that of its big brother: well-built, solid, and more importantly, well balanced. The two stage telescopic handle extends and retracts easily and is hidden well internally. The rear flap that exposes the shoulder straps (the straps are easy to clip on and adjust and



easy to stow) and the flap forms lumbar / lower back support when worn as a backpack. When walking or on a bike, I found the case well balanced on my back. The internal mechanisms of the handle and wheels are not even felt when using as a backpack. In trolley mode, the wheels are excellent and widely spaced enough to give stability.

The protection afforded the drones when packed, while not as 'bomb-proof' as the original Bagpiper Flight Case, still provide more than adequate protection due to the adjustable padded internal pockets in the case lid. The accessories pouch in the front has ample room for everything you'd carry as before (hip flask of Islay single malt included, although, I suspect it was designed for frivolous things like iPads, spare reeds and tuners), much the same as previously designed. There is a hinge system on the front compartment preventing the contents from spilling out when opened upright on its wheels. Nice.

All in all, I can't find fault. It almost forces you to take your pipes everywhere. That's fine if you play like the front rank of FMM but may wear thin with your friends if you play like me.

Available in the usual high class piping establishments for around £70.00 ● BY STUART CURNOW



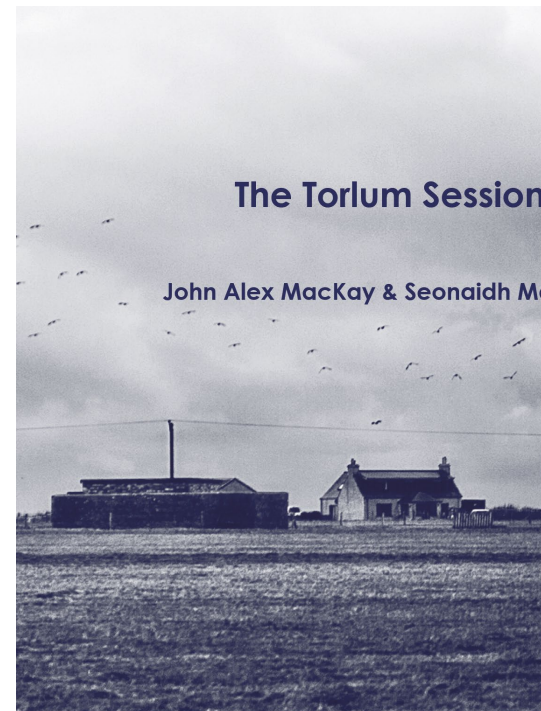
JOHN ALEX MacKAY & SEONAI DH MacINTYRE

The Torlum Sessions

BAGHDUBH01

www.seonaidhmacintyre.com

BENBECULA has a reputation for strange goings-on. Everything from missile launchers to maudlin laments, the Dark Island is famous. Music too: pipers, accordionists, singers, sometimes all three at the same time.



Iain McLachlan was of course one of the first to popularise pipe and accordion duets, recording tunes on the "goose", the traditional Hebridean combination of a practice chanter and a pipe bag. A few years on from his 1987 release of *An Island Heritage*, the practice of playing pipes with accordion is still going strong on Benbecula, at least in the southwestern hamlet of Torlum. John Alex MacKay hosts storming sessions, with or without gales howling round the house, and this CD presents just such a house party for a wider public.

John Alex himself plays piano accordion, melodeon, harmonica, and even sings a bit. His nephew Seonaidh MacIntyre plays big pipes and smallpipes, whistles and jaw harp, as well as singing along. This pair are joined by several other fine musicians: Allan Henderson, Bill Hart, Angus MacPhail, Even Henderson, Ross Wilson, Alec Dalgligh and Andrew MacPherson. It all adds up to an impressive session indeed. If it's hard to find this CD in the shops, google *The Torlum Sessions* for online possibilities.

An accordion and low whistle duet starts proceedings, one of John Alex's own tunes *Memories of Calum* which would fit on the pipes at a pinch, followed by two classic marches *The Shores of Loch Bee* and *Flett from Flotta* with smallpipes and fiddles, banjo and

guitar, and enough drums to keep the pipe band fans happy. For a home recording, the mixing is first rate and the sound quality is superb.

Switching to melodeon, I think, for a couple of Irish jigs and a Ronnie Cooper reel, John Alex shows versatility which is matched by Seonaidh on whistle and the old dental resonator. The first of two Gaelic songs from John Alex is strongly backed on keyboards, and followed by a low whistle air from Seonaidh which leads into a pair of rattling reels, one by Donald MacLeod and the other by John Morris Rankin of Cape Breton, all on low whistle here with crisp fingering and fancy tonguing too.

The Gaels are evident in a set of delightful waltzes, great Hebridean melodies with an old fashioned ring to them, and lovely fiddle harmonies. Western Isles piping is rightly celebrated with tunes by Allan MacDonald, Lachlan Bàn MacCormick and others, a Seonaidh showpiece on the GHB in competition style.

More Gaelic waltzes, another melodeon set, and the crowd-pleasing song *Mo Nighean Donn* bring us to the final track: what else but a set of 2/4 marches, those peculiarly Scottish tunes, played at island dancing speed? Ending with the matchless *Pipe Major Willie Gray's Farewell to the Glasgow Police*, this recording of *The Torlum Sessions* disappears into a stunning Hebridean sunset, pipes and accordions blazing. ● BY ALEX MONAGHAN



with *Scotland the Brave*, but it's the most elaborate rendition you're ever likely to hear.

The same is true for a number of other traditional staples. A tweak of time signature combines with tasteful and sympathetic guitar, keyboard, drums and accordion accompaniment to create a truly novel version of *Highland Cathedral*, a rare achievement given the tune's enduring popularity.

Bucking the download trend, WAPOL have clearly designed the album to be listened to in its entirety, as several tracks segue smoothly into each other. The most effective is the transition from *Flower of Scotland* into the wonderfully atmospheric *The Dark Island*, where the Highland pipe harmonies and delicate keyboards wring all the musicality possible out of the famous air.

As well as the tourist classics, there are a few sets of pipe tunes for those looking to hear what the back-to-back Grade I Australian Champions can do. While some listeners may find the twee keyboard riffs of the

2/4 ceilidh marches grating, pipers and drummers will more likely enjoy the jig and reel sets, which include the likes of the *Atholl Highlanders*, *The Jig Runrig* and *Richard Dwyer's Reel*.

However, it should not be taken as an insult to the pipe band that the best tracks on *Homeland* have no Highland pipes on them at all. *The Skye Boat Song* and *Wild Mountain Thyme* work wonderfully on accordion and keyboard respectively, but the standout track of the album is the Burns song *Now Westlin' Winds*. The female vocalist, Jane Jackson, is superb, and her ethereal voice combines with a chilling cello-like effect that haunts the listener from start to finish.

While *Homeland* is not meant for pipers and drummers, there is plenty on the album for them to enjoy. It should go down very well with its target audience, and will hopefully find its way onto the sound systems of Royal Mile tourist shops in short order. Red Hot Chilli Pipers, beware. ● BY STUART MILNE

WESTERN AUSTRALIA POLICE PIPE BAND

Homeland
WAPOLPB11

A QUICK YouTube search will tell you Western Australia Police Pipe Band (WAPOL) are much more than just a competition band. They have a busy calendar of concerts, public engagement events and TV appearances to promote the image of the force in its home state and elsewhere. To further achieve this the band have long been prolific recorders, producing albums for both the serious piping/drumming market and the wider public.

The album cover and the track listing shows *Homeland* is targeted squarely at the latter. The likes of *Flower of Scotland*, *Highland Cathedral* and that Paul McCartney song conjure up images of shortbread tins and souvenir shops, but the album is much more sophisticated than that.

WAPOL's website shows many of its members to be multi-instrumentalists, and their talents are put to the fullest possible use with extensive backing arrangements on every track. Yes, *Homeland* begins

Pipes & Sticks on Route 66

THIS film almost never happened.

Many pipers and drummers will remember John McDonald from his documentary *On the Day*, which chronicled the formation of the Spirit of Scotland Pipe Band to compete at the 2008 World Pipe Band Championships.

When the director found out cast members Willie McCallum and Angus MacColl would be joining Stuart Liddell, Jim Kilpatrick MBE and Mike Cole on a workshop and concert tour of the iconic US Route 66 in the spring of 2012, he was determined to record the experience.

However, the Kickstarter campaign to get the film off the ground failed, and McDonald was forced to spend much of his own money to allow his film crew to record the epic journey. Finally, after three years of fundraising to get the footage edited and the final product prepared for release, *Pipes & Sticks on Route 66* is ready for the world to see.

The film begins in bass drummer Mike Cole's native Chicago, as the group assemble at the signpost marking the beginning of the historic highway. While there is no explanation as to how the trip came about,

the director solidly establishes the main characters whose journey we will share. Through an extended sequence of the band's first concert we are introduced in turn to the five musicians, featuring some rare and occasionally embarrassing photos from their younger years (e.g. Stuart Liddell in a baby pram).

There is a lot to see along the 2,451 miles of Route 66 from Chicago to Santa Monica, California, and the filmmakers do their best to give the viewer a flavour of as many different settings as possible. At times the checklist of towns along the Main Street of America flies by with the briefest of cursory glances at each, but now and then more time is given to take in key stops along the way.

In a moving passage Angus plays *Amazing Grace* at the memorial to the 168 people murdered in the Oklahoma City bombing 20 years ago. On several occasions the ensemble join in with Native American music groups, and after discovering a Navajo chant and drum beat in strathspey timing, Willie finds one of the most picturesque spots for a piobaireachd imaginable — Monument Valley, Utah.

Every story needs an element of conflict, and just

when the film is in danger of becoming an everything-is-awesome roadtrip bromance, a crisis presents itself in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the form of a dodgy parking meter, a towed band vehicle and a collection facility that won't open for a couple of days. McDonald does an excellent job of capturing the band's discovery of the conundrum live on camera, and you can feel the musicians' smug satisfaction as they watch the report of their plight on television after Willie phones up the local station with every journalist's favourite sentence: "We've got a news story for you."

More often than running into trouble, the group get to know some of the custodians of Route 66, who have become almost as iconic as the landmarks along the Mother Road itself. They include a man with more than 100 Route 66 tattoos, Dean "Crazy Legs" Walker, and the delightful barber Angel Delgadillo, still offering straight-edge razor shaves and wisecracks aplenty at the age of 85.

While pipers and drummers will lap up the wonderfully entertaining concert performances, many of the film's standout sequences capture much more intimate moments along the way. The best of these is a Stuart/Angus duet in a theatre dressing room in Buddy Holly's hometown of Lubbock, Texas, as the two gently sing the anti-war ballad *The Green Fields of France* by another legendary singer-songwriter, Scotland's Eric Bogle.



While Spirit of Scotland's finish outside the prize list in 2008 denied *On The Day* a proper ending, *Pipes & Sticks on Route 66* climaxes with a wonderful sequence at journey's end on Santa Monica beach. The end credits shot of the five musicians playing with their bare feet in the Pacific Ocean in front of an orange and purple sunset as porpoises bob playfully in the surf is so perfect you can feel the director quietly fist-pumping off-screen.

Indeed, that final image is the perfect metaphor for the film itself, and the journey its director has gone through to bring it to us. It has been a long, hard and expensive three years for McDonald, but the result is a very high quality and hugely enjoyable product that, if it can pass the crunch test of executive approval, would happily find a home on TV screens in Scotland or the USA. Whether you're watching it for the music or to discover more about an American icon, *Pipes & Sticks on Route 66* offers no shortage of kicks. ●



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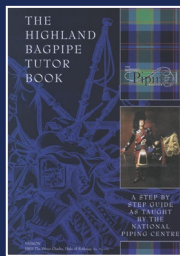
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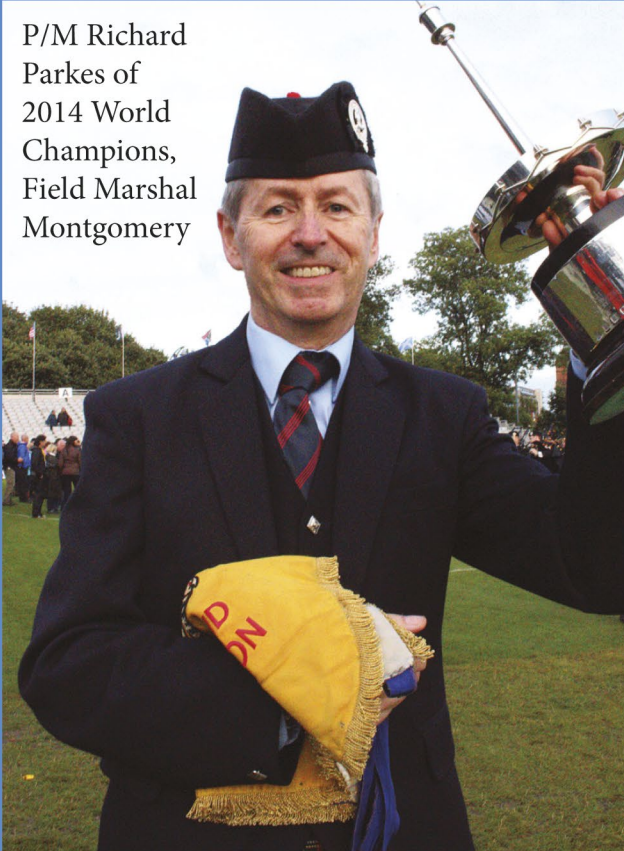
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COMPETITION LEAGUE FOR AMATEUR SOLO PIPERS

Nine questions with David McIntyre



David MacIntyre receiving his medal from Eric Stein, for 2nd place, in the Grade 3, 2/4 March competition at Piping Live!

Q. Where are you from and how old were you when you started piping?

I am originally from Campbeltown, Argyllshire. I started piping at 10 years of age.

Q. How did you get into piping?

My father encouraged me to play. He was friends with Pipe Major Peter McCallum who taught me.

Q. You are one of our more senior CLASP competitors, what is the secret to your piping longevity?

Feeling fit and my love of piping

Q. Have you found CLASP beneficial to your piping?

Yes. The friendly people like Margaret Dunn and Finlay MacDonald certainly encouraged me.

Q. Has piping ever taken a back seat in your life?

Yes. From 1959 until 1979, a period of 20 years, I gave up due to other interests.

THE NATIONAL PIPING CENTRE CLASP RESULTS 2015



The overall winners from The National Piping Centre CLASP 2015: Bianca Kail; Romana Brunner and Bob Low

Overall Grade 1 Winner
Bob Low
Overall Grade 2 Winner
Romana Brunner
Overall Grade 3 Winner
Bianca Kail

Grade 1 - Piobaireachd
1. Bob Low; 2. Stewart Gaudin;
3. Andrew Park
Grade 1 - MSR
1. Susy Klinger; 2. Bob Low;
3. Stephen Whitton
Grade 1 - Hornpipe & Jig
1. Gregor McCulloch; 2. Bob Low;
3. Stewart Gaudin
Grade 2 - Piobaireachd
1. Douglas Maxwell; 2. Michael McGowan; 3. Ian Graham
Grade 2 - 2/4 March
1. Romana Brunner; 2. Con Houlihan; 3. Janette Greenwood
Grade 2 - Strathspey & Reel
1. Romana Brunner; 2. John Campbell; 3. Janette Greenwood
Grade 2 - Jig
1. Colin Brown; 2. Robert Thomson; 3. Bianca Kail
Grade 3 - Piobaireachd
1. George Gordon; 2. James Hanlon; 3. Bianca Kail
Grade 3 - Ground Only
1. Robert Thomson; 2. George Gordon; 3. Bianca Kail
Grade 3 - 2/4 March

1. Colin Brown; 2. Dagmar Pesta;
3. James Hanlon
Grade 3 - Strathspey & Reel
1. James Hanlon; 2. Bianca Kail;
3. Dagmar Pesta
Grade 3 - Jig
1. Colin Brown; 2. Robert Thomson;
3. Bianca Kail

Upcoming CLASP Competitions in 2015

- **Army School of Piping**, Edinburgh
Saturday, June 6, 2015
- **Rosneath Highland Games**, Rosneath
Sunday, July 19, 2015
- **Inveraray Highland Games**, Inveraray
Tuesday, July 21, 2015
- **Piping Live! World Championship CLASP**
August 11 (G3), 12 (G2), 13 (G1), 2015
- **Northern Meeting**
Friday, September 4, 2015
- **Chatsworth Country Fair**
Saturday, September 5, 2015

Q. What do you see as your piping strengths and weaknesses?

My strength I feel is determination to succeed. My weakness is concentration.

Q. Who are your favourite pipers?

The late Pipe Major Donald MacLeod MBE and Pipe L/Sgt Ian Clowe. Present day Willie McCallum, Gordon Walker, Angus McColl, Ian Speirs and Douglas Murray.

Q. What are your piping plans going forward?

To pass on through my tutoring my knowledge and love of piping.

Q. Anything your fellow CLASP competitors do not know about you?

Lots like! Being a proud member of the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards who played at the Coronation of our present Queen Elizabeth. I also took part in 1997 at Earls Court on the occasion of our Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh's Golden Wedding Anniversary 100 Pipers past and present of the Scots Guards.

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Photo: Ryan MacDonald Photography

Bagpipe 999

THERE'S around 1.3 million apps currently available for Android system users and almost the same number for those with iPhones. You don't need me to tell you that there's an app for pretty much any need or task a person might have.

Bored out of your mind? Download *Tiny Wings* and start your little bird a-fluttering over a long road of endlessly amusing hills. Fingers red raw from practice and just not up to keying a note? *Dragon Dictation* is there to the rescue to transcribe your weary voice to text. *RunPee* has to be one of the oddest. This golden app tells you the best time to duck out of a movie to relieve yourself: key in your movie and the snooziest moments, complete with time marks, are offered up for consideration. Now you know the best times to hit the WC. No more rushed whispers of, "What did I miss?" with accompanying blasts of "Be quiet!"

While piping has been slow to find its way to the app world, there are more than 1100 "music" apps in Apple's app store. Just as there are loads of apps that offer up self improvement help, from productivity tips to relationship advice, a *Piping999* app might have a market. Theory, tunes, history, inspiration, advice — *Piping999* could offer any and all of those things. Good advice that inspires is a fairly rare thing so maybe that could be a featured part. But what might that look like?

Honesty is the best policy so I tell you now I have always loved proverbs. Those short and mostly sweet snatches of words that pass along a truth about something or a situation — and usually in a colourful, thought-provoking way. Proverbs can offer great advice; they can remind and guide and help people understand how things go in any number of situations — and any number of places. "If not now, when?" is one I draw on a lot. An old Yiddish proverb, it's a great arse-kicker when you're lazy, procrastinating or especially indecisive.

And for canny counsel of the piping kind, proverbs have great app potential. And since we're talking a bagpipe app, we should look to the Gael for wisdom. The 16th century philosopher Francis Bacon said that the genius, wit and spirit of a nation are discovered by their proverbs. And when it comes to pansophy the Scots Gael is no different from his Yiddish speaking brethren: we have a fount of reference material.

The 19th century Skye-born lawyer Alexander Nicolson saw his way to collecting about 4000 Gaelic proverbs and published them in 1881. He wasn't alone among those with time on their hands, but his are among those included here. So, here we go, a few short sentences of great wisdom. Click on the icon, breathe easy, help is at hand:



Is fheàrr teicheadh math na droch fhuireach.

Better a good retreat than a bad stand.

This is all about a graceful exit, knowing when to pack it in, retain a little dignity and live to fight another day. Bass drone stops in solo contest? You stop. Bloopers racking up and pain for you — and listeners — setting in? Time to move on. With a clean finish, chin up, and a nod to the crowd you proudly exit stage left. No one will see you crying yourself to sleep.



Bidh cron duine cho mòr ri beinn mun lèir dha fhèin e.

A man's fault will be as big as a mountain before he sees it.

This reminds me of the old axiom that says "an old friend is the best mirror". Substitute "friend" for "teacher" and in piping you're good to go. Do what you can to grab hold of objective constructive feedback. If you have a teacher, listen to her. Your imagined dreamy stylings can be riddled with jumped phrasing and crazy tempo. And. You. Don't. Know.



Gabbaidh fear na sròine mòire a b-uile rud ga ionnsaigh fhèin.

The man with a big nose thinks everyone talks of it.

It's not all about you and people don't spend every waking hour fixated on you and your imagined imperfections. For instance, errors made in a stressful performance situation, like, say, a contest or show, are often magnified tenfold by you and your big onion head in-the-moment. Don't let that get in the way of overcoming imagined flaws. Pipe like no one is watching — or listening (unless you're off the rails).



Am fear nach dèan cur sa Mbàrt, cha bhuain e san Fhogbar.

He who will not sow in March will not reap in autumn.

One word: preparation. This line brings to mind another: "You make your own luck". If you want good music, results and lots of enjoyment from your piping? Get the lead out and work it. Practice. This goes for anything in life.



Am fear a bhios a' riarachadh na maraig, bidh an ceann reambar aige fhèin.

The man that divides the pudding will have the thick end to himself.

OK. I'm not completely convinced this one is true but it can fit neatly in a piping context. When I put on my Grey piping shades and read this proverb I think judges, piping judges. It's the piping judge person who has pupils or relatives in a contest where he's working — and finds himself tempted to set results the family way — well, that's the "thick end".



Cha mbisid' a' ghealach na coin a bhith combartaich rithe.

The moon is none the worse for the dogs' barking at her.

Now here's a uniquely original way to say, "Stop your damned incessant whining". For me this barking moon line is about cutting out the complaints and accepting — or taking accountability — for what comes your way. Your online whinges on social media or lame-o piping forum isn't going to make one bit of difference (except maybe reflect badly on you). Pardon my internet bagpipe forum bias.



Chan i bhò 's àirde geum as mò bainne.

The loudest cow is not the best milker.

I think this line would make a great T-shirt. What does it mean? It's got moo written all over it. It's also got a neatly elegant way of saying, just because you say — or yell — an imagined truth, makes it true. Play those Tunes of Glory, lay them out for all — but let us, us listeners, decide if they're happening and if you're the "best milker". OK. That doesn't read well. Let's put it this way: let me hear you play the sweet music — don't tell me how sweet you can play it. Actions speak louder than words.



Gluais faicilleach le cupan làn.

Go carefully with a full cup.

Be humble.

Loud cows or not, whoever needs milk, bows to the animal. ●

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